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NUTRITION THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE: PART 7 - ADULTS

dults should choose a variety of nutrient rich **▲**foods containing vitamins, carbohydrates minerals, proteins and foods low in fat to be healthy and for the prevention of chronic diseases. Research has shown that excess intakes of fat, sugar, cholesterol, salt and alcohol are contributing factors to many illnesses including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. It is very important that adults balance their energy intake of food with physical activity in order to maintain an appropriate body weight and to prevent the accumulation of fat which leads to obesity.

As one gets older, the body composition changes and the amount of lean muscle decreases while body fat increases. This can be prevented by regular physical activity including resistance training and proper nutrition which helps to sustain

lean muscle mass. It is also important that women eat foods that are rich in calcium and vitamin D to prevent osteoporosis later in life.

Factors Affecting Food Intake

The types and amount of food people eat depend on many factors: family income, family size, cost and availability of foods, age, knowledge, emotional factors such as stress, palatability, eating habits and beliefs.

Lack of knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet can lead to the selection of unhealthy foods and food preparation techniques which contribute to obesity and other lifestyle chronic diseases. Cultural influences also play a role in the

selection of certain foods and how they are prepared. Food choices are also affected by social influences. Family and friends can have a direct effect on food purchasing patterns. They can be supportive in decision-making about food choices that are beneficial in sustaining positive dietary changes.

Since some meals are eaten outside the home whether at school or work or in restaurants, the type of food offered at these places and how they are prepared can affect energy and nutrient intakes of food. If healthy foods are available at these places then persons will be more likely to consume them.

For people with low incomes, the price of food usually is the most important factor that determines the food consumption patterns within the





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A diet containing a limited range of nutrients but high in sugar, fat and salt puts an individual at-risk for chronic diseases. Persons with limited funds must therefore try to select foods that provide a wider range of nutrients in relation to the money spent so that they can prepare nourishing mixes of foods to achieve a healthier diet.

Here are some guidelines on how families can eat healthy on a low budget:

- Buy fruits and vegetables in season, they tend to be cheaper, fresher and tastes better.
- Preserve food when in abundant supply for future use.
- Eat less total calories if you are overweight. This saves money and improves your health.
- Buy food from the farmer. They are cheaper and more nutritious than processed foods.
- Avoid impulse buying. Make a list and stick to it.
- Stop buying meals from outside. Take food with you or eat before leaving home.

Preparing foods gives one total control over the ingredients used and portion sizes. It also saves money because it is cheaper than buying foods at school or work.

- Prepare just what you need and serve just enough so as to prevent wastage.
- Store food properly.
- Grow some of your own food such as vegetables, fruits, peas and beans.
- Conserve fuel energy when preparing meals. Make one pot meals, put enough in the oven whenever you use it. Lower flames and cover pots to keep the steam in which helps the food to cook efficiently.

Guide for Healthy Eating

Adults should eat a wide range of nutritious foods from the six food groups to be healthy and improve quality of life. This includes:

- Eating nutritious foods such as vegetables, fruits, legumes and nuts, cereals preferably wholegrain and low fat dairy products.
- Consume moderate portions of lean meat, fish and low fat dairy products.
- One should limit energy dense foods that are high in fat especially saturated fat, salt and foods low in fibre. The intake of saturated fat and cholesterol can be reduced by substituting fish, lean meats, poultry without

- skin and low fat dairy products for fatty meats and whole milk products.
- The consumption of adequate amounts of water is important because our bodies are composed of water and it is vital for good health.
- Limit alcohol intake
- Consume moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugar. Instead consume complex carbohydrates such as yam, potato, green banana, and legumes.

Nutritionally High Risk Groups

OVERWEIGHT/OBESE ADULTS

A growing health problem occurring globally is over nutrition. When people take in more food calories than they actually need then excess fat accumulates. The high energy density and the fat content of commonly eaten foods, irregular meal times and irregular daily physical activity are all factors which lead to obesity. The environment makes it quite difficult to maintain and control the tendency to eat which is not always caused by hunger but by the sight, taste and availability of food.

To effectively lose weight and maintain a healthy body weight changes must be made to eating and exercise, behaviours and attitudes. It is best to adopt an eating plan that reduces daily calories intake by small amounts. One should eat foods that are relatively low in calories but high

in nutrients such as whole grain breads and cereals such as wheat and oats, moderate portions of lean meat such as chicken and fish, fruits and vegetables, low fat milk, yogurt and reduce intake of foods that have a high energy density. Energy dense foods are high in sugar and fat which makes them high in calories. Foods such as frankfurters, sausages, bacon, salt pork, margarine, butter, full cream milk and ice cream are high in fat and should be reduced. One should use moderate amounts of foods that contain fat but have other essential nutrients such as avocado, beans, ackee and cheese.

Adults should drink adequate amount of water daily. Water satisfies thirst and helps to fill the stomach between meals. By reducing the intake of foods while still maintaining a balanced diet to meet nutrient needs, one will experience a gradual loss of weight.

Lack of exercise is a significant contributor to obesity. Regular exercise assist in weight loss by reducing body fat and has several other advantages such as reducing stress and the risk of getting chronic diseases. Television watching is a major reason for inactivity and is usually associated with snacking on low nutrient high-energy foods.

Overeating and inactivity can be changed by modifying the purchasing patterns, meal planning and preparation, eating behaviour and physical activity patterns. Here are a few tips that can be used for weight loss:

- Put the fork down between mouthfuls.
- Do nothing else while eating.

- Chew thoroughly before swallowing.
- Drink fewer alcoholic beverages, decrease fat intake and increase intake of complex carbohydrates.
- Eat a low calorie snack before parties.
- Practice polite ways to decline food.
- Use smaller dishes and utensils.
- Eat meals and snacks at scheduled times.
- Begin an exercise program and increase exercise gradually.
- Use stairs instead of the elevator and park the car father away.
- Walk instead of driving, whenever you can.
- Get off the bus stop early and walk.
- Watch less television and move around more.
- Keep a diet diary that includes information on time and place of eating, type and amount of food, reason food was eaten and the mood to help identify problem areas. In so doing one can identify what triggers the tendency to overeat and apply problem solving skills to address these problems.

ADULTS WITH ANAEMIA

Women of reproductive age lose iron because of blood loss through menstruation and will have an increased need for iron. Iron deficiency anaemia occurs if the body has inadequate amount of iron which causes a reduction in the amount of red cells in the blood. Iron is an important component of haemoglobin which transports oxygen to all the tissues of the body. If the body lacks iron, the body is deprived of oxygen because the blood©s ability to transport oxygen is impaired. This results in symptoms of tiredness, weakness, pale skin colour, fatigue, irritability and dizziness. To prevent deficiency anaemia women should eat meals containing foods that are high in iron every day. Foods rich in iron are; red meat, liver, kidney, heart, dark green leafy vegetables and dried peas and beans. Acidic fruits rich in vitamin C and their juices assist in the absorption of iron from these foods.

ADULTS WITH DIABETES

Diabetes mellitus is one of the leading health problems in the Caribbean. It results in significant morbidity and mortality and affects the individual©s quality of life. However this can be improved with diet and exercise and in some cases medication.

The diabetic diet should be balanced and should include variety of food from the six food groups so as to keep blood glucose within the normal range. Meals should be consumed at the same time each day. The intake of fat (particularly saturated fat because of the increased risk of coronary heart disease), should be reduced, and should choose foods with complex carbohydrate such as yam and sweet potato and fibre rich foods such as peas and beans.

Exercise is very important in controlling diabetes. Exercise should be part of the daily activities because it increases insulin sensitivity and helps in regulating blood glucose levels. Brisk walking, swimming, cycling and running are recommended for diabetic individuals.

ADULTS WITH HYPERTENSION

Hypertension can cause serious damage to the heart, brain and kidney if not treated. Risk factors which contribute to hypertension are high salt intake, inadequate physical activity, tobacco use, high alcohol intake and an unhealthy diet which consists of high saturated fat intake. For individuals who are obese, dietary counselling on weight

reduction is vital because losing weight has been found to produce a fall in blood pressure.

Lifestyle modification is essential for the prevention and management of hypertension. This includes:

- Limiting salt intake and avoiding foods high in salt such as salted meat, canned foods and processed foods.
- Increasing intake of fruits and vegetables which provide potassium. Low potassium levels have been associated with high blood pressure.
- Stopping cigarette smoking.
- Ensuring a daily intake of fibre from wholegrain breads and cereals, fruits, vegetables, nuts, peas and beans.
- Increasing physical exercise for at least five times per week for 30 minutes.
- Reducing alcohol intake.
- Reducing total fat especially saturated fats and trans fatty acids which helps to lower the risk of hypertension and coronary heart disease. Instead consume moderate portions of lean meats, fish and low fat dairy products.

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