

# The Elderly

## Information and Activities

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## Factors which can affect the Diet and the Health of an Elderly Person

- **Reduction in money available**

After retirement many elderly people have little more than the State pension to pay household bills. It is important for elderly people to budget carefully and consider the cost of fuel for cooking as well as the cost of food. Elderly people may not be able to afford more expensive foods such as meat, cheese and fish, which are high in protein calcium and iron. Avoiding these vital nutrients can lead to deterioration in overall health

- **Decrease in Mobility, Strength and Balance (Arthritis, Osteoporosis, Rheumatism)**

Many elderly people suffer from physical problems such as arthritis, osteoporosis and rheumatism that can affect their mobility, strength and balance. During spells of very wet or icy weather, elderly people may be afraid to go out to the shops to buy food in case of falling. Poor flexibility in the joints of the hand may make it impossible, or very difficult to perform actions which most people take for granted, eg opening cans, peeling vegetables or cutting meat. Elderly people may 'make do' with tea and biscuits or bread, butter and jam. They may avoid preparing vegetables, which are rich in vitamins and minerals and suffer certain health conditions.

- **Loneliness, Depression and Anxiety**

Elderly people are at the stage of life where their children have grown up, left home, got married and may have families of their own to raise. Some of their friends, family, a husband or wife may have died and life may suddenly become very lonely for a person at this advanced age. Elderly people often lose their self-confidence and no longer feel needed. They may become more anxious about their own health and mortality, and may show signs of apathy and depression. This may affect their motivation to shop for food and cook meals for 1 person. Lack of balanced meals will lead to poor nutrition and deteriorating health.

- **Lack of Knowledge of Nutrition**

Many elderly people may not understand the rules of good nutrition. They may have grown up in families where money was scarce and family meals were based on potatoes, bread and cheap fried foods. Lack of knowledge of basic nutrition can contribute to poor health since an elderly person may not always know which foods provide certain important nutrients. Elderly people may not be aware that, as they get older, they lose their sense of thirst. They may not realise that they are thirsty and may not drink water, tea or coffee. This leads to dehydration, which, in turn, can cause an elderly person to become confused and disorientated.

## The Effects of Poor Nutrition on the Health of an Elderly Person

- **Digestive problems**

Problems with digestion of food can affect older people. Elderly people may wear dentures, although many still have all their own teeth. Sometimes loose fitting dentures can hinder the process of chewing food and an elderly person may avoid crunchy foods, and foods such as meat and cheese, which are difficult to chew. Elderly people often find it difficult to digest heavy protein such as cheese, meat or hard-boiled eggs and may avoid these highly nutritious foods. Digestive problems may lead to constipation, which is unpleasant, painful and can cause more severe bowel conditions such as diverticulitis and bowel cancer.

- **Anaemia**

Anaemia is a condition in which there is a lack of haemoglobin in the red cells of the blood. Haemoglobin is important as it transports oxygen and nutrients to each cell in the body. The nutrients brought by haemoglobin nourish each cell. The oxygen brought by haemoglobin help 'awaken' each cell and give it energy. If there is very little haemoglobin in the red cells of the blood, oxygen and nutrients cannot be transported to the cells efficiently. This leads to a severe lack of energy, listlessness, great tiredness and paleness.

- **Arteriosclerosis**

This is a condition occurring often in old age. Arteriosclerosis causes the arteries, which carry oxygenated blood around the body, to lose their elasticity and become hardened and thickened. If the arteries become less elastic, hardened and thickened, the heart must work harder and under pressure, to pump the blood around the body. If the blood pressure is too high an elderly person may suffer a stroke or heart attack.

- **Coronary Heart Disease**

Coronary Heart Disease is a condition, which can occur in old age. One of the causes of Coronary Heart Disease is eating a diet high in fatty foods and fried foods, over many years.

The coronary arteries surround the heart and travel through the heart. The coronary arteries carry blood, which is rich in nutrients and oxygen, to the cells of the heart. The cells of the heart are fed and nourished by the blood flowing through the coronary arteries. Sometimes the walls of these small arteries become narrowed with a sticky substance in the blood called cholesterol. This narrowing of the

coronary arteries, with cholesterol, restricts the blood flow. The heart cells therefore cannot be nourished properly. If the heart is not being nourished it cannot work properly. The heart may go into a cramp and the elderly person may feel pain in the chest area

If the coronary arteries become completely blocked by cholesterol and the blood cannot get through the blockage, a Cardiac Arrest may occur. A Cardiac Arrest causes the heart to stop and the elderly person may die.

- **Hypothermia**

This is a condition, which affects many elderly people. Hypothermia causes the body temperature to drop below  $37^{\circ}\text{C}$ , normal body temperature. It can be caused by extreme cold, due to lack of heating in the home of an elderly person. A very cold environment and a shortage of warming food can cause the body temperature to drop. If the body temperature of an elderly person drops below  $34^{\circ}\text{C}$  the heart will stop beating and the elderly person will die.

## The Nutritional Needs of an Elderly Person

An elderly person requires the following nutrients in his or her diet

- **Protein**                      to repair and replace worn out body cells
- **Fibre**                         to prevent constipation and digestive disorders eg bowel cancer and diverticulitis
- **Calcium**                     to strengthen the bones and the teeth (with the help of Vitamin D),  
the bones of an elderly person tend to break more easily than a young person
- **Vitamin D**                    to help the body take in the nutrient Calcium  
to keep the bones and teeth strong
- **Iron**                            to help the body make haemoglobin and prevent anaemia  
(with the help of Vitamin C)
- **Vitamin C**                    to help the body take in the nutrient Iron  
to prevent infections  
to keep skin and gums healthy  
to help heal cuts and bruises
- **Vitamin B**                    to help release energy from food  
to keep the nervous system healthy

## Planning Meals for Elderly People

A perfect diet for an elderly person is one, which is **well balanced** and **digestible**. Elderly people may be less active, especially after retirement from an active job, and so require **fewer calories**. A diet for the elderly people diet must **include all the important nutrients** if a healthy old age is to be enjoyed. Elderly people should be encouraged to prepare **one well- balanced meal every day**

- **Size of meals**

The size of meals can be decreased due to reduced activity of the elderly person. This does not mean that the quality of meals should also be decreased.

- **Textured Foods**

There is no need for soft or smooth foods unless the elderly person has a digestive problem. Even if dentures are worn, textured foods (foods with a 'bite') can still be enjoyed as long as the dentures fit properly.

- **Fibre**

Foods containing fibre should be increased, as constipation is a common disorder in this age group. A diet, which includes wholemeal bread, cereals and fruit and vegetables, will ensure that an elderly obtains enough fibre to avoid digestive disorders.

- **Sugary Foods**

Elderly people should avoid too many sugary foods to avoid gum disease and dental decay and to help them keep their own teeth

- **Salt**

Elderly people should be encouraged to avoid eating too much salt with their food. Too much salt helps to reduce the elasticity of the arteries and causes them to become hard and thickened. High blood pressure can result and strokes and heart attacks can occur

- **Oily Fish**

Elderly people should take oily fish (fish whose flesh is not white eg tuna, mackerel, sardines) twice a week. It is believed that the oils in the fish reduce the risk of blood clots.

- **Saturated Fat**

Elderly people should try to avoid too much saturated (animal) fat to help keep cholesterol levels normal and reduce the risk of heart disease

They should choose lean red meat, chicken, white fish, low fat cheese and semi-skimmed milk. Elderly people should avoid too much cream, butter, full cream milk, fatty meat and eating too many eggs in a week.

- **Fruit and Vegetables**

A diet, which contains fruit and vegetables, is essential at any stage of the life cycle. Eating a variety of fruit and vegetables will ensure that the elderly person gets Vitamins A and C as well as Calcium, Iron, and Fibre

- **An Emergency Store Cupboard**

One of the problems facing elderly people, especially during bad weather is getting out to the shops to buy food. With this in mind it is important for an elderly person to keep a store of 'standby foods' or convenience foods.

These include foods, which may be either:

- **Canned** (beans, peas carrots),
- **Dried** (packet soups and sauces)
- **Frozen** (vegetables, fish, beef or chicken and 'boil in the bag' meals)
- **Cook chill** (ready cooked meals which have been stored at temperatures below 4°C. These are also suitable for home freezing)

Convenience foods are a useful 'stand by'. Some of them are quite economical as there is no waste and a shorter cooking time saves fuel. They are helpful to elderly person in that they are very easy to prepare. A nourishing meal can be produced using a combination of convenience and fresh foods. Using convenience foods also reduces the amount washing up.

If an elderly person has a freezer they can also store bread, milk, and vegetable

## Factors which can affect the Diet and Health of an Elderly Person

What condition/issue is the character describing?

Situations	Correct answers
<p>I've worked all my life, never took a day off. But what thanks do you get? The state pension is only a pittance. How is anybody supposed to live on that? I can hardly afford to heat the house let alone buy food. And they wonder why us elderly folk go down hill so quickly!</p>	
<p>You know, as I get older I notice that I am not as quick on my feet as I used to be. I feel that I could easily lose my footing and fall. I needed to go to the shop the other day to buy some groceries but the weather was very bad. It was that windy and rainy, I was afraid to go out. And me with hardly a bite in the house! I had to make do with tea and toast. That was much easier than opening a tin of soup. I can't manage that tin opener anymore, my hands are too stiff</p>	
<p>My cousin Alice has just lost her husband Jimmy. They had been married for 55 years. I don't know how she's going to cope. She's been blessed with good health all her life but she's gone down hill terribly since the death. She's no interest in anything. Her family is very worried about her because they can't get her to eat. She's hardly eaten a bite since Jimmy died. I think Alice needs to see the doctor. Poor Alice.</p>	

## The Effects of Poor Nutrition on the Health of an Elderly Person

Situations given	Correct Answers
<p>I was a talk for the elderly. It was organised by our local, community group. The speaker was a dietician. She advised us to eat plenty of foods containing fibre, like cereals, brown bread and plenty of fruit and vegetables to prevent a lot of disorders</p>	
<p>During the winter months I need to be careful to save enough money to buy fuel to keep the house warm. As well as that I need to eat regular balanced meals so that my body keeps warm. Lots of people my age die from this condition every winter.</p>	
<p>Like me, my friend Bert was raised on fried bread, potatoes with butter, and eggs. He still eats them, same as me. Times were hard and money was scarce when we were growing up. There were no fancy foods like they have nowadays. We ate what we were given and were grateful. The doctor says Bert will have to change my ways. He says his arteries are all furred up!</p>	
<p>The things that happen to us elderly! I've been feeling very tired of late. I could sleep the clock around. My daughter's a nurse. She says that I'm low in blood and need to get a tonic from the doctor. She told me I'd have to eat more red meat, green vegetables and reddish or purplish coloured fruit as well.</p>	
<p>My grand daughter says I shouldn't be taking too much salt on my food. She says that she is learning about it in school. She says it'll harden my arteries. There is no taste of food without salt. The things they're teaching nowadays. I just don't know!</p>	
<p>My sister Mary is 75 years old, 5 children and 12 grandchildren. She has terrible trouble with her bones. The doctor says it's wear and tear, not eating enough calcium foods and having the children that has done it to her. Poor Mary, you'd think that at her age she could enjoy seeing her grandchildren grow up. Instead she is crippled with pain. She has already had one broken hip. Life can be hard when you get to our age</p>	

## Planning Meals for Elderly People

### Suggested Activity:

This could be in the form of a work sheet

How could you prepare the following meals using only convenience foods?

Meal	Convenience Foods used
Shepherd's Pie Mixed Vegetables Apple Tart	
Cod in parsley sauce Peas and chips Fruit and Ice Cream	

## Planning Meals for Elderly People

### Suggested activity: Quiz

Question	Answer
Which Vitamin helps Iron to enter the blood stream?	
Which foods contain Vitamin C?	
Why is it important for an elderly person to have a good supply of Calcium?	
How would you make sure that an elderly had a balanced meal?	
Which Vitamin helps Calcium enter the blood stream?	
What is meant by the term 'balanced diet'?	
Some elderly people have problems digesting heavy protein foods like meat, cheese and eggs. How could you make these foods easier to digest?	
How can an elderly person reduce the risk of Coronary Heart Disease?	
How can arteriosclerosis affect an elderly person?	
What can an elderly person do to reduce the risk of Hypothermia?	
What is anaemia?	
Why is oily fish useful in the diet of an elderly person?	

# Recipes

## Apple and Raisin Loaf

### Ingredients

225g Wholemeal Self Raising Flour

2 teaspoons Mixed Spice

1 teaspoon Baking Powder

125g soft margarine

125g sugar

125g stewed apples

125g raisins

2 eggs

2 tablespoons milk

### Equipment

### Method

- 1 Sieve the flour and mixed spices into a bowl. Rub in margarine.
- 2 Add the remaining ingredients and beat until thoroughly combined
- 3 Spoon into a greased and lined 2lb loaf tin
- 4 Bake in the centre of oven for 1 hour 15 minutes

## Golden Vegetable Soup



### Ingredients

- 1 potato
- 1 carrot
- 1 tablespoon Oil
- 750 mls water
- Chopped parsley
- 2 sticks
- 1 onion
- 1 stock cube
- 1 level tablespoon cornflour

### Equipment

### Method:

- 1 Peel all the vegetables grate the carrot and finely chop the other vegetables.
- 2 Fry gently for 10 minutes
- 3 Add the water and stock cube.
- 4 Bring to the boil and simmer for about 25 minutes until all the vegetables are soft
- 5 Blend the flour with 4 tablespoons water until smooth.
- 6 Pour into the soup and simmer for 5 minutes
- 7 Blend in a liquidiser until smooth

<b>Minced Beef &amp; Vegetable Crumble</b>
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Serve



**in a warm soup tureen sprinkled with parsley**

**Ingredients**

200 minced beef  
 1 large onion  
 400g tinned tomatoes  
 1 beef stock cube  
 50g mushrooms  
 50g peas  
 50g sweetcorn  
 1 small tin kidney beans

**Equipment****Topping**

75g breadcrumbs  
 75g oats/branflakes  
 75g cheddar cheese

**Method**

- 1 Chop onion and slice mushrooms. Dry fry the mince
- 2 Add tinned tomatoes
- 3 Crumble stock cube into the mixture
- 4 Add beans, peas sweetcorn and mushrooms to the mixture and simmer for 25 minutes
- 5 Grate cheese and combine with the breadcrumbs and oats
- 6 Place meat sauce in ovenproof dish and sprinkle with topping
- 7 Cook in oven for 15-20 minutes