

Senior Matters

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Food and Nutrition

I love to eat. I eat when I'm happy and I eat when I'm sad. Sometimes, I even eat when I'm hungry. Lately, I have noticed that I can't eat things I used to enjoy and have learned to like things I used to avoid. As my body grows older, I have to learn to adapt how and what I eat.

Obviously, regardless of our age, food is important to our health. What and how much we eat makes a difference. For seniors, there are specific nutritional factors to consider. The internet has many sites to learn more about this. An article I found helpful is entitled "Nutritional Guidelines for People 70 and Older" written by Joan Pleuss, Dietician at the Medical College of Wisconsin Clinical Research Center,

My experience with seniors has taught me that eating is not always as important to them as it once was. Frequently, families of prospective residents tell me that their loved one eats alone and may miss meals. Perhaps they do not eat properly because they don't want to have to prepare a meal just for themselves. Dining with others while enjoying conversation and fellowship are key components of eating for anyone, but especially for seniors. One of the greatest benefits of retirement communities is the opportunity to dine with others.

Meals must be tasty and nutritious. They should be prepared and served in an eye appealing manner. Unlike me, many seniors have trouble eating enough. If the meal is served without thought in an unattractive way, or if there is no garnish or color on the plate, some residents fail to be interested. Likewise, if a person receives too much food on a plate, they may be so discouraged that they refuse to eat any of it.

Seniors need to make sure they get the vitamins and minerals that are needed. The article notes that seniors "do not absorb and process nutrients as efficiently as younger people," so care should be taken to get enough important minerals and vitamins such as calcium and vitamin D. Milk is an excellent source of these vital nutrients. If you are among those who cannot tolerate it well or don't faithfully get enough calcium and vitamins in your diet, multi-vitamin supplements should be considered.

The article notes that seniors often do not realize they are thirsty and fail to drink enough fluids. "Eight, eight-ounce glasses of water, juice, milk or non-caffeinated soft drinks each day to prevent dehydration" is recommended. Take care not to use coffee and alcohol to meet that quota as these beverages actually negate the benefits of drinking non-caffeinated fluids.

Eating right and getting regular exercise are key components to enjoying a healthy lifestyle. Knowing what and how to eat for our body's needs is something we all can learn.