



Most seniors need healthier diets

When my mother got older, I recall being very concerned about the weight loss she began experiencing. Unfortunately, now that I am approaching 60, I find myself gaining weight. Which is worse for older people, weight gain or weight loss?

Maintaining a healthy weight can be a challenge at any age, but it's particularly difficult as we age.

To your specific question, health professionals can become concerned whenever an elderly person experiences weight loss, as it could be an indication that they may not be getting the nutrition they need, or it could mean they are suffering from other health problems.

At the same time, health issues associated with being overweight or obese are challenges for all age groups, and, as we age, it is easier to put on the pounds (as personal experience has already told you).

Whether one is worse than the other really comes down to the individual level; it's impossible to answer with a blanket statement. But a 2008 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study that examined the diets of people age 60 and over found that many older adults' diets could use a health boost. In fact, only 17 percent of the 3,060 older adults who participated in the study had diets that analysts considered healthy.

Here's some guidance from that

report as well as from the American Dietetic Association, which offers advice for consumers on its Web site, <http://www.eatright.org/> (search for "Nutrition for Older Men" or "Nutrition for Older Women"):

- Eat more fruits and vegetables.

Only about one-third of those in the CDC study met dietary recommendations for vegetable consumption, and just one-fourth met recommendations for fruit intake.

- When choosing which type of produce to pile on your plate, choose ones with the most vivid colors, such as leafy greens, tomatoes, bell peppers, broccoli, artichokes and oranges. And choose a variety of colors to balance out your intake: colors in fruit and vegetables often are a sign of different disease-fighting nutrients and phytochemicals.

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

- Older adults should be sure they're getting enough of specific nutrients for optimal health, including calcium (1,200 milligrams daily), zinc (8 milligrams daily for women, 11 for men), potassium (4.7 grams), fiber (21 grams for women, 30 for men), and vitamins D (at least 10-15 micrograms) and B12 (2.4 micrograms). Nutrition Facts labels offer much of this information, or you can find it online. Or, talk with a dietitian or health professional for additional guidance.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

**For the week of
March 7, 2010**

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