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Diet & Nutrition Tips for Seniors & Their Caregivers

If you are a parent, we know you lead very busy lives. While juggling a job and family life, you may also be caring for the needs of a senior loved one. While ensuring your loved ones get what they need to stay strong and healthy over time, we often sacrifice our own health needs. In this infographic, we will walk you through diet and nutrition tips for your aging parents who may need some help, as well as tips that you may want to consider to strike a nutritional balance that keeps you healthy and energized!

First things first, what does nutritional balance mean?

Simply put, nutritional balance is having the right amount of protein, energy, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals each and every day to help you meet your dietary needs.

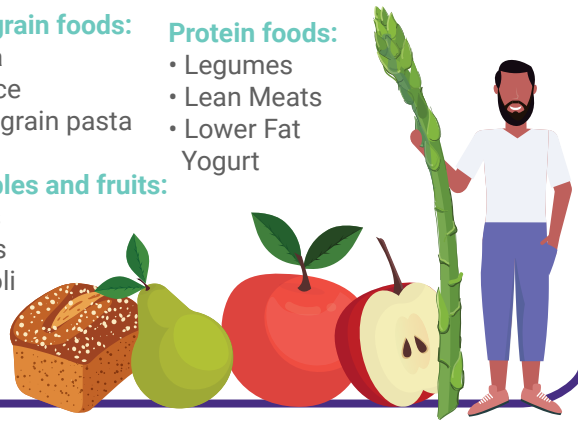
To achieve this, Canada's Food Guide recommends eating vegetables and fruits, whole-grain foods, and protein foods to maintain your health.

They suggest eating the following on a regular basis:

Whole-grain foods:
- Quinoa
- Wild rice
- Whole grain pasta

Protein foods:
- Legumes
- Lean Meats
- Lower Fat Yogurt

Vegetables and fruits:
- Apples
- Carrots
- Broccoli



Caring for seniors

A balanced and healthy diet is very important for elders as they age. You may or may not already know, but healthy eating can help your loved ones:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Promote and protect health and well-being
- Provide essential energy and nutrients to maintain health
- Prevent or slow progression of chronic illnesses
- Prevent muscle and bone loss to reduce the risk of falling or breaking bones

You may have noticed your parents, on occasion or with growing regularity, eat less, or are becoming uninterested in food. With aging, the body may need fewer calories, but it does require just as high or higher levels of certain nutrients such as vitamins or minerals.

Essential vitamins and minerals that Dietitians of Canada recommends as you age include:

Vitamin B6:
You and your elders need more of this after the age of 50, as they are essential for a healthy immune system.

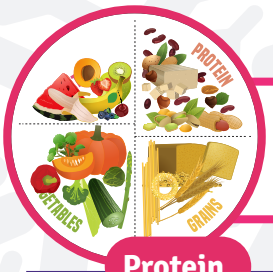
Sources include potatoes, beans, meat, chicken and fish.

Vitamin B12:
Up to 30% of adults over age 50 may have trouble absorbing vitamin B12. This vitamin is found in meat, chicken, fish and milk products.

Vitamin D:
Health Canada says that in addition to eating vitamin D rich foods, everyone over age 50 should take a supplement with 500 IU of vitamin D daily.

Calcium
Daily calcium needs increase to 1200 mg at age 50 for both women and men to keep those bones strong and healthy.

Iron
Good sources of iron include poultry, beans, leafy greens and fortified breakfast cereals.



Canada's Food Guide recommends seniors eat a wide range of healthy foods to get enough of those nutrients. Keep nutrient-dense foods include: fruits, veggies, beans, lentils, whole grains, nuts and seeds, low fat dairy and protein.

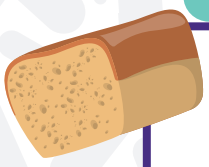
Protein

Protein is important for balanced and complete nutrition, as it helps build, maintain and repair our bodies. It keeps our muscles strong and our hair, nails and skin healthy. **Protein intake is especially important as we age,** when faced with a medical condition or when physically active. If your elderly loved one can reach their protein goal, try to incorporate one good source of protein at every meal.

Some sources of protein:

- Meat
- Poultry
- Fish
- Eggs
- Legumes
- Yogurt

TIP: For healthy protein snacks, purchase some peanut or almond butter for them to add to toast, crackers or apple slices, or nuts and seeds that can be put on top of yogurt and salads!



Fibre

Fibre keeps us regular and can also help lower blood cholesterol levels, manage blood sugar levels and help prevent high blood pressure. According to Dietitians of Canada, women ages 51 and over should be consuming 21 grams of fibre each day, and men 51 and over should be consuming 30 grams.

Some sources of fibre:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Beans
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Whole grains

TIP: Look for "whole" grains to be the first ingredient on the ingredient label. "Enriched wheat flour" "all-purpose flour" "unbleached flour" are all refined white flours and have much less fibre than whole grains.

Fats

Fats give us energy and help with nutrient absorption, mood and brain function. Rather than cutting out fats for those who are aging, focus on healthy fats such as omega-3 fatty acids. They can help lower triglycerides, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Some sources of fat:

- Eggs
- Fatty Fish (Salmon)
- Chia Seeds
- Avocados

TIP: Research shows that margarine may be worse for your heart than butter because it contains large amounts of trans fats. The best choice is healthy liquid oil for cooking and baking, such as olive and canola.

Make sure to take care of yourself

To achieve a balanced diet, the same rules apply to you. As we previously stated, Canada's Food Guide recommends eating vegetables and fruits, whole-grain foods, and protein foods to maintain your health.

If you are experiencing caregiver stress, try meal planning and prep by having nutritious leftovers in the fridge. Make smoothies or have nutritional drinks on hand: make and freeze individual cups of smoothies or have a nutritional drink to help fill nutrition gaps.

References:
1.Seniors BC. Healthy Eating Seniors Book. Retrieved From: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/people/seniors/health-safety/pdf/healthy-eating-seniorsbook.pdf