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Senior

Focus



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How nutritional needs change with age



The human body undergoes an assortment of changes over the course of a lifetime. Some of those changes are visible to the naked eye, but many more are not. The body's changing needs in regard to nutrition is one alteration that people cannot see.

A nutritious diet can be a building block of a long and healthy life. Nutritional needs change as the body ages and recognition of those changes can help people rest easy that their diets are working in their favor and not to their detriment.

Calorie needs.

The body requires fewer calories as individuals reach adulthood. That's because muscle mass begins to decrease in adulthood while fat increases. The National Institutes of Health notes that muscles use more calories than fat throughout the day, so it makes sense that a body experiencing a decline in muscle mass will require less calories than one in which muscle mass is on the rise. No two individuals are the same and some adults exercise more than others. So it's best for adults to consult their physician to discuss their own calorie needs and then adjust their diets based on such discussions.

What to eat.

The American Heart Association notes aging adults' calories should come from nutrient-dense foods like

vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean meat and low-fat dairy. This recommendation aligns with adults' declining calorie needs, as nutrient-dense foods contain ample amounts of protein, vitamins and/or minerals but do not contain a lot of calories.

Water needs.

It's vital for aging adults to make a concerted effort to drink water each day. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion notes that the sensation of thirst declines with age. Aging adults who are unaware of that unique biological reality may be risking dehydration because they are not compelled to drink water throughout the day. The Cleveland Clinic notes that dehydration can contribute to dizziness, weakness and light-headedness, among other symptoms. Those symptoms can be particularly menacing for older adults, who are at increased risk for potentially harmful falls even if they are not dehydrated. The body still needs water as it ages, and seniors taking certain medications may need more than usual due to medication-related fluid loss.

These are just some of the ways nutritional needs change with age. Adults are urged to pay greater attention to diet as they age and make choices that can counter age-related changes in their bodies.

Signs of overexertion seniors can learn to recognize

Help reduce risk for illness and injury



Exercise is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. When paired with a nutritious diet, routine physical activity promotes long-term health and improves quality of life. The benefits of a physically active lifestyle are

undeniable, but it's important to guard against overexertion. That's particularly important for seniors, as aging produces bodily changes that pose unique challenges to older adults who are physically active. According to Easy

Exercising, a Queensland-based organization that specializes in assisting seniors with exercise, aging bodies experience decreased physiological resilience over time, which makes them less adaptable to stress. That reality underscores the need for seniors to recognize the signs of overexertion, a recognition that can help seniors reduce their risk for illness and injury.

- **Dizziness:** The online medical resource Healthline notes a number of things can cause post-workout dizziness, including overexertion. Seniors taking group classes may be especially vulnerable to overexertion-related dizziness, as they may be trying to keep up with classmates and pushing themselves without even

realizing it. Dizziness during or after a workout should not be taken lightly and seniors should sit down immediately, catch their breath and drink water as their heart rate slows. Seniors who become dizzy while taking a group class should alert their teacher immediately.

- **Soreness:** Soreness is another sign of overexertion, but seniors should recognize this symptom can be a little harder to categorize. Some soreness is common after exercise. After all, a good workout challenges the body. However, soreness that manifests as tightness, sharp pain or a throbbing or burning sensation is likely a sign of overexertion. When such symptoms present, stop exercising immediately

and emphasize rest. After sufficient rest, make sure a return to exercise is less taxing (i.e., lower intensity with cardiovascular exercise and less weight with strength training).

- **Nausea:** A workout should never make anyone nauseous, regardless of their age. Healthline notes feeling nauseated or vomiting after a workout are a sign that a change in routine is necessary. As noted, aging bodies experience diminished resilience over time, so feeling nauseated is a sign that a body was pushed too far during a workout. Seniors who push their bodies so far during a workout that they are feeling nauseated also are increasing their risk for injury and muscle and joint

strain. Take the first sign of nausea as a warning that a workout has gone too far and make the necessary adjustments to avoid a repeat episode.

- **Abdominal pain:** The Maryland Pain and Wellness Center notes overexertion during physical activity can cause muscle strain and spasms that manifest as abdominal pain. Rest is necessary when such symptoms present and a return to exercise should be marked by a lower-intensity workout.

Seniors have much to gain from exercising regularly. But it's vital that seniors avoid overexertion, which can lead to a host of unpleasant and potentially harmful side effects.

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