

Health-Full Eating & Nutrition



How Nutritional Needs Change With Age

Caloric needs are determined by several factors such as height, weight, gender activity level, and age. As we age, our bodies undergo internal changes. One of those changes include a slowing metabolism and as metabolism slows, energy expenditure decreases. Metabolic rate is thought to decrease about one to two percent per decade. After age 45, the average person loses an estimated 1 percent of muscle mass each year. Although calorie requirements can diminish with age, nutrient requirements can often stay the same or even increase. For instance, a 19 year old should aim to get 15 micrograms of vitamin D per day; a 70 year old should aim for that same daily amount.

Fortunately, there are things that you can do to help prevent nutrient deficiencies. The goal is to consume a diet that is filled with nutrient-dense foods, such as vegetables, fruit, low-fat dairy, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and lean protein (fish, chicken, beef). These foods range in caloric density (vegetables-low, nuts-high), but for the most part are on the lower end of the range. These foods are also high in water and/or fiber, which make them more satisfying and help to aid in hydration and digestion.



It is also a good idea to talk to your doctor about changes in nutrient requirements as we age. If your diet is not providing the right amount of nutrients, your doctor may suggest changes to your diet. You may even want to ask for a referral to a Dietitian/Nutritionist to learn about food choices and if supplements might be appropriate.

Although there is a natural decline in metabolism, these changes are minimal compared to the changes that we can control. A large factor in an age-related metabolic decline is a decrease in activity level. As we get older, we tend to move less. Less activity causes muscle mass to diminish and therefore metabolism slows. We have the power to slow these effects by keeping a regular fitness routine. The earlier you adopt an active and healthy lifestyle, the more likely that you will maintain a healthy lifestyle in later years.