

Section 10

Nutrition

Nutrition and Aging:

Nutrition plays an essential role in maintaining immune competence in the elderly, which contributes to keeping elderly individuals living independently at home for as long as possible.

Malnutrition weakens the immune system and increases disease complications, poor healing, risk of falls, increased hospitalization and risk of death.

Proper nutrition in the elderly prevents malnutrition.

Signs and symptoms of malnutrition:

- pale skin
- sunken eyes
- weakness, fatigue
- irritability
- change in functional status
- dehydration
- fluid retention

Healthcare providers should be performing early risk assessments and be aware of signs and symptoms of malnutrition. The diet of seniors should include a variety of foods based on Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. The use of nutritional supplements may be useful for some elderly. These supplements can be used as a high energy, nutritional snack or as a meal replacement for the elderly having trouble meeting their daily energy needs. Ensure Plus is a supplement with an excellent source of calories and protein.

Some physiological age-related changes that may impact nutritional status:

- anorexia
- chewing problems

- constipation
- decreased smell & taste
- diarrhea
- dry mouth
- hearing & vision impairment
- iron deficiency
- lactose intolerance
- physical inactivity
- swallowing problems
- weight loss
- weight gain

Public Health Nutrition Information

The nutritious Food Basket is a food-costing tool that measures the cost of healthy eating based on recommendations set by Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. It is a list of foods based on nutrient value and cost calculated by Toronto Public Health. The Food Basket includes 66 basic food items from the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. It generally does not include processed foods, snack foods or restaurant/take-out foods

- 4 – 5 servings daily fruits & vegetables
- 4 – 5 servings daily breads & cereals
- 2 servings daily milk & milk products
- 2 servings daily meat, fish or poultry

Older persons must have the same variety from each of the four food groups but will need smaller quantities. Some seniors lose interest in eating, grocery shopping or preparing meals. Some suggestions that might help are:

- place food attractively on the plate, set a pretty tray, sit at a favourite window, watch TV or read a book. Pleasant music helps enjoyment and relaxation
- take a lunch to a park
- invite a friend to share a potluck but keep it simple
- plan a walk or other exercise
- have a small glass of sherry before dinner
- eat 5 or 6 small meals a day rather than 3 large
- try a new food or recipe at least once a month
- enjoy a different breakfast, leisurely
- fresh air helps appetite and digestion

With healthful eating one can often decrease reliance on medications and reduce stress, the risk of disease and risk of over-medication. If there are allergies or intolerance of some foods, seek professional advice.

Your Notes – Section 10

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