The Congress of California Seniors wants to keep you informed with up-to-date information about nutrition and a variety of other important topics.

Please review these general guidelines for optimum senior nutrition. For more detailed information, please visit our website at:

www.seniors.org

This brochure was made possible by a grant from the Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund. Created as a result of an antitrust class action, one of the purposes of the fund is to improve the health and nutrition of California consumers.

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NUTRITION

Finding Information
Taking time to read the label on food packages or cans can help you plan for maximum nutrition within an appropriate number of calories. The information found here will also help you limit those things that should be consumed in small amounts, such as sodium (salt).

Here is an example of a typical food label:

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

Amount Per Serving
Calories 250
Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*

Total Fat 12g
Saturated Fat 3g
Trans Fat 9g

Cholesterol 30mg
Sodium 470mg
Potassium 700mg

Dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cheese are important sources of calcium. Two ounces of cheese are equivalent to one cup of milk or yogurt in calcium content, but cheese has more fat. Two to three cups of milk products should be included in a 2,000-calorie daily diet.

How Much Food
For individuals over 50 years of age, the FDA recommends 2,000-2,800 calories for men and 1,600-2,200 calories for women. A 2,000-calorie diet could include the following:

2-2 ½ cups of fruit. This could include a banana, ½ cup of strawberries and ½ cup of orange juice.

2-2 ½ cups of vegetables. Examples are a sweet potato, ½ cup each of broccoli, carrots and cauliflower.

7-8 ounces of grain. Whole grain is best. A one-ounce serving would be a ½ cup of cooked rice, ½ cup of pasta, ½ cup of cereal, one roll or one slice of bread.

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5 ½ ounces of protein should be eaten each day. One ounce of protein is equivalent to one egg, ¼ cup cooked beans, ½ cup tofu, one tablespoon of peanut butter, or a few nuts or seeds.

Caregiver Responsibilities

Advocacy, Education and Service for Seniors since 1977

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Basic Guidelines for Optimum Senior Nutrition

Meat Preparation

Cooking methods that reduce or eliminate the need for oil and use shorter cooking times should be used when preparing meat. Oil and batters add extra calories and too much fat, which cause a rise in bad cholesterol levels and disease. Something else to keep in mind is that shorter cooking times help preserve nutrients in meat.

Remember that “shorter cooking times” refers to methods that cook meat thoroughly to the recommended internal temperature in less time.

Different Cooking Methods for Meat

Grilling can be a healthy way to cook meat. Grilling works best with lean meat. Never use an outdoor grill indoors; there are many different electric grills available.

Broiling is similar to grilling, only the heat source is above rather than below the meat. Broiling works best with lean meat. Some ovens have broilers, and free-standing broilers are available.

Stir frying uses short cooking time and requires only a little added fat. Stir frying can be convenient because everything can be quickly cooked together in one large pan.

Preparing Vegetables

There are a number of tradeoffs to consider when deciding how to prepare vegetables. It is certain that frying should be avoided as much as possible, if not entirely.

How we prepare vegetables influences their nutritional value. Eating vegetables raw can increase levels of valuable nutrients such as antioxidants and vitamins. However, a little bit of cooking and processing can increase the body's absorption of other nutrients like lycopene. Microwaving vegetables, as opposed to boiling, can help them retain nearly all of their vitamin C. For example, boiling carrots significantly increases levels of some nutrients, and lowers the level of others.

The main idea to keep in mind is that a variety of vegetables prepared in a variety of ways is essential to good nutrition.

Water for Hydration

It is important to make sure seniors stay hydrated. Water is important because it aids in digestion and keeps cells healthy and the body hydrated.

The importance of adequate hydration in seniors cannot be overstated. It is important to know that seniors who become dehydrated can have symptoms of dementia, such as confusion and forgetfulness. Unfortunately, seniors often do not feel thirsty until they are at the point of dehydration.

By carefully monitoring the amount of water consumed daily, preventable mental confusion can be avoided.

The appropriate level of vitamins and minerals is important for good physical and mental functioning. A well-balanced diet will usually provide an individual with appropriate levels of these nutrients. Before deciding on any supplements, be aware that some vitamins can easily reach unsafe levels in your body.

Some conditions or medications may affect the way a vitamin supplement is absorbed. Some vitamins may cause adverse reactions for certain physical conditions, or reduce the benefits of medications. Always follow the doctor’s recommendations before using or giving supplements.

Saving Money

Home-made meals are usually less expensive to prepare. Watch for weekly sales and stock up on frequently used items. Plan meals in advance and shop with a list to reduce impulse buying, which can get expensive fast.

Compare the cost per serving between bulk and smaller-sized packages. Bulk buying can save money. However, remember that you do not save money if you buy too much and wind up throwing it out. You may be able to prepare several meals at one time and freeze some for later use.
Deficiencies in vitamins and important minerals have been observed in almost a third of elderly people. Often their dietary habits diminish and they fail to eat balanced meals regularly. Multiple drug regimens may prevent absorption of some vitamins. Elderly people, particularly if they are not exposed to sunlight, may be deficient in vitamin D. They also may have low levels of important B vitamins. Older adults showing signs of dementia should be checked for B12 deficiencies, as well as other disorders causing mental disturbances. One study reported that the immune systems of elderly people may benefit from higher levels of vitamin E than the daily recommended dosage. It should be noted, however, that metabolism slows down as a person ages, and in elderly people it takes the liver longer to eliminate drugs and vitamins from the body. The effect of some vitamin supplements, therefore, may be intensified. Higher dosage levels of vitamin A, for instance, which might be harmless in a younger adult, could be toxic in an elderly patient. They may also interact with medication. Nevertheless, experts are increasingly recommending extra vitamin and mineral supplements for older people.

Always consult a physician about vitamins and follow their advice.
Basic Guidelines for Safe Supplements for Seniors

Selecting Vitamins
When selecting vitamins at the store, keep in mind the following factors:

- Government recommendations only suggest the basic known requirement for vitamins. They do not indicate anything about their specific effects on health or how an individual may react.
- The US Pharmacopoeia, an independent organization that sets standards for drugs, has also implemented standards for vitamins. Only companies adhering to these standards may display the USP label on their products.
- There is no need to shop for the highest priced vitamins. There appears to be no significant differences in quality between the vitamins in the lowest- and the highest-price range.

Important Precautions
Before you put any nutritional supplements into your body, take a few precautions. These six tips will help protect your health:

- Always check with your health care provider to be sure the supplements are right for you.
- Read labels carefully to identify all the ingredients.
- Check dosages to make sure they are what you discussed with your physician.
- Check for expiration dates before you buy – some supplements have a specific shelf life.
- If possible, find out about the manufacturer to make sure they are reputable and follow the highest safety standards.
- Always buy supplements from a reputable, established store. Be extra cautious of online sales.

Why Take Vitamins?
Most vitamins must be provided by your diet or by supplements; only three vitamins (D, K and the B vitamin, biotin) can be manufactured in the body from non-dietary sources. Vitamins are not direct sources of energy like carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Instead, vitamins aid enzymes involved in the body’s metabolism, cell production, tissue repair and other vital processes.

Not All Vitamins Are the Same
Vitamins are either fat soluble or water soluble. The water-soluble vitamins include C and the B complex vitamins. The body uses these vitamins quickly and excess amounts are eliminated in urine.

Vitamins A, D, E and K are fat soluble and are stored in the body. They are absorbed in the liver and used up by the body very slowly. This is important to know because these supplements can build up – especially in seniors – due to slow metabolism, and may rise to dangerous levels.

That is why it is important to talk to your doctor and pay close attention to the vitamin’s target dosage.

What Is Daily Value (DV)?
Food and supplement labels now typically list the Daily Value (DV). This is the percentage of the amount of a nutrient that experts believe a person needs in their daily diet. On food labels it is usually based on one serving size for a person who ingests 2,000 calories a day.

Things to Keep in Mind When Talking to Your Doctor
Ask what vitamins, minerals or herbal supplements can personally benefit you.

Be sure you know what dosage is best for you or your client.

If you have a medical condition, it is important to know how any supplement will affect your condition.

If you have a medical condition and it changes, it is important to ask your doctor about continuing use of supplements.

Make sure you are well informed about how the supplements may interact or interfere with prescription drugs and other medications.
Caregiving for a senior involves many responsibilities. One of the most important responsibilities is ensuring that nutritious foods are available to seniors who are no longer able to prepare their own meals.

Seniors may be affected by conditions that make it hard to utilize the nutrients from the food they eat. Our bodies change as we get older and we often develop physical barriers to good nutrition. Among them are lack of appetite, a change in the way food tastes, swallowing and digestive issues. Chronic illness and medications may make eating more difficult or depress the desire to eat.

To overcome these issues, meals should be planned that account for the ability to chew and swallow. It may be necessary to process favorite foods into smaller pieces to ensure that seniors can safely and comfortably consume the meal. To reduce the severity of heartburn, serve a lighter meal in the evening and have the big meal of the day at an earlier time. Consider timing meals around medications; this can usually be done by taking medications at traditional meal times. Also consider smaller, more frequent meals or snacks.

Maximizing the nutritional value of foods in diets will help make sure that all essential nutrients are available to seniors throughout the day. Reducing the amount of salt and saturated fat in meals will also benefit the overall health of seniors.

Seniors may want to consider vitamin and mineral supplements so that appropriate levels of vital nutrients are consistently maintained in the body. Before deciding to take any supplement, consult with a doctor as some vitamins may cause adverse reactions for certain physical conditions or reduce the benefits of medications.
Medical Conditions Affecting Nutrition

A person’s ability to chew and swallow food can be affected by neurological diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease. A stroke also affects the neurological system and can cause paralysis and difficulty chewing.

Disorders that affect the digestive system can interfere with the body’s ability to absorb and utilize nutrients. These disorders include tumors and lesions, cancer, chronic renal failure and other injuries or complications.

Therefore, when planning and preparing meals it is important for caregivers to consider the specific dietary needs of the client.

Safe Ways to Prepare Protein

Meat is a good source of protein, iron and other vitamins and nutrients. Salmon contains beneficial oils. Chicken can be prepared in a wide variety of ways and is a lean source of protein. The method we use for preparing meat is important. Prepare the protein with as little added oil as possible, and to make sure the meat is cooked thoroughly, use a meat thermometer.

Cooking Temperatures

To avoid being infected with parasites and bacteria such as E. coli and salmonella, meat should be cooked to the recommended temperatures. Always make sure you are measuring the internal temperature of the meat.

Cleaning Produce

Wash raw fruits and vegetables under running water – don’t use soap or bleach. Fruit and vegetable washes are available, just follow the instructions. If the skin is rough, use a vegetable brush. Cut away bruised or damaged areas where bacteria may thrive.

Thawing Food

Thawing meat can be done in a variety of ways. Be sure to take all factors into consideration so that meat can be thawed safely.

Place a frozen item in the refrigerator overnight to thaw.

When defrosting food in the microwave, be sure to cook it immediately because some areas of the food may get warm during the thawing process. Foods thawed in the microwave should be fully cooked before refreezing.

Another method of thawing is to submerge a large item, such as a turkey, in cold tap water, changing the water every 30 minutes. For whole turkeys, estimate about 30 minutes per pound.

Food Handling and Storage

When it comes to refrigeration, remember that food should be refrigerated at 40° Fahrenheit and below. Some areas of the refrigerator keep food colder than others. Be sure to appropriately position food in the refrigerator so that, for example, milk doesn’t freeze while cheese gets moldy.

Promptly refrigerate perishable food after purchase.

Always wash your hands and counters after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood.

Raw meat, poultry and seafood all have juices that can leak and seep around other refrigerated items. Prevent contamination by storing them in containers or sealed plastic bags.

Produce that comes into contact with raw meat, poultry or seafood must be cooked immediately or thrown away.

Divide leftovers into small amounts to ensure quick, even cooling in the refrigerator.

Cross-contamination should always be of concern. Make sure to use clean cutting boards and utensils.

After cutting raw meat, poultry or seafood on a cutting board, thoroughly clean the cutting board and knife before cutting other ingredients.

Watch for mold on food. Mold can easily hide on bread and baked goods. Discard the item if you see any mold.