

It can be possible to have too much of a good thing

A valued benefit of aging is the wisdom that comes from experience. But during the last few decades of life, common changes in health can present completely new experiences and challenges. As problems develop, most of us start paying more attention to common health messages primarily designed to prevent disease in healthy people. Regrettably, recommendations beneficial for maintaining health can sometimes be detrimental for those who already have health problems. Therefore, it is important to know the ramifications of these recommendations.

Some "good food" messages are only good to a point -- for example, the recommendation to eat more whole grains, fruits and vegetables. The potential benefits depend upon how much of these foods you already eat and on what foods will be reduced to make way for more. As we age, calorie needs decline, but the need for many nutrients does not change -- or may even increase

with age. For example, protein needs stay the same or even increase slightly as people age. If a low-calorie diet has large amounts of fruits, vegetables and grains, it can be too low in total protein. Grains and produce also contain compounds that can interfere with the absorption of dietary iron. So, eating plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables can be a good thing as long as it does not displace adequate protein and iron sources.

Additional "good food" recommendations that can backfire include those for garlic, ginger, green tea and grapefruit. Garlic can help lower blood cholesterol, but in turn may increase blood-clotting time, a side effect that could prove problematic before surgery or for those taking blood thinners. Garlic also reduces iodine uptake, leading to medication adjustments for those with thyroid problems.

Ginger has many reported benefits, including decreasing nausea. But it also has other ef-

fects on the body that may not be as beneficial. These include increasing medication absorption and increasing the risk of bleeding, especially in those taking anticoagulants.

Green tea contains a plethora of antioxidants, but can also raise blood pressure in high doses and should not be used by individuals with kidney inflammation, ulcers, insomnia or some heart problems.

Grapefruit is a great source of vitamin C and other phytochemicals, however those taking statin drugs to lower blood cholesterol should talk to their pharmacist to determine if grapefruit negatively interacts with those drugs.

"Bad food" messages also can backfire. Too often, in the effort to eat less fat, good sources of nutrients such as protein, iron, calcium, and vitamins D and B-12 are decreased. This can lead to such health problems as anemia, osteoporosis and impaired mental function.

Staying wise as you age requires food and drug homework.

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