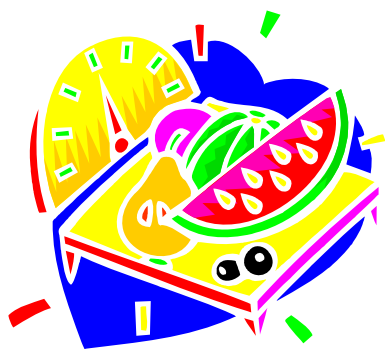


Mental Health Minute

Food for Thought

In this issue...

- * Food For Thought
- * Nutrition tips for the elderly
- * Did you know...



**Geriatric Behavioral
Medicine Center**
626-300-7300

**San Gabriel Valley
Medical Center**
www.sgvmc.com

Do you remember as a child being told to eat all of your vegetables? This rule should be adhered to all throughout life, not just in your younger years. In fact, a healthy lifestyle change could make improvements in your health no matter what your age.

Healthy eating and physical activity are important lifestyle habits for people of all ages and they are of particular importance for the elderly.

According to the U.S. Administration on Aging, 87 percent of older Americans have a chronic disease that can be improved through nutrition. Eating a healthy diet can reduce the risk for many conditions associated with aging, including anemia, confusion, infections, hip fractures, hypotension, and wounds. When healthy eating habits are paired with physical activity it can reduce the risk of many chronic diseases including osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

Many elderly people have unique barriers that prevent them from eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity. Difficulty chewing, a sensitive stomach, reduced appetite, and dietary restrictions are just a few of the barriers to healthy eating that the elderly experience. When caring for an elderly individual you should keep these barriers in mind.

Not only are there physical benefits to eating well, keeping a healthy lifestyle is also beneficial to the brain. The human brain has high energy and nutrient needs. Changes in energy or nutrient intake can alter both brain chemistry and the functioning of nerves in the brain. Intake of energy and several different nutrients affect levels of chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters transmit nerve impulses from one nerve cell to another, and they influence mood, sleep patterns, and thinking. Deficiencies or excesses of certain vitamins or minerals can damage nerves in the brain, causing changes in memory, limiting problem-solving ability, and impairing brain function.

The bulk of the diet should include foods that are high in fiber like whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, fruits and vegetables as well as plenty of water. These foods can help prevent constipation as well as lower the risk for chronic diseases. Help out the older adult in your life and encourage them to eat healthfully!

NUTRITION TIPS FOR THE ELDERLY

Regardless of age, we all require healthy foods to help our bodies thrive, but the elderly have specialized nutritional needs. These are some simple tips when considering nutrition among the elderly:

- Rather than 2 or 3 large meals a day, it is better to serve 5-6 small meals. This is appropriate because the appetite of many old people decreases as they age and so they can only eat small amounts of food at a time. Serving more frequent meals helps make eating less overwhelming and can help provide better nutrition.
- The elderly should drink water more frequently. As we age, we lose our sense of thirst. This makes dehydration a common problem in the elderly. Water should always be available and older people should drink water regularly even when they don't feel thirsty.
- Older people need to consume enough protein. Although excessive intake is not advisable, it's been shown that many elders do not consume sufficient protein. This can lead to muscle weakness, edema (fluid build-up), fatigue and a decreased ability to fight infection. Good sources of protein include chicken, fish, beans, nuts and meat.
- The elderly should consume foods high in omega-3 fatty acids. Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids help decrease the risk of heart disease, decrease inflammation and improve mood. Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids include tuna, salmon, sardines and nuts.
- Enough fiber is important. Eating foods high in fiber can help prevent constipation, a common complaint in elders and improve satiety. Foods high in fiber include whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables.
- Zinc containing food should be eating regularly by the elderly. In elders, zinc deficiency is common due to an inadequate intake of zinc, decreased absorption of it, increased needs and more interactions with medications. Deficiency can result in decreased appetite and decreased sense of taste in the elderly. Good sources of zinc include fish, poultry, enriched grains and beans.
- All mealtimes should be made enjoyable. This encourages eating and nutrient intake. Let us eat with our elderly relatives to encourage their appetites.
- Encourage the elderly to be physically active. Even in the elderly, physical activity has been shown to be essential for decreasing the risk of chronic disease, maximizing mental capacity and having healthier muscles and bones. It also results in greater flexibility, more lean body mass, a better sense of balance, increased blood flow to the brain, a stronger immune system and better overall health.

Information from the Alzheimer's Association

www.caregiver.com

www.nutrition.com



Did you know:

Eating foods high in Omega-3 fatty acids may help reduce your risk of developing dementia later in life.



Mental Health Minute: enriching lives one step at a time

The information in this newsletter is intended to be general information and should not be constructed as medical advice or instruction. Readers should consult with their physician on any matter related to their individual health and well-being