Putting Nutrition Knowledge to Work

In the 1950s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) introduced a food-grouping system for planning a varied diet. The original Basic 7 food groups turned into the Basic 4 about 40 years ago. It next became a food guide pyramid based on five major food groups that was developed in the 1990 edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Today we have MyPlate, which was developed in 2011 with the most up-to-date research information available.

MyPlate classifies foods into groups based on their key nutrients; places emphasis on the general type of food item consumed rather than on specific nutrient content of each food item; encourages consumption of low-fat, high-fiber food choices; and minimizes calories from higher fat and higher sugar food choices. It gives a visual cue, using a place setting for a meal. This encourages people to think about what goes on a plate or in a cup.

Importance of Weight Control

Health risks are reduced when weight is appropriate for age and height. Appearance affects self-esteem.

Do you need to change your weight? Ask yourself the following:

1. Is my weight higher or lower than the guidelines for my age and height?
2. Does my waist-to-hip ratio put me at risk for health problems? Extra fat carried in the abdomen results in an apple shape. Research indicates that people with “apple shape” figures are at greater risk than those with “pear shape” figures for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gall bladder disease and hypertension.
3. Do I have a medical problem for which the doctor has advised me to lose or gain weight?

If you answered “no” to all three questions, your weight is probably healthy. If you answered “yes” to any of the questions or if you are not sure, consider talking to your doctor about how your weight might be affecting your health and what you should do.

Principles for Effective Weight Control

Focus on the foods you can eat. Eat a variety of foods. Avoid extreme approaches to weight loss. Balance caloric intake with caloric output.

You’ve probably thought of some good ways to put your eating and exercise plans into action. Start with the ones that are easiest or that appeal to you the most. It’s best to make small, steady changes and make them permanent. The goal is to work toward having 30 minutes of physical activity every day.

Before you start an activity program, ask your doctor to help you decide which activities are best for your general physical condition. Remember, you’re never too old, nor is it ever too late, to become more physically active.
Ideas for Changing Eating Habits

- Keep a food-and-eating-habit diary.
- Limit high-calorie, nutrient-sparse foods including foods with added fats and sugars.
- Control snacking.
- Slow down the rate of eating.
- Follow an eating schedule.
- Eat in one room at home, turning off the television and other social media.
- Watch portion sizes.
- Do not sample when preparing food or clearing the table.

Eating Out, Eating Better

Eating out is routine for many of us because of busy lifestyles, work and travel. According to the USDA, Economic Research Service:

- Americans spend more than 50 cents of every food dollar on food eaten away from home.
- Americans consume 32 percent of their total calories from food eaten away from home.
- Americans eat one out of every five meals at away-from-home eating establishments, with dinner being the meal eaten out most often.
- Fast-food places serve four out of ten meals eaten away from home.

The more you eat out, the greater the effect of food choices in your total diet. If you consistently choose places with a limited selection of foods, you may be missing some nutrients, and/or adding extra fat, sodium, sugar and calories to your diet.

Fried or salty foods and rich desserts contribute fat, sodium and sugar. If you select these items when you eat out, pay close attention to the food choices you make at other meals. Your total diet is what counts. Balancing food choices means eating a variety of foods with essential nutrients.

Choose menu selections that are lower in calories, fat, sodium and sugar. Request substitutions for foods not included in your diet, or order a la carte.

Restaurants are featuring more menu items that fit a nutritious and healthful eating style. However, study the food items carefully before you decide. You can also go online or check the menu for calorie counts before going out to eat.

Special Diets

As we grow older, some of us may need to modify our diet to accommodate changes in our health or physical condition. Special diets can be designed to help reduce or control certain health problems or ensure adequate intake of nutrients when there is an eating problem.

Trendy best-seller diets make interesting reading, and a friend’s advice may be well-intended. But if you require a special diet, get one tailored by a professional.

References

Center on Rural Elderly, University of Missouri System. Vol. 1, Senior Series.
