Important Considerations for the Nutrition in the Elderly by Simons

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Over the past few years, the elderly population in developed countries is growing. Governments are spending a considerable amount on medical and healthcare of the elderly. Disease prevention is one of the important factors in elderly healthcare, and the proper nutrition for the elderly is one of the major components in disease prevention activities. The role of good nutrition in prevention of diseases in the elderly cannot be underestimated.

In this article, we shall discuss nutritional requirement in the elderly and address common questions regarding aging and physiopathology that calls for special nutritional requirements.

How elderly are different from younger adults

Aging comes with changes in every part of body including molecules. With age, progressive functional decline occurs that increases the risks of diseases and death. There are certain functional changes that mark the elderly with the effects of aging. These changes include decline in speed of response, decreased interest, changes in motor and visual coordination, low adaptability to changing condition, decreased oxygen consumption, reduced feeling of thirst, and remarkable decrease in kidney function, basal metabolism, and gastric juice production.

These changes are also accompanied with changes in body composition such as reduction in muscle mass, atherosclerosis, osteoporosis, decreased extracellular fluid, increase in fat content, and hardening of soft tissues.

The overall effects of aging make the elderly prone to diseases and increase their exposure to the risk of organ damage. However, many medical and scientific theories suggest that effects of aging can be better coped by proper nutrition with increased consumption of certain ingredients that combat the aging process, for example, antioxidants.

Nutritional requirements of the elderly

Although the energy requirement in the elderly is decreased due to lack of activity, there is no evidence for decreased micronutrient requirement in the elderly. Hence, nutritionists agree that elderly diet should contain higher nutrient density than that required by younger adults. Similarly, due to reduced basal metabolism, the protein requirement in the elderly is lower than the younger adults, but since the ability to absorb protein is also reduced with aging, the intake of proteins should not be reduced in the elderly diet. To prevent the muscle loss, it is suggested that physical activity should be increased in the elderly and they should be encouraged to exercise regularly.

Dietary fiber is another major component that should be included in the elderly diet as it prevents constipation, which is a common problem in the elderly. The elderly diet includes a good proportion of fat and protein, with some carbohydrates.

Vitamin should be given more importance in the diet of the elderly, especially, vitamin D and B-6. Vitamin D is important for proper utilization of dietary calcium, with is required to prevent bones from risk of fracture and osteoporosis. Calcium is also one of the important components of elderly diet, which should not be ignored. The daily dose of calcium exceeding 800-1000 mg in the elderly is highly beneficial in old age. Adequate water consumption is also essential for proper elderly diet as the reduced thirst and decreased kidney function may cause dehydration.

Regular exercise, regular medical checkup and physicianâ€™s advice are also important for well-being of the elderly.

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Simon reviews about a elderly healthcare and says that Governments are spending a considerable amount on medical and a healthcare of the elderly.

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