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Nutrition Changes As We Age

Good nutrition is important at all ages, but our bodies require different types of nutrition at different ages. As we age, it is especially important to eat healthy because aging is linked to a variety of changes, including decreased appetite, nutrient deficiencies, loss of muscle, thinner skin and less stomach acid. Some of these changes can affect the senses and alter one's quality of life.

Decreased appetite, and reduced need for calories, can lead to unintentional weight loss and nutrient deficiency. Studies have found that older people tend to have lower levels of hunger hormones (ghrelin) before a meal, and higher levels of fullness hormones (Cholecystokinin and leptin), which means they could get hungry less often and feel fuller more quickly. Other factors that may cause poor appetite include poor sense of smell and taste, making foods seem less appealing; tooth loss; loneliness; underlying illness and medications that can decrease appetite. Smaller meal portions more often per day or a habit of eating healthy snacks like almonds, yogurt and boiled eggs is a way to get the proper amount of food per day. Vitamin supplements and a diet of a variety of whole foods, like fruits and vegetables, as well as minimally processed, lean meat/fish can ensure the appropriate nutrients are taken in. Some common supplements for older people are Vitamin B12, Potassium, Omega 3 fatty acids (fish oil), Magnesium, and iron.



Older adults are more prone to dehydration. Water makes up about 60% of the body. As we age, the receptors found in the brain that detect thirst become less sensitive to water changes, making it harder to detect thirst. Additionally, the kidneys help the body conserve water, but tend to lose function as we age. Long-term dehydration can reduce the fluid in the cells reducing the ability to absorb medicine, worsening medical conditions and increasing fatigue. It is very important to make a conscious effort to drink enough water daily.

As the body changes, so does its nutritional needs. As we age it is important to pay attention to what we are eating and drinking, as well as how much we are eating and drinking, to make sure we are giving our bodies everything it needs to stay healthy and maintain a good quality of life. Even if one has chronic health conditions, certain dietary changes, and/or the addition of vitamin supplements can help one feel better, and possibly improve their overall general health. Nutritional counseling is a great resource, along with physician consultation, to develop a meal plan that is age and health appropriate for each individual. Happy eating!

The following website was sourced and referenced for this article:
<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/nutritional-needs-and-aging#section6>
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/286839.php>



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