

Healthy Diet for the Elder People

Age causes our bodies to weaken. Proper nutrition can help slow that process and improve health. Food is vital for good health. Choosing the right food helps provide resilience and health risks. However, most elder people do not receive adequate intake of proper nutrients the body needs. Others take in too much food or have an unbalanced diet, hence lead towards greater risk of ailments.

Proper nutrition for the elderly



Elder people are less active and their bodies exert less physical movement. Energy expended drops by 20-30% compared to youths. Men age 60-69 require an average of 2,200 kilocalories per day while women age 60-69 require an average of 1,850 kilocalories per day. Those who are 70 years or older require even 10% less. The elderly are advised to keep a diet which is sufficient for their bodily needs and select foods that are ideal.

The regular diet for elder people should include all 5 food groups and include a good variety within each category. The 5 food groups are 1) meats, 2) carbohydrates and sugars, 3) fats, 4) vegetables, and 5) fruits.

- 1) **The meat group:** This includes all meats, milk, eggs, beans which are primary sources of protein. They help build body tissues and muscles, improve immunities against illness, and promotes healthy bodies. Elder people should focus on fish. Other meats should be boiled till tender or ground. Eggs consumed should not exceed 3 per week. There are no limits on egg-whites since they are sources of high quality protein; daily intake recommended. A daily glass of milk is recommended, or substitute soybean milk for those with difficulty digesting milk. Elder people with kidney conditions should take precaution with dry nuts (peanuts, red beans, black beans, cashew nuts, etc.), animal internals, small fish consumed in whole, dried shrimp, egg yolk, and fish roe which contain large amounts of phosphorus.
- 2) **Carbohydrates and sugars:** These include rice, flour, sugar, taro, and potatoes, which are sources of energy. Excess intake leads to a build-up of fat, increases weight and blood sugar levels. Elder people should reduce intake of this food group to align with

less energy demanded by this age group. Select foods derived from protein-based flour such as noodles, bread, corn, taro, potatoes, brown rice, oatmeal, and barley. Rice should be limited to 1 serving consisting of 1 cup or two small scoops. Elder people with kidney conditions should select white rice, white bread, and avoid carbohydrates containing large amounts of protein. Diabetics in this age group should caution against sugars, avoid all sugary or fatty snacks such as some traditional Thai snacks (sweetened egg yolk tarts, custards, banana in coconut milk) and creamy cakes. Beverages should not be laden with too much sugar as 1 teaspoon of sugar comes with 20 kilo calories.

3) **Fats:** Fats also provide energy and help absorb vitamins. Fats in food come in 2 varieties: saturated and non-saturated fats.

- saturated fats should be avoided as it raises cholesterol levels and undesirable lipoprotein in blood. This heightens risk of heart diseases. Saturated fats are common in meats, palm oil, coconut oil, cream, cream cheese, lard and milk.
- unsaturated fats are recommended for consumption since they contain useful substances that bodies cannot produce. They help reduce cholesterol and lipoproteins in blood. Unsaturated fats consist of two types:
 1. Mono-unsaturated fats should be regularly used for stir-frying or frying food; they include olive oil, canola oil, sesame oil, peanut oil
 2. Poly-unsaturated fats are useful for frying. They contain vast amounts of substances the body cannot produce on its own and helps reduce lipoproteins in blood is consumed in large amounts. This type of unsaturated fat is found in soybean oil, corn oil, sunflower oil and linseed oil

The use of fats for cholesterol-reducing benefits, canola oil and soybean oil should be used in alternate, or corn oil alternated with canola oil, in food preparation. Use canola oil for frying while switching to corn oil and soybean oil for stir-fries. Avoid fat for frying that is sourced from lard, coconut oil, palm oil, pork fat, beef fat, pork rind, duck skin, chicken, butter or cream.

- Avoid foods with high cholesterol such as animal internals, egg yolk, fish roe, squid, oysters, shrimp roe, fish oil, cream, butter, baked pastries that are rich in butter.
- Foods with large amounts of triglycerine should be avoided such as all fried food, baked food containing large amount of fat, sugar and sugary snacks, sweet fruits, dried fruits, fruit jams, sweet beverages, soft drinks, naturally sweet or sweetened fruit juices, and alcoholic beverages.

4) **Vegetables:** Vegetables are rich in vitamins and nutrients such as vitamin C, vitamin E, beta carotene, folic acid, iron, calcium, potassium, fibers, and phytochemicals. They help prevent heart ailments and cancer, strengthens the body, prevents constipation and does not cause weight gain.

Vegetables that elder people are advised to consume are leafy green vegetables such as morning glory, kale, gourd, eggplant, peas, string beans, and cucumbers and yellowish or reddish vegetables such as pumpkin and chillies. They can be consumed in

large quantities. Vegetables that are high in potassium should be avoided or moderated if one has a chronic kidney condition; these include mushrooms, asparagus, cauliflower, carrot, broccoli, spinach, morning glory, kale, choy sum, agasta, celery, neem, corn, tomatoes, potatoes, consume, chayote, and banana buds.

- 5) **Fruits:** Fruits contain vitamins, nutrients, fiber and sugars. It is a core source of energy. Elder people may consume any type of fruit, except those that are intensely sweet such as durian, longan, jackfruit, custard apple since these can cause weight gain and raise blood sugar levels. In addition, most fruits contain lots of potassium which are not conducive for elder people with an advanced kidney condition and intake must be reduced. If potassium levels in blood are high, all fruits should be avoided. Fruits rich in potassium which should be avoided include durian, bananas, and guava.

Besides the 5 food groups, sufficient water should be consumed regularly. Water is vital for bodily function, helps digest food and drive wastes. Many elder people do not drink adequate water; they should drink 6-8 glasses daily. Those with advanced kidney conditions or heart diseases or bodily swelling are advised to lower intake of water and water-rich foods, avoid salty and spicy dishes. Those dishes cause thirst and leads to excess intake of water.

Guidelines for proper nutrition for elder people

- 1) Consume adequate amounts that the body needs. This means all 5 food groups. Maintain ideal weight and eat 1 gram of protein for every kilogram of your body weight. Any excess consumed would be left accumulated in the body as fat, causing obesity.
- 2) Meals should be kept small, but frequent (4-5 meals). Avoid food that causes gas or constipation.
- 3) Soft textured food is preferable. They are easier to chew and digests readily. These foods include steamed fish and fried fish (not crispy).
- 4) Eat freshly cooked meals; be cautious of spoiled food and food poisoning. Avoid food containing MSG and preservatives.
- 5) Do not eat strongly flavored dishes or fermented food, especially salty dishes. Advisable to consume ginger beverages, bale and orange juice, low fat milk or soybean milk.
- 6) Tea, coffee, alcohol and smoking should be avoided
- 7) Drink adequate amount of clean water, approximately 6-8 glasses daily to help drive wastes from the body.
- 8) Reduce intake of rice, carbohydrates and sugars. These cause weight gain. Avoid white rice or rice dishes that include coconut milk or fats such as pork knuckle stews, chicken rice, sticky rice, snacks with syrup, and all sugary snacks.
- 9) Take in vegetable oils such as soybean oil, rice bran oil, corn oil.
- 10) Avoid meats containing fat and skin such as bacon, pork knuckle, fried chicken skins, fried food. Stir fried food such as fried eggs or vegetables should be prepared with minimal oil.
- 11) Avoid food with high fat content. These include pork fat, oil from chicken, coconut oil, palm oil, and fried food such as fried dough, fried bananas, and batter coated fried food.
- 12) Avoid fruits which are intensely sweet such as durian, ripe mango, sapodilla, banana, longan, custard apple and jackfruit.
- 13) Consume adequate amount of food which contain electrolytes and vitamins such as:
 - 13.1 Calcium: Osteoporosis is common among elder people, especially more common among women than men. Adequate intake of calcium helps strengthen bones; 800 milligrams per day is advisable. Calcium is found in milk or soybean milk, dried grains, small fish, and dried shrimp.

- 13.2 Iron: Elder people should receive adequate amount of iron in their nutrition which is approximately 6 milligrams per day. Simultaneously, sufficient protein and vitamin C is necessary for good absorption of iron. Food containing iron include morning glory, kale, liver, meat, and egg yolk.
- 13.3 Sodium: Elder people are advised to reduce intake of sodium, especially those with heart conditions. On the contrary, elder people tend to prefer saltier food as their taste buds are less receptive.
- 13.4 Vitamins: Important vitamins include vitamin C. 30 milligrams should be consumed daily by drinking 1 glass of orange juice. Elder people have less digestive fluids and saliva, hence should consume food which are easy to chew, swallow and digest. Those wearing dentures, have dental conditions, or have difficulty swallowing are advised to consume liquid foods; meats should be diced, grounded, stewed or blended into soups.

Summary: Elder people should consume what is adequate for their body which include the 5 food groups to ensure intake of nutrients and nutritional value. Within each food group, select items which are suitable while mindful of any illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or chronic kidney conditions. Pay attention to nutrition and select foods which are ideal to ensure longevity.

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