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OLDER AND WISER: Healthy eating promotes overall well-being

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AUGUST 1, 2018 11:00 AM



Eating healthy is a must for seniors.

Combined with exercise, you can't beat this combo for healthy aging. (I know, I know I'm always going on about exercise.)

Eating well is important as one ages because it helps maintain a person's independence and ability to stay active and participate in their community.

Healthy eating promotes and supports social, physical, and mental well-being for everyone, at all ages and in all stages of life.

But according to the B.C. Ministry of Health's Healthy Eating for Seniors Handbook, for many seniors eating well all the time can be a challenge.

Seniors may be cooking for only one or two individuals, which can make it challenging. Also, a senior's sense of smell and taste can be diminished which means they don't get the usual hunger cues, and some might find it difficult to get out shopping – especially during the summer heat. A senior could try the “shop by phone” options available at many food stores.

Sometimes seniors just don't feel like cooking, perhaps after 50 or 60 odd years of cooking for others this is not an unreasonable thing to feel.

However, nutritionists suggest eating at home more and eating out less is best in order to keep control of one's diet.

Unhealthy eating leads to malnourishment and puts older adults at risk.

A recent report called Raising the Profile of Community-based Seniors' Services in B.C. showed that approximately 34 per cent of seniors in Canada living were at nutritional risk.

The report states: “Malnutrition has been shown to have a negative impact on health outcomes, and is associated with increased mortality, increased length of hospital stay, readmission to the hospital, complications, and increased healthcare costs.”

The report does point out that the nutritional status of malnourished or at-risk older adults can be improved with nutritional interventions.

It suggests these interventions could include dietetic referral and advice, nutrition information resources, Meals on Wheels, and other community services.

For instance, you could go to a seniors' centre that prepares daily meals, such as Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre and West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre for a nutritious hot meal.

Many other organizations offer meals at differing times of the week, such as Parkgate Community Services Society, North Shore Neighbourhood House, and North Shore Volunteers for Seniors, to name a few.

For other food service choices check out the new 2018 Seniors Directory put together by the North Shore Community Resources Society and published by the North Shore News.

Or you could call North Shore Meals on Wheels to get a healthy food option delivered to your home. Meals on Wheels can be reached at 604-922-3414.

For dietetic referral and advice try or call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian free of charge from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Copies of the Healthy Eating for Seniors Handbook are also available to order free of charge by dialing 8-1-1.

Summer can be a great time to get back on track if you have fallen off the eating well wagon.

There are lots of fruits and vegetables available that fall under the Canada Food Guidelines of what to eat.

Plan your meals around vegetables and fruits – these foods should cover about half of your plate.

In the Healthy Eating for Seniors Handbook, the authors outline a number of ways to eat well.

They offer advice on various components of a balanced diet, whether to take supplements, how to eat well with a chronic illness and how to stay strong through healthy eating. They also give tips on meal planning, shopping and cooking.

They give advice on information you can trust and food safety. The last part of the handbook outlines great recipes.

I personally liked the section on quick and delicious salads – these are especially good in the summer heat!

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 48 years and has worked for and with seniors for 20 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome Email: lions_view@telus.net.

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