Nutrition and Meal Preparation for Older Adults
Caregiving Series: Volume 14

Objectives
After viewing this program, participants will understand:

• Nutritional needs of older adults
• Common serving sizes
• Signs of malnutrition and prevention
• Medically-prescribed diets
• Shopping, meal planning and preparation
• Cooking methods

Outline
1. Dietary recommendations for older adults
2. Common serving sizes
3. Food groups and servings per day
4. Importance of drinking enough water
5. Meal planning
6. Medically-prescribed diets: low fat, low sodium, diabetic
7. Warning signs of malnutrition
8. Some methods for preventing malnutrition
9. Reading labels
10. Unit pricing
11. Food handling guidelines
12. Cooking with a recipe
13. Preparation methods
14. Cooking methods
15. Setting the table and serving the meal
16. Bonus feature: Kitchen equipment and use
Key Points and Definitions

1. **Older adults absorb fewer nutrients** from foods they eat; the ability to digest fats decreases with age.

2. **Older adults need fewer calories to maintain body weight.** The daily number of total calories for people over 70 should be between 1200 and 1600. Calorie needs decline by 25% for people over 70, yet protein needs remain constant or increase.

3. **Foods that provide the best diet for older people** are whole grains and cereals, bright or deeply colored vegetables and fruits, beans and nuts, low fat dairy products, lean meat, fish, poultry and eggs.

4. **Purchase as many fresh, unprocessed items as possible.** Choose fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season to add variety and keep costs down. Use canned, frozen and packaged foods as a backup.

5. **Older people may not eat well** because of dementia, illness, isolation or the inability to shop and prepare foods.

6. **Older people often lose their sense of thirst** and so do not drink enough water. Your client should have eight 8-oz. glasses of water and other liquids each day.

7. **Prepare the kinds of foods your client prefers,** rather than the foods you prefer. It has been shown that people feel more relaxed and heal faster from illness when they are provided with the foods they are used to.

8. **Plan meals for a one-week period.** When developing menus, pay attention to the total number of calories in the meal and its nutritional value. When planning meals, a simple book that lists the calories, proteins, carbohydrates, fat and sodium for different foods can be helpful.

9. **Eating a variety of foods is important for good health.** Different foods contain different nutrients and variety adds color and texture to the meal.

10. **Importance of a high-fiber diet.** The fiber in fruits, vegetables and whole grains promotes good health and elimination. For example, fresh fruits and vegetables provide 2-8 grams of fiber per 1 cup serving. A high fiber diet includes 20-35 grams of fiber daily.
11. Use breads labeled "whole wheat" or "cracked wheat." Be aware that breads labeled simply "wheat" or "enriched wheat" may not contain the whole grain and are far less healthy.

12. A low sodium diet consists of 2000-3000 mg of sodium daily. One teaspoon of salt contains 2300 mg of sodium. Each meal should contain about 1000 mg sodium.

13. Fresh fruits, vegetables and meats are naturally low in sodium.

14. To restrict sodium in the diet, limit canned foods, soy sauce and restaurant food. Use lemon juice, spices and herbs instead of salt.

15. A low fat, heart-healthy diet means eating no more than 40-60 grams of fat a day, 40 grams for women and 60 grams for men.

16. Saturated fats contained in cream, whole milk, butter, cheese, ice cream and fatty red meats should be limited. They are associated with higher risk of heart attack and stroke. No more than 15-17 grams of saturated fat should be included daily.

17. Trans fat is a man-made fat found in margarine, fast foods and commercial baked goods. It is considered unhealthy and should be avoided.

18. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats are healthier fat choices.

19. Monounsaturated fat is found in olive oil, canola oil, sesame oil, peanut oil and in foods such as nuts and avocados.

20. Polyunsaturated fat can be found in grains, spinach, walnuts, fish and seafood. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish can lower LDL cholesterol and lower risk of heart attack.

21. To decrease fat in the diet:
   - Use low-fat or non-fat milk for drinking and cooking
   - Bake food instead of frying
   - Trim fat from meat before cooking
   - Add less fat or oil to food
   - Eat less processed foods
   - Limit restaurant eating to 1-2 times per week
22. Older adults have a higher risk of malnutrition than the rest of the population. Malnutrition weakens the immune system, increasing the risk of pneumonia and other serious infections. It can also contribute to mental confusion.

23. Warning signs of malnutrition include:
   - An illness that affects the type or amount of food eaten
   - Eating less than 2 meals per day
   - Not eating a balanced diet
   - Drinking three or more alcoholic beverages daily
   - Tooth or mouth problems that make it hard to eat
   - Eating alone most of the time
   - Unintentional weight gain or loss of 10 or more pounds in the past 6 months
   - Inability to shop, cook or feed oneself
   - Change in the appearance of the skin or sores on the skin

24. Labels on packaged food items provide information about the food's ingredients and nutritional values. Learning to read the labels on food products is a valuable skill, especially in choosing healthy foods for your client.

25. Before you purchase products, check their expiration dates and choose items with the longest time before expiration. Avoid dented cans or damaged packaging.

26. Unit pricing, which is often found below the product on the grocery shelf, gives the cost of items in ounces or pounds. It makes it easier to compare the cost of various products.

27. To provide a record for your client and agency, record the date and total amount you spent on groceries and other items. Save all the receipts.

28. Food handling. It's important to follow established safety procedures when handling food. Food poisoning can occur if foods are not handled, stored or cooked properly. Food poisoning can be life threatening, especially for children, older adults and those who are ill.

29. Four core practices in food handling:
   - Cleanliness
   - Don't cross contaminate
   - Proper preparation and cooking
   - Proper refrigeration
30. **Recipes** make it easier to cook dishes because they include:
   - The number of servings the recipe will make
   - The time needed to cook the dish
   - A list of ingredients needed
   - Step by step directions for preparing the dish

31. **Microwave cookware** is generally made from glass, ceramic or plastic. Use only cookware with microwave-safe labels. Never use metal in the microwave. It will conduct electrical sparks or currents and can damage or ruin the microwave oven.

32. **When you use the stove, follow these safety measures** to prevent injuries or fires.
   - Use potholders when picking up or moving a pot or pan.
   - Keep your sleeves short or rolled up so that they are well out of the way of the burners.
   - Turn pot handles toward the back of stove to keep them out of your way as you cook.
   - Make sure that you turn burners and oven off as soon as you have finished cooking.

33. **When filling the plate**, imagine that it is divided into quarters. Use one quarter for meat or other types of protein and one quarter for carbohydrates such as pasta, cereal, rice, potatoes or corn. The rest of the plate should be filled with vegetables, salad or fruit.

34. **The kitchen should be cleaned after each meal.** Keeping the kitchen clean helps reduce the spread of germs.