

Ageless nutrition

Karen Abbey (Foodservice Aged Care Specialist Dietitian)

Published in Ageless (DPI publications August 2013)

Nutrition means something different to everyone. But the one thing that all people need is good nutrition and this varies throughout our life. Our nutritional needs when we are younger to what we need when we are older will vary. It varies in the amounts of food we need and the quality of nutrition we consume. Therefore, nutrition is important through every stage of our life.

With the increased ageing population more people are staying in the community and those entering aged care homes will be frailer and often in need of more intensive care. So nutrition does play a vital part in maintaining one's health but also one's quality of life. So what does this mean? It means that everyone has to eat a wide variety of foods and eat regularly throughout the day.

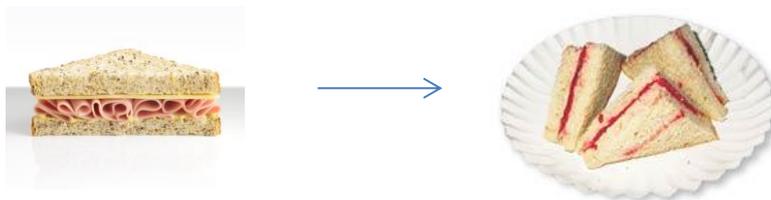
It means making sure that people have access to food and meals.

And if they don't then accessing services that can ensure that food and meals are available. It means that organisations, dietitians and support workers who are providing services in the community and residential care homes are developing menus which are suitable, tasty to meet nutritional goals.



Some people rely upon carers, volunteers and staff to help them to prepare meals or be assisted to consume them. There are many stages of how we interact with our food supply but the most important aspect is that we all must eat a certain amount of food per day to ensure that the essential needs of our body are met. If we fail to meet the nutritional and energy needs of our body we will lose weight and if we exceed the amount of energy needed then weight will be put on.

We have to watch the elderly in the community and those that are in care homes to make sure they are getting enough food and enough good quality food. There is a difference between a sandwich with ham and cheese and a class of juice to a person just eating a jam sandwich with a cup of tea.



Over a period of time poor quality food intake will lead to poor nutritional outcomes. Poor food intake can be caused due to social isolation, poor access to food, inability to prepare meals, lack of feeding assistance, poor nutritional assessment of what an elderly person needs and developing the appropriate food and menu strategies. So while some elderly may look like they are eating enough food the quality is not there and people are missing out on essential nutrition.

When people start to lose weight due to poor food intake in the community or in an aged care home then nutrition strategies through careful menu planning should be undertaken to reduce further deterioration. Research has shown that the social environment is more conducive to eating and therefore leads to a higher food intake. That is why social support services are essential to help

reduce social isolation and loneliness. Do you know of someone who eats alone? There are times when we all like to have a meal by ourselves but not always and social contact makes people feel wanted, engaged and connected. That is why community meal services should also focus on companionship and residents in aged care homes should be encouraged to come into the dining room for meals.



Ageless nutrition is what we all need to eat well throughout our lives and we all need to help those that have a reduced capacity or are unable to do so for themselves.

Karen Abbey
0417 608 206
nacc@live.com.au

For more articles on nutrition and food services in aged care please visit www.nutcat.com.au and go to the NACC publication site.

If you would like to subscribe to the Nutrition and Catering Global Hub www.nutcat.com.au and sign up on the home page