

Acute Training Solutions

Nutrition & Hydration - Possible causes of poor nutrition with the elderly

The best ways to find out why some one isn't eating well are to pay attention, look for clues and ask questions. Encourage them to talk openly and honestly, and reassure them that it is not a burden to you or anyone else. Some of the most common reasons for poor nutrition in the elderly include:

Decrease in sensitivity

The aging process itself is a barrier to good nutrition since it is common for appetites to diminish as a person ages. A decline in the senses of smell and taste also affect a person's ability to taste and enjoy food. If a meal isn't appetizing, a senior is less likely to eat as much as he should.

Side effects of medication

Certain medications (whether over-the-counter or prescription) can reduce appetite, cause nausea, or make food taste differently. If a senior doesn't feel hungry due to medication side effects, she is less likely to eat even though her body does need food and calories.

Poor dental health

Seniors are more likely to suffer from dental problems. Ill-fitting dentures, jaw pain, mouth sores and missing teeth can make chewing painful. All of these factors make it increasingly difficult for the elderly to eat healthy foods.

Financial burden

Many seniors are on fixed or limited incomes. If he is worried about money, a senior may cut back on grocery expenses or buy cheaper and less-nutritious foods to stretch his budget. Lacking money to pay for adequate foods can result in a host of nutrition problems.

Lack of transportation

Shopping today is also more difficult with many food stores located in large shopping malls and on crowded streets. In order to go grocery shopping, a senior must drive to the store, navigate through heavy traffic and park far away from the door. Add snow and ice to the mix and you have a very treacherous situation for the elderly.

Physical difficulty

Seniors can become frail as they age, especially when dealing with debilitating conditions like fibromyalgia, arthritis, vertigo (dizziness) and disability. Physical pain and poor strength can make even simple tasks (opening a can, peeling fruit, and standing long enough to cook a meal) too challenging.

Forgetfulness

Dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and poor memory can hurt a senior's ability to eat a variety of foods on a regular schedule and remember what to buy at the store. One may keep eating the same foods over and over without realizing it, or skip meals entirely because she doesn't know the last time that she ate.

Depression

As people age, life can become more difficult. Their loved ones may be gone (or far away), their body may be failing them, even if their mind is sharp, and loneliness can take its toll. Feeling blue or depressed can decrease one's appetite, or make him feel apathetic about caring for his health. Depression is a manageable disease when treated correctly, but left untreated it can lead to many other nutrition and health problems.