

OptimalHealthSecrets.Com
LIA Lifestyle Instruction Aid

a3. Elderly need "Special Food Pyramid"

NEW YORK, Mar 02 (Reuters Health) ___

The famous nutritional food pyramid, is used to guide consumers in planning their diet. It should be customized for people 70 years and older, to account for their special needs, according to nutrition experts at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts.

In an article in The Journal of Nutrition, Dr. Robert Russell, associate director of the Tufts University USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging, makes the case for the modified pyramid, which he and his colleagues believe better serves the nutritional needs of the growing senior population.

"This elderly group is particularly vulnerable to compromised nutrient intake because with advancing age, energy needs decrease, necessitating a decrease in food intake," the research team writes. They add that "for elderly people, the Food Guide Pyramid should highlight specific selections within each food group category to emphasize foods with a high ratio of nutrients to energy to ensure adequate nutrient intakes, and should be narrowed to reflect lowered energy needs."

Unlike the traditional pyramid developed by the US, Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services in 1992, the pyramid for healthy seniors who are 70 and older is built on a base of eight glasses of water, which is important, say the researchers, because elderly people tend to lose their sensation of thirst as they get older, and consequently can become dehydrated.

Russell and colleagues note that alcohol, coffee, and tea should not be included when calculating fluid intake because of their diuretic effect. In addition, the revised pyramid for seniors includes calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B 12 supplements. Calcium may be necessary because the elderly often avoid milk products due to real or perceived lactose intolerance, and vitamin D synthesis may be inhibited due to limited access to sunshine. Likewise, vitamin B 12 is not absorbed efficiently in many older people, making supplementation necessary.

The altered pyramid suggests the following daily servings: 6 or more from the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group; 3 or more from the vegetable group; 2 or more from the fruit group; 3 from the dairy group; and 2 or more from the „meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts group.

In addition, the researchers suggest that seniors choose whole-grain, enriched, or fortified breads and cereals because they tend to fill up on these types of foods and run the risk of malnutrition if they are eating less nutritious items.

They also suggest "colorful" vegetables and fruits like those that are dark green, orange or yellow, because they contain large amounts of vitamin C, folic acid and vitamin A. To maintain adequate fiber intake, they recommend a piece of fruit, rather than fruit juice.

"Given the shifting demographics in the United States, this is a growing segment of the population and one that has historically been under represented in previous recommendations for different age subgroups," write the authors.

Copyright 1999, Dr. Victor Jean, DC, MS, Ouellette, All Rights Reserved