



Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



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Targeting a Healthier Diet

There are three qualities to good health. The first is being physically and mentally fit. A person is able to meet the demands of daily living such as doing housework without becoming exhausted, mowing the lawn or weeding the flower beds without becoming tired, and climbing stairs without becoming winded. The second quality is that a person has few disease risk factors. For example, high blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease. The third quality of good health is that a person has no obvious illness.

Several lifestyle factors are important to health. Although this fact sheet will focus primarily on eating habits and nutrition, your health may also be influenced by:

- Smoking, drinking, and medication-taking habits.
- Management of life-stresses.
- Practicing safety measures in and around your home.
- Current level of physical activity.

To be healthy, a person should eat a balanced diet with a variety of nutrients. Nutrients are substances in food needed for normal growth, maintenance, and repair of tissues. There are six categories of essential nutrients: water, fats, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, and minerals.

Water

Water is important for survival. Fifty to sixty percent of body weight is water. A physically active adult living in a moderate climate should drink approximately six to ten eight-ounce glasses of water a day. Active adults and those living in a warmer climate may need to drink more water.

Fats

Although most of us don't like our bodies to have "added fat," we need fat for good health. Fats:

- Provide energy at the rate of 9 calories per gram.

- Carry the fat-soluble vitamins of A, D, E, and K throughout our bodies.
- Keep protein from being used as a source of energy.
- Increase flavor of foods.
- Contribute to the feeling of being full.

Fats are found in margarine, butter, oils, and meats, and are added to many snack foods. It is suggested that people over 2 years of age should get 30 percent or less of their daily calories from fats. This goal for total fat intake applies to the diet over several days, not to a single meal.

There are some basic principles for reducing fats in the diet.

- Reduce the total amount of fat consumed, especially saturated and hydrogenated fats.
- Eat less fat from animal sources. These are cholesterol containing foods such as meats, eggs, and butter.
- Use vegetable oil (except coconut, palm, and palm kernel oils) instead of solid fats in cooking. Look specifically for oils high in monounsaturated fats such as olive oil, canola oil, and peanut oil.
- Practice moderation by reducing the amount of salad dressings, gravies, and sauces used.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates provide the main source of energy in the diet. They in-

clude starches, sugars, and fibers. Complex carbohydrates such as vegetables, whole grains, and legumes are important in the diet because they help regulate how the body uses fat for energy, and they keep protein from being used as energy. Americans should consume about 50 percent of their total daily calories from carbohydrates. Read food labels to determine the types of carbohydrates in the diet and to make sure that the foods chosen provide not only carbohydrates but other needed nutrients.

Proteins

Protein is important in building, maintaining, and repairing body tissues. Complete proteins are found in most foods of animal origin. Incomplete proteins are found in foods of vegetable origin and in gelatin. By combining incomplete proteins, the quality of protein in the diet is raised. For example, use cooked dried beans with rice or bulgur, tofu with rice, or split pea soup with rye bread. Be sure your daily intake is adequate, but not excessive. Too much protein is not useable and is stored as fat.

Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins and minerals are found in most foods. They have no calories and are needed only in small amounts. Therefore they are often called “micro” nutrients. Both vitamins and minerals work with other nutrients in the body.

Vitamins regulate body processes that promote growth and maintain health

and life. There are fat soluble (vitamins A, D, E, and K) and water soluble (B-complex and vitamin C) vitamins. Eating too much of a fat soluble vitamin could result in toxicity. Water soluble vitamins are not stored in the body.

Minerals help keep water evenly distributed throughout the body. They also give structure to bones, teeth, blood, and cartilage. Minerals are stored in the body and therefore can be harmful if consumed at high levels. The major minerals are: calcium, phosphorus, sodium, potassium, chloride, magnesium, and sulfur. Trace minerals are: iron, iodine, zinc, copper, manganese, fluoride, chromium, selenium, and molybdenum.

Most healthy people get enough of the essential vitamins and minerals through a well-balanced diet and do not need supplements. If you do take supplements, limit the dosage to 100 percent

of the Daily Recommended Allowances. Vitamin A, Vitamin C, calcium, and iron are listed on food labels.

Summary

Target a healthier diet by thinking and acting positively! Focus on foods that you can have, rather than on what you can't have. A "pinch of the right" attitude puts you on the way to healthful living.

References

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