

Optimal nutrition for optimal health

Mickey Mantle was quoted as saying, "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." Whether you are 20 years old or 80 years young, if you stay physically active and strive for optimal nutrition, you might be able to avoid quoting Mantle.

A balanced diet is the best way for an aging person to obtain essential nutrients.

Question: What is optimal nutrition?

Answer: Optimal nutrition is more than simply preventing clinical deficiency symptoms. Optimal nutrition promotes optimal health. The World Health Organization defines health as complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Optimal nutrition is all about balance: getting adequate essential nutrients to promote health but not an excess of nutrients that, over time, could strain organs like the liver and

kidneys.

Q: What types of problems might be related to an initial subclinical nutrient deficiency?

A: Poor nutrition can play a primary or secondary role in many conditions that decrease the quality of life. The list is extensive, but common problems include insomnia, depression, restless legs syndrome, inflammation, memory problems and overall fatigue.

Q: What nutrients could affect these types of conditions?

A: Many of these problems are interrelated. Some are associated with limitations in the brain's production of neurochemicals such as dopamine, serotonin and melatonin. If the body has the nutrient building blocks needed to produce these brain chemicals efficiently, then the need for pharmaceutical drugs and special supplements is decreased. But as people get older, their diets often become too restricted. Removing or reducing specific types of foods in

the diet decreases variety and limits some essential nutrients.

Q: How can an aging person obtain the essential nutrients they need without eating excess calories?

A: Of course, a balanced diet is best, but taking a daily multi-vitamin can compensate to some extent for an inadequate diet. Choosing a dietary supplement best suited for the needs of seniors, however, gets tricky. For example, if you have been told that you are anemic or borderline anemic, taking a dietary supplement made especially for seniors might not provide the iron you need to reverse the iron deficiency.

Also, most seniors are on one or more medications. Certain nutrients, like excess vitamin K, can conflict with the functioning of blood thinners. Consequently, talking to your pharmacist about drug/nutrient interactions is important.

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