

DIGESTIVE NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is vital to good health and well-being. Healthful foods provide essential building blocks the body needs to function properly. At the same time, eating well is one of life's great pleasures. On the other hand, eating poorly can result in chronic disease and even death.

GENERAL DIET GUIDELINES

A high-quality eating plan includes:

- A variety of vegetables.
- Fruits, especially whole fruits.
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains.
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages.
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), nuts and seeds.
- Oils.

In addition, a good diet limits saturated fats and trans fats; added sugars; and sodium.

NUTRITION AND AGING

While proper nutrition is important for people of all ages, it particularly helps those who are older.

"For seniors, healthy eating can help increase mental acuteness, resistance to illness and disease, energy levels, immune system strength, recuperation speed, and

the effectiveness of chronic health problem management," the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging points out.

The National Institute on Aging offers these suggestions:

- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water, low-fat or fat free milk, or 100 percent juice. Limit beverages with added sugars or salt.
- Get advice on what to eat, how much to eat and which foods to choose from a trusted source such as the federal government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Add a variety of vegetables of different colors to shopping lists and meals.
- To protect sensitive teeth and gums, try cooked or canned foods such as unsweetened fruit, low-sodium soups or canned tuna.
- Because the senses of smell and taste can change over time, try adding new or more herbs and spices to food to make it more pleasing.
- Ask your doctor about vitamins or supplements.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIETARY FIBER

Dietary fiber is a crucial part of the diet. It helps you feel full faster (thereby cutting down on overeating), aids in digestion and helps prevent constipation.

In addition to its benefits in any eating plan, a diet rich in fiber can help those with gastrointestinal problems such as irritable bowel syndrome and diverticulitis.

Still, many Americans don't eat the recommended 20 grams to 35 grams of fiber each day.

These changes recommended by the American Academy of Family Physicians can help add fiber to your diet:

- Eat at least 2 cups of fruits and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables each day
- Replace refined white bread with whole-grain breads and cereals. Choose brown rice instead of white rice.
- Check nutrition fact labels for the amount of dietary fiber. Try to get 5 grams of fiber per serving.
- Add a quarter-cup of wheat bran (miller's bran) to foods. You can put it in cooked cereal, applesauce or meat loaf.
- Eat a half-cup of cooked beans, such as navy, kidney, pinto, black, lima or white beans.

It's not a good idea to add too much fiber to your diet all at once. Instead, add it gradually.

RESOURCES

2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans:
www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015