

Good nutrition is an important component of keeping healthy. It gives our bodies the energy we need to stay active and if we do become ill, good nutrition will help speed healing and prevent complications. Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians Wellness Concierge, offers some advice to help seniors maintain the right balance of nutrition and activity.

Maintaining a proper diet isn't always easy, especially in these days of busy lives and convenience foods. Fast food outlets are practically on every corner, tempting us with their speed and low cost. One of the most common nutritional problems among seniors is high fat and saturated fat diets. Too much fat in your diet can lead to a higher risk of heart disease, some types of cancer and high blood pressure. Studies examining the relationship between dietary patterns and health have found that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables has been associated with the prevention of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the U. S. Unfortunately, less than one-third of adults 65 years and older meet the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables per day. Good nutrition, including a diet that is low in saturated fats and contains five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day is vital in maintaining good health. Fruits and vegetables (with the exception of avocados, olives and coconut) are naturally low in fat. A healthy diet can also help to prevent a number of other ailments that frequently affect older individuals. For example, making sure that you get enough calcium can slow the weakening of bones that occurs with age, thereby reducing the risk of fractures or breaks. Making sure you drink enough water and consume adequate amounts of fiber can help prevent constipation.

As you age you may notice a loss of appetite. Decreased appetite may result from a slower metabolism rate. As people age, most use less energy, or calories, than they did in younger years. That's because many older adults live less active lifestyles. By age 75, about one in three men and one in two women do not engage in any physical activity. Being more active can improve the appetite, and exercise (even moderate exercise like walking) provides a variety of health benefits.

Regular physical activity greatly reduces a person's risk from dying of heart disease, and decreases the risk for colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Physical activity also helps to control weight; contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints; helps to relieve the pain of arthritis; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; and can decrease the need for hospitalizations, physician visits, and medications. Finally, physical activity does not need to be strenuous to be beneficial; people of all ages benefit from moderate physical activity. Before starting an exercise program, you should consult with your physician. It's important to start slowly and increase your activity gradually. The trick is to find activities you truly enjoy. This way, you'll actually look forward to your daily routine. After a few weeks, it may even become habit-forming.

Look for daily opportunities to exercise in work and play. When visiting the mall, take a few minutes more to walk around. Use the buddy system. Arrange to have a friend meet you - It's harder to say no to exercise when you exercise with a friend. While it's never too late to start — even people in their 90s can benefit from physical activity — don't stop once you do.

Adopting healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods and being physically active can prevent or control the devastating effects of many of the nation's leading causes of death regardless of one's age.

Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians wellness concierge, can help you and your family make healthy food choices. Her office is located at the Capital Region Health Park, 711 Troy Schenectady Road, Latham. For information call 783-3110 extension 3347.