

Nutritional requirements more complex for seniors

Good health is the key to being able to enjoy life throughout the later years. Depending on your genes, maintaining health may become more of a challenge with each passing year.

During youth it is relatively simple for most individuals to meet their nutritional needs. However, as people age, meeting these needs becomes more complex and challenging. Personal habits that add to the complexity of maintaining health include previous eating and exercise habits, commonly used pharmaceutical drugs and dietary supplements, and a person's present body weight and body fat. Because these factors vary from person to person, it is not possible to create one-size-fits-all diet recommendation as you age. In fact, many of the dietary recommendations broadcast throughout the nation may go against your personal needs. Listed below are three important nutrition and health concepts that need to be considered as you move into the later years.

1) Get or keep active. Now may be the time to join an exercise class or get a personal trainer and start weight lifting. Maintaining strong muscles not

only helps a person stay more mobile, but muscle also is important in maintaining a healthy immune system.

To build or maintain muscles requires fueling the body. It is important to consume adequate nutrients and not get caught up in quick weight loss schemes, which only challenge a person's immune system.

2) Fueling your body adequately may become one of the biggest challenges as you age. Appetite and thirst often decrease, and many lose their thirst mechanism altogether. Therefore, consuming fluids on a schedule rather than when thirsty becomes essential to maintaining adequate blood flow throughout the body and especially to the brain.

For some, eight glasses of fluid each day is enough, but for others, especially those consuming a relatively dry diet, numerous drugs or dietary supplements, more fluid may be needed to help eliminate negative drug side effects. Also, if you have decreased your protein intake too much, this extra liquid may increase trips to the bathroom.

For those with dentures or de-

creased ability to chew, getting additional nutrients from a protein powder mixed with liquid or yogurt may be an easy way to meet protein requirements.

3) A full life relies not only on a strong body but also on a healthy mind. Marginal deficiencies of many nutrients can cause sub-clinical depression and in turn impair memory.

More important, a deficiency in vitamin B12 may cause permanent short-term memory loss and mimic dementia. Some individuals will require B12 injections to prevent the deficiency from progressing. Symptoms of B12 deficiency can be irreversible. Therefore, it is important for those with memory problems or decreased sensation in hands and feet to ask their physicians to assess their B12 status using the methyl malonic acid blood or urine test.

Becoming proactive in managing your health is essential. But remember: Snake oil has never really worked to remove aches and pains and may be seriously harmful -- so buyers beware.

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