Extensión en Español
CSREES and state Extension services cooperating

Nutrition and the Elderly

Regular exercise and a well-balanced diet will help older people stay healthy and active.

As people age, they need to pay special attention to the foods they eat. Because of changes in the body and decreasing physical activity, older people need fewer calories.

A well-balanced diet provides vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and calories from a variety of foods. These foods should include: whole grain and enriched breads, tortillas, cereals, rice and pasta; fruits and vegetables; fish, poultry, meat, eggs, and beans; and milk, cheese and other milk products.

A healthy diet can help you live longer

Limiting the amount of fat in the diet may help prevent weight gain. Too much weight can contribute to developing diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure in older people. Less fat in the diet can also protect the elderly against some types of cancers.

Older people should pay special attention to their need for calcium. As they age, bones may thin out and break easily. Eating foods that are high in calcium helps the body maintain strong bones.

The fiber found in foods is very important for everyone, but especially for the elderly. Fiber from whole fruits, vegetables and grains helps prevent constipation. It's important to eat 5 to 6 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

Another way to help the body maintain, repair, and improve itself is through exercise. Exercise can strengthen the heart, lungs, and bones, and lower the blood pressure.

Most older people, even those with illnesses or disabilities, can take part in exercise, such as walking. It is important to check with a doctor before starting an exercise program.

Paula Fitch, Nutrition, Family & Consumer Sciences Advisor, University of California, Cooperative Extension, in collaboration with UC's Spanish News Service.