



Indian Dietetic Association

# HEALTHY EATING IN OLD AGE

## Introduction

Nutritional needs and dietary patterns of older persons are influenced not only by their present health status and activity patterns but also by their long-standing food habits. Chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis, are common in older persons. Besides the normal aging process, these conditions further influence the dietary intake and nutritional status of the elderly.

## Tips for Healthy Eating in Old Age

- Since the energy requirement decreases and the quantum of food eaten becomes lesser with advancing age, include high protein foods such as milk, chicken, eggs, fish, pulses in the diet.
- Even though the elderly need less energy, they need the same amount or even more of vitamins and minerals that they needed as adults. A liberal use of vegetables and fruits will help to provide these nutrients.
- Elderly people commonly complain of heaviness, fullness in the stomach, gas formation and acidity. Hence, fried, spicy and fatty foods should be avoided.
- Drink plenty of fluids. However, tea and coffee should be taken in moderate amounts and smoking and alcohol should be avoided.
- Very large meals may not be tolerated, so 3-4 small meals may be preferred. Eating small nutritious snacks in between meals may help to alleviate acidity and heartburn and provide nourishment.
- Most elderly complain of dental problems like loose teeth, ill-fitting dentures or problems in chewing. Liquids or soft cooked, mashed foods like vegetable dalia, khichri etc are preferred by them. Hard foods like raw vegetables and fruits can be included in the grated, boiled or stewed form.
- The elderly often suffer from constipation. Eating fibre rich foods like whole cereals pulses, vegetables and fruits helps to overcome constipation. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of fluids like water, milk, juice, tea, soup etc. daily.
- Eggs, red meat and animal fats like ghee should be avoided since they give rise to diet related disorders like diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease etc. Lean meats like fish and chicken may be included in the diet.

### DISCLAIMER

This document is for information purpose only. It acts as a basic guideline for the Elderly. For specific and individual meal plans, please consult a qualified dietitian/nutritionist.



## *Diet Guidelines for Diet Related Chronic Disorders*

Obesity, hypertension and heart disease as well as diabetes mellitus are common diet related degenerative diseases of advancing age. Simple diet restrictions will help to not only control these disorders but also if started early enough may even prevent the onset of these chronic ailments.

Maintaining weight within normal range will keep one healthy and active. Besides the tips for healthy eating in old age, some dietary considerations for chronic degenerative diseases include:

- Decrease the amount of cereal foods eaten e.g. rice, chapati, bread etc. Prefer whole cereals and pulses instead of refined cereals and washed dals.
- Reduce intake of fatty foods like fried foods, oily gravies. Substitute skimmed milk for whole milk. Restrict the intake of saturated fats like ghee, butter, vanaspati, etc. Vegetable oils like sesame oil, groundnut oil, mustard oil, sunflower oil, soybean oil, etc. may be used in small quantities for cooking food.
- Avoid foods with excess sugar – e.g. chocolates, sweets, mithai, carbonated beverages, jam, jellies, ice cream.
- Restrict the use of starchy fruits and vegetables like banana, mango, sapota, potato, sweet potato, colocasia, etc.
- Include more fibre rich fruits and vegetables in the diet. Eat plenty of green leafy vegetables, carrots, radish, beans, etc.
- Restrict the intake of salt in foods. Most snacks like wafers, fries, namkeens, samosas, pakoras, mathri, etc. contain large amounts of fat and salt and hence should be avoided.
- Alcohol should be restricted or completely avoided.
- Do some form of physical activity. Walking is an excellent exercise.