

Resources for Families

Maintaining a Healthy Diet



The Importance of Healthy Eating

Throughout our lives, it is important to maintain a healthy diet. What we eat impacts our current well-being, but it also has long-term effects. Sometimes it can be challenging to follow an ideal dietary plan. When we're young, our bodies usually bounce back from poor choices. As we age, this isn't the case, and medical conditions can complicate this.

Fruits and vegetables are key to a healthy diet. The following are some misconceptions about vegetables.

Veggie Myths

Frozen Vegetables aren't as Nutritious

Studies have shown that frozen vegetables are often more nutritious than fresh produce. Crops start losing nutrient quality as soon as they are picked, so vegetables that have been imported from another country might not be very fresh due to extended shipping times.

Frozen vegetables are flash frozen immediately after they are harvested, so they are preserved at their peak nutritional value. Your best bet in terms of taste, texture and nutrition is fresh, in-season produce. When that isn't an option, frozen is a great choice. Keep in mind that fresh or frozen vegetables are preferable to canned vegetables.

Cooked Vegetables are Less Nutritious

This depends on the vegetable. The process of cooking can destroy nutrients, but it can also release others.

For example, tomatoes release vitamin A when cooked, and this makes them easier to digest. Your body can also more effectively absorb lycopene, a cancer-fighting antioxidant that is more easily absorbed from cooked tomato sauce than from raw tomatoes.



Steaming or roasting vegetables is preferable to boiling because that process leeches vitamins into the water. If you do need to buy canned cooked vegetables, pick no sugar added and low sodium options for a healthier choice.

Potatoes are Fattening

Potatoes are low in calories and almost fat-free. It's not the potatoes themselves that can cause weight gain, but rather the method of preparation. If you deep fry them, or cover them in sour cream and butter, you can't blame the potato!

Carrots are Good for Your Eyes

This theory developed because carrots contain beta-carotene that the body converts into vitamin A, which contributes to healthy skin, vision, and bone growth. As with other vitamins, ingesting them helps maintain, but not improve, health. A deficiency of vitamin A can lead to night blindness, an inability to see effectively in low-light.

The origin of the carrot myth is fairly recent. In World War II, the Allied Air Force developed a radar system that pilots used to find and track enemy aircrafts. In an effort to conceal this secret weapon, the Air Force served carrots at every meal and spread the word that eating this vegetable enabled the pilots to see at night. This charade effectively deceived the Nazis, but the rest of us believed it too.

If it's Colorful, it's Nutritious

There are many vegetables that don't fit this myth. For example, White cabbage is one of the most vitamin and nutrient rich vegetables. It contains vitamins A, B, C, and K, as well as iron, calcium, and fiber. Other examples include cauliflower, which is rich in anti-oxidants, celery, which contains both protein and calcium, and it is noteworthy that white pinto beans have everything that the colorful red and pink varieties have.

Avocados are Too Fatty

A healthy diet has reduced amounts of saturated fat. But avocados contain mono-unsaturated fat, a "good fat," which has a positive effect on blood cholesterol levels. Of



course, eating too much of anything—even vegetables—can cause weight gain. Avocados are also the primary ingredient in guacamole, which can lead to an increased consumption of tortilla chips!

Potato Chips are Vegetables

Potatoes are in the vegetable category of the food guide. However, potato chips are deep-fried in oil and are extremely high in fat. They are not considered a vegetable.

Broccoli Cures Ulcers

There are many benefits derived from broccoli, but there is no proof that it cures stomach ulcers. However, some recent studies have shown that sulforaphane, a compound found in broccoli, may help stop the growth of and even destroy ovarian cancer cells.

Green Salads are Healthiest

While greens are extremely healthy, adding a variety of other colorful ingredients to your salad is healthier than eating only greens. Red peppers are high in vitamin C, which helps with the proper absorption of iron. Purple vegetables like eggplant contain powerful antioxidants that help reduce the risk of heart disease and improve brain function. Radishes contain indoles, which have been shown to prevent the metastases of breast cancer. Add color to your salad to increase the health benefits and make it tastier!

Celery is Calorie Neutral

Celery has six calories per stalk. It is not true that the body expends more calories than that to chew and digest it. However, it is a diet-friendly food and a healthy choice. Celery is a good source of fiber that can help fill you up. But watch out for those high-calorie dips.

Become a Vegetarian to Lose Weight

Research shows that vegetarians do eat fewer calories and less fat than non-vegetarians. However, it is possible to be a strict vegetarian and still consume lots of high-calorie, high-



fat, and high-sugar foods, such as French fries, cheese, bread, and candy.

Meal Planning

If you're assisting your loved ones with their diets, you should know that there are significant benefits to proper meal preparation.

Prevent Nutritional Deficiencies

Nutritional requirements vary from person to person. Medications or medical conditions may require a certain diet. Proper meal preparation ensures people meet their unique nutritional requirements. Since diet is a key factor to maintaining good health, you may want to consider getting professional support with this.

Safety

For seniors, the task of preparing their own meals can become difficult as they age. Cutting up food, dealing with a hot pan, or manipulating complex culinary appliances can be dangerous if they have deteriorating motor functions or cognitive abilities. Having a homecare provider or a family member who can manage meals for them can be safer and easier.

Portion Control

Many seniors caring for themselves without a live-in companion, partner, or visiting caregiver tend not to monitor how much or how little nutrition they are getting. Portion sizes can be erratic when there is a sudden shift to a solitary lifestyle (such as when a partner passes on) or other factors, such as dementia or other illnesses, impede effective meal preparation. Assistance from a family member or certified care specialist can prevent health problems resulting from overly large or inadequate portions.

Routine

When meals are part of a structured routine, it can give your loved one a number of benefits. They will experience less anxiety, a better and healthier sleep cycle, and an increased



feeling of being adequately protected. Another benefit is ensuring medication can be taken with meals when appropriate. Dishes prepared beforehand eliminate the need for a loved one to wait and associated dangers, such as dropping blood sugar, can be avoided.

Remain at Home

Many seniors want to remain in their home to maintain their lifestyle, independence, and dignity. A balanced diet is a key factor in determining whether this is possible. If your loved one wants to remain at home but is challenged with meeting their nutritional needs, there are ways to successfully manage this aspect of their lives.

Peace of Mind

If your aging parent or loved one's meals are taken care of, you can gain peace of mind knowing that they are getting all the necessary supplements and dietary requirements. You don't have to worry about them struggling in the kitchen or facing unnecessary dangers.

If you're concerned about making sure your loved one is getting regular, nutritious meals, reach out to Qualicare to learn how we can assist you with this.

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