Digestive Nutrition

Proper nutrition is essential for good health. The benefits of a well-balanced diet include a healthy weight, plenty of strength or energy and resistance to some gastrointestinal diseases. Nutritional needs differ at various life stages, but some general guidelines apply for everyone.

General diet guidelines
- Eat more fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
- Eat fewer foods with saturated fat and cholesterol such as full fat dairy products.
- Eat sweets and salts in moderation.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit alcoholic beverages.
- Eat moderately sized portions and be mindful of the number of calories you intake.
- Engage in daily physical activity.

Nutrition and Aging
For older adults, nutrition plays a role in cardiovascular disease, some malignancies, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis and alcoholism. Poor nutrition can weaken the immune system, impair healing following surgery or injury, lessen mobility and reduce mental capabilities and function. The following are nutritional guidelines for older adults.
- Total fat intake should be reduced to 30 percent or less of calories. Saturated fat intake should only account for 10 percent (one third of fat calories).
- Salt and alcohol intake should be limited.
- Dietary fat content composed primarily of monounsaturated fat (such as olive oil) and polyunsaturated fat (such as canola, corn and fish oils) may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Foods to avoid include whole milk and dairy products (ice cream, cheese, butter); commercially baked goods (cookies and crackers); hot dogs, ham and cold cuts; and oils, gravies, and salad dressings.

Gastrointestinal health
Drinking plenty of water and eating foods with fiber such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains will stimulate microorganisms in the gastrointestinal tract that produce regular bowel habit and a lowered risk of inflammation and cancer.

Functional gastrointestinal disorders such as constipation and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), which affects 10 to 20 percent of adults, can be caused by poor nutritional habits including the following:
- Eating a diet low in fiber
- Not drinking enough water
- Not getting enough exercise
- Eating large amounts of dairy products

The importance of a high-fiber diet
A high-fiber diet may improve chronic constipation, coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus, diverticular disease, elevated cholesterol, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and colorectal cancer.
• The recommended fiber intake is 20-35 grams per day.

• Two types of fiber include insoluble fiber (found in cereals, wheat/wheat bran and whole grains) and soluble fiber (found in fruit, oatmeal/oat bran and vegetables). Both are important to include in your diet from a variety of sources.

• Consider a fiber supplement if you travel, frequently eat away from home or find it difficult to get enough fiber from your food choices.

• Always increase your fluid intake (water, soup, broth and juices) when you increase your fiber intake.

TO FIND OUT MORE

Online calorie needs counter:
www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_6_1x_Calorie_Calculator.asp

Interactive menu planner:
www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_6_1x_Calorie_Calculator.asp

International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders:
www.iffgd.org/GIDisorders/GImain.html