

Nutrition

As older adults age, their nutritional requirements change. Malnutrition is any disruption to a healthy nutritional status. ⁽²⁾

Why is it important?

- 34% of older Canadians are at nutritional risk. Women are more at risk than men ⁽¹⁾
- Older adults are at risk for under-nutrition due to dietary, economic, psychosocial, and physiological factors ⁽²⁾
- Proper nutrition can lower the risk for diseases: high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity, certain cancers, type 2 diabetes, heart disease ⁽³⁾

Common Causes

- Increased sedentary lifestyle ⁽⁴⁾
- Increased deficiency in key vitamins and minerals from a combination of factors: a reduced sense of taste and smell; difficulty chewing or swallowing; a restricted diet for a health condition; eating alone; loss of appetite; and medication consumption that may prevent absorption of vitamins and minerals ⁽⁴⁾
- Limited income or lack of transportation may affect access to quality food and the number of meals per day ⁽²⁾
- Chronic conditions or disability may affect ability to cook ⁽²⁾
- Poor oral hygiene ⁽²⁾

Key Considerations

- Follow Canada's Food Guide
- Ask for a consultation with a dietitian

References

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2. DiMaria-Ghalili, R. (2012). *Nutrition in the Elderly, Nursing Standard of Practice Protocol: Nutrition in Aging*. Retrieved March 12, 2014 from: http://consultgerirn.org/topics/nutrition_in_the_elderly/want_to_know_more
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4. University of Rochester Medical Center. (2014). *Nutrition Needs in Older Adults*. Retrieved March 12, 2014 from: <http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=2321>

Hydration

Drinking liquids throughout the day is especially important for older adults. Dehydration can lead to dizziness, fainting and low blood pressure. Dehydration can make constipation worse. ⁽²⁾

Why is it important?

- Older adults are vulnerable to shifts in water balance- in both over hydration and dehydration
- Serious problems can occur:
 - heat injury
 - swelling of the brain
 - seizures
 - shock
 - dizziness/fainting and risk of falls
 - kidney failure
 - constipation
 - coma
 - death ⁽²⁾ ⁽¹⁾

Common Causes

- Age-related changes in body composition resulting in depletion of total body water ⁽⁴⁾
- Decreased renal function ⁽⁴⁾
- Thirst sense becomes less accurate ⁽⁴⁾
- Poor tolerance for hot weather ⁽⁴⁾
- Intense vomiting and diarrhea ⁽³⁾
- Vigorous exercise and not drinking enough water
- Inadequate nutrition intake
- Increased urination

Key Considerations

- Risk factors: 85+, female, dementia, multiple chronic diseases, medications, fever, dehydration history , use of diuretics (water pills) ⁽⁴⁾
- Parkinson's disease or stroke may cause swallowing difficulties ⁽¹⁾
- Signs of dehydration: little or no urination, sunken eyes, skin lacking elasticity and resilience, low blood pressure, increased heart rate, dry mouth, dizziness/sudden confusion, weakness ⁽³⁾ ⁽¹⁾
- Common signs: thirsty or dry mouth; urine is dark yellow with a strong smell; feeling light-headed, headache ⁽²⁾
- Seek medical attention if symptoms persist, if swallowing difficulties/excessive choking or coughing after ingestion of food ⁽¹⁾
- Treatment usually involves replacing lost fluids through increased oral intake
- Eat Right Ontario recommends if able: women drink 9 cups (250mL) a day and men-12 cups ⁽²⁾
- Certain liquids, such as fruit juices, coffee, or carbonated drinks can make diarrhea worse ⁽³⁾
- Keep beverages available (safe for specific diets, e.g., diabetes); foods containing water (e.g., fresh fruits and vegetables, yogurt) ⁽¹⁾
- Drink frequently throughout the day instead of drinking large amounts in one sitting ⁽¹⁾
- Limit drinks with caffeine to 3 cups per day ⁽²⁾
- Certain circumstances require more fluid intake (e.g. illness, when exercising , hot/humid weather, when staying in heated buildings) ⁽³⁾

References

1. Alberta Caregiver College. (2014). *Support for Caregivers of Older Adults: Hydration*. Retrieved February 20, 2014 from: <http://www.caregivercollege.org/scoa/?Hydration.html>
2. Dieticians of Canada. (2014). *Facts on Fluids- How to Stay Hydrated*. Retrieved February 19, 2014 from: <http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Water/Facts-on-Fluids---How-to-stay-hydrated#.UwYiMRbnL7I>
3. MAYO CLINIC. (2014). *Diseases and Conditions: Dehydration*. Retrieved February 19, 2014 from: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dehydration/basics/definition/con-20030056>
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