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NEWS RELEASE

Healthy Nutrition for Older Adults

In recognition of Nutrition Month in March, the Otsego County Department of Health advises older adults and those who care for them that when you choose healthy nutrition you help to reduce the risk and severity of illness and make it easier to recover from illness. Healthy nutrition helps to maintain strength, independence and better mental health.

Older adults need fewer calories as they age because they are not as physically active as they once were and their metabolism slows down. Nevertheless, their bodies still require the same or higher levels of nutrients for good health. Choosing foods that are low in saturated fat, eating whole grains and adding fruits and vegetables and dried beans to your daily diet are essential to maintaining good health.

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated. Eat a variety of foods from all the food groups to get the nutrients you need. Fruits and vegetables can be fresh, frozen or canned.

Look for foods low in saturated fats and cholesterol and with little to no trans fat to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Eat only fat that is mostly polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels for total fat, trans fat and saturated fat.

Older adults need more vitamin D and calcium to help maintain bone health. Include at least three servings of low- or fat-free milk or yogurt each day. Other calcium-rich foods are fortified cereals and fruit juices, dark green leafy vegetables and canned fish. If you take a calcium supplement or multivitamin, choose one with vitamin D. In addition, check with your physician about taking a separate vitamin D supplement.

The Otsego County Department of Health also recommends that older adults eat more fiber-rich foods to stay regular. Fiber also can help lower your risk for heart disease, control your weight and prevent diabetes. Choose whole grain breads and cereals and include more dried beans and peas in your diet. Try hummus made from garbanzo beans.

Reducing sodium (salt) may lower your risk of high blood pressure. Choose and prepare foods with little or no added salt. Look for prepared foods with five percent or less of sodium on the Nutrition Facts panel. Also choose fruits, vegetables and low- or fat-free milk and yogurt, which are good sources of potassium.

It's easy for older people to become dehydrated. Thirst is an obvious sign of dehydration, but you need water long before you feel thirsty. Foods with high water content, such as lettuce, soups and vegetable and fruit juices, can help prevent dehydration.

Older people may skip meals, lose weight and become undernourished. Or, they may snack on unhealthy foods, frequently eat at fast food outlets, and choose frozen dinners, lunch meats and other highly processed foods. The result is that they may consume too many empty calories, fat and sodium without getting a healthy balance of vitamins and minerals. Family members and friends can help older adults by talking to them about healthy nutrition choices.

For more information about nutrition, call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/nutrition.

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