

**OBJECTIVES:**

- *Overview of the importance of good nutrition
- *Review the In-home aide's role in assisting clients with nutrition

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References:

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at DietaryGuidelines.gov

USDA My Plate: <https://www.myplate.gov/>
https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf - Chapter 6 older adults

<https://diabetes.org/food-nutrition>

<https://medlineplus.gov/nutritionforolderadults.html>

NUTRITION

Nutrition plays a key role in the health of an individual. What a person eats and drinks can help or harm their health. Many chronic conditions can be helped with good nutritional practices. In-home aides can help their clients with nutrition with meal preparation and assistance with eating and helping the client make good food and beverage choices. General healthy eating is good for everyone, but especially a person with a condition that can be helped with a good diet such as a person with diabetes, or heart disease. General guidelines for healthy eating are found at the USDA MyPlate guidelines at <https://www.myplate.gov/>. According to the MyPlate information, the benefits of healthy eating add up over time, bite by bite. Small changes matter.

Nutrient-dense foods and beverages provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, eggs, beans, peas, and lentils, unsalted nuts and seeds, fat-free and low-fat dairy products, and lean meats and poultry when prepared with no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium are nutrient-dense foods. A healthy dietary pattern consists of nutrient-dense forms of foods and beverages across all food groups, in recommended amounts, and within calorie limits. The U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and of Health and Human Services (HHS) update the Dietary Guidelines at least every 5 years, based on the current science. A fundamental premise of the Dietary Guidelines is that everyone, no matter their age, race, or ethnicity, economic circumstances, or health status, can benefit from shifting food and beverage choices to better support healthy dietary patterns.

A person living with a chronic condition may be on a specialized therapeutic diet prescribed by their healthcare provider. The In-home aide should follow the client's plan of care for any specialized diet plan when preparing food for the client considering the client's choices. A person's food and beverage choices are based on their traditions, culture, and personal preferences as well as their budget. In home aides who assist clients with grocery shopping can help the client make healthy food choices within their budget such as buying in season fruits and vegetables, looking for sales, reading labels for nutrition value to get the most nutrients from a food/beverage choice.

Compared to younger adults, older adults (age 60 and over) are at greater risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as health conditions related to changes in bone and muscle mass, such as osteoporosis and sarcopenia (age-related progressive loss of muscle mass and strength), respectively. Older adults should follow a healthy dietary pattern because of the changing dietary needs and the heightened risk of malnutrition that occurs with age. Older adults generally have lower calorie needs but similar or even increased nutrient needs compared to younger adults.

Good nutrition is important, no matter a person's age. It gives a person energy and can help a person control their weight. It may also help prevent some diseases, such as osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

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Nutrition is about eating a healthy and balanced diet so that a person's body gets the nutrients that it needs. Nutrients are substances in foods that our bodies need so they can function and grow. They include *carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and water*. As a person ages, their body and life change, and so does what they need to stay healthy. For example, an older adult may need fewer calories, but they still need to get enough nutrients. Some older adults need more protein. Malnutrition is the lack of proper nutrition because of a lack of food intake, improper diet, or impaired use of food by the body. For the human body to continue to grow normal cells, maintain normal functioning of all systems, and have energy for activities, a well-balanced diet is needed. It is important to remember that each person is unique. Each client is different and cannot be compared to other clients of the same age or condition. Nutritional status is based on a person's body composition, functional status, and the presence of illness or disease and is unique to each person.

Some changes that can happen as a person ages can make it harder for them to eat healthy. These include changes in their:

- Home life, such as suddenly living alone or having trouble getting around
- Health, which can make it harder for them to cook or feed themselves
- Medicines, which can change how food tastes, make their mouth dry, or take away their appetite
- Income, which means that they may not have as much money for food
- Sense of smell and taste
- Problems chewing or swallowing their food

Eating healthy as a person ages include:

- Eating foods that give a person lots of nutrients without a lot of extra calories, such as:
 - Fruits and vegetables (choose different types with bright colors)
 - Whole grains, like oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, and brown rice
 - Fat-free or low-fat milk and cheese, or soy or rice milk that has added vitamin D and calcium
 - Seafood, lean meats, poultry, and eggs
 - Beans, nuts, and seeds
- Avoiding empty calories. These are foods with lots of calories but few nutrients, such as chips, candy, baked goods, soda, and alcohol. Encourage your clients to eat a healthy diet and assist to ensure healthy snacks are prepared according to the clients' plan of care.
- Pick foods that are low in cholesterol and fat. Especially avoiding saturated and trans fats. Saturated fats are usually fats that come from animals. Trans fats are processed fats in stick margarine and vegetable shortening. You may find them in some store-bought baked goods and fried foods at some fast-food restaurants. Encourage your clients to make healthy food choices in determining what to eat. If you are assigned to prepare meals, encourage your clients to choose meals you can prepare in a healthy way such as low fat and cholesterol. Preparing meals is a big role for in-home aides in helping clients with their nutritional needs. If your client is on a special diet, make sure you have instructions on how to prepare the meals.
- **Drink enough liquids**, to avoid getting dehydrated. Some people lose their sense of thirst as they age. And certain medicines might make it even more important to have plenty of fluids. As an in-home aide you can offer the client liquids, remind and encourage the client to drink liquids if the client is not on a fluid restriction, and make sure that the client has liquids within their reach. Report to your supervisor and according to the plan of care if the client is not drinking liquids and if you notice their urine is dark.
- Being physically active. If a person has started losing their appetite, exercising may help them to feel hungrier. Assisting a client with movement and mobility according to their plan of care is a valuable role of an in-home aide and can help a person stay physically active.

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Food is a basic need, and a person's diet affects physical and mental well-being and function. A poor diet and poor eating habits increase the risk for disease and infection, cause chronic illnesses to become worse, and cause healing problems.

A mechanically altered diet requires a change in the texture of food or liquids (e.g., soft solids, ground meat, pureed food or thickened liquids). A therapeutic diet or modified diet is a specific diet ordered for a person because of illness, condition, or preparation for a procedure (e.g., low cholesterol, low sodium (salt), low sugar, lower carbohydrates, or other). Follow the client's plan of care for any type of therapeutic diet requirements, be sure to ask your supervisor for any education for requirements for any therapeutic or modified diet. If your client has had a stroke, it may be difficult for them to swallow liquids. You may have to thicken their liquids before consumption. You will need special instruction from your supervisor as to the amount of thickener needed. There are various degrees of thickener. You may have clients that due to a stroke or other condition need assisting with eating. If the client's plan of care includes assistance with eating or feeding a client, be sure to receive education from your supervisor on how to safely assist a client with eating. Follow the client's plan of care regarding preparing food or assisting a client to eat. Report per the plan of care any problems with your clients with eating food or drinking liquids or any difficulty with swallowing. Good nutrition is vital in the overall health of the individual. In-home aides are vital in assisting a client with nutritional needs.

Healthy eating for prediabetes and diabetes helps to manage blood glucose (blood sugar). Intentional food choices for a person with prediabetes or diabetes such as eating more non-starchy vegetables, opting for lean meats or plant-based proteins, choosing quality carbohydrates, and low-fat versions of cheeses and dressings, will all help a person meet their health goals. It is not about one food, or one meal, it's about healthy eating over time. (<https://diabetes.org/food-nutrition>). In-home aides can assist their clients and provide encouragement to follow any nutritional guidelines that have been prescribed by their health care provider for their diabetes management. Fiber is a type of carbohydrate that your body cannot digest. It is found in many foods that come from plants, including vegetables, beans, and peas. Eating fiber-rich vegetables can help prevent stomach or intestinal problems and lower cholesterol.

According to the American Heart Association, a healthy diet and lifestyle are the keys to preventing and managing cardiovascular disease. They recommend eating an overall healthy dietary pattern that emphasizes:

- A wide variety of fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains and products made up mostly of whole grains
- Healthy sources of protein (Mostly plants such as legumes, and nuts; fish and seafood; low-fat or fat-free dairy; and, if a person eats meat and poultry, ensure it is lean and unprocessed.)
- Liquid non-tropical vegetable oils such as canola, corn, olive, soybean and sunflower oils
- Minimally processed foods
- Minimized intake of added sugars
- Foods prepared with little or no salt
- Limited or preferably no alcohol intake

If you are preparing food as part of a client's plan of care, *food safety* is important to protect yourself and your client from harmful germs. Learn about food safety at:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/safe-food-handling#:~:text=To%20keep%20your%20family%20safer,COOK>

Facts about Water

- Most essential nutrient
- Needed for every cell in body
- Main part of the blood
- Importance to body
 - Helps move oxygen and nutrients into cells and removes waste products out of cells
 - Helps with digestion and absorption of food
 - Helps maintain temperature by perspiration
 - Water is essential for survival

