

May 2022 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames *FOOD IS OUR FRIEND – NOT OUR ENEMY!*

Media headlines frequently focus on “telling” us what not to eat, implying that various foods are hazardous to health: “30 foods to avoid for better health according to science,” “ten foods you should never eat,” “50 things you should never eat,” or “10 fruits not to eat”.

It would be more helpful if emphasis were placed on the value and importance of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and other nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. For sure, individuals with various health issues such as diabetes, gluten intolerance/sensitivity, sugar intolerance, lacto-intolerance, and cardio-vascular disease, under the recommendations of their primary care providers, refrain from various foods. For the vast majority, eating a variety of foods across the spectrum of nutrition categories is recommended. Limitations relate to the amount one consumes. A recap of nutrients might be helpful.

Grains: Any food made from wheat, rye, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or other cereal grain is a grain product. This includes bread and pasta, breakfast cereal, grits, tortillas, and popcorn. Along with fruits, vegetables, and dairy, grains contain carbohydrates, the body’s main source of energy. Some grain products are refined, which gives them a finer texture and a longer shelf life but removes fiber and nutrients. Most refined grains are enriched, which means that some nutrients are added back after processing. Examples of refined grain products include white flour, degermed cornmeal, and white rice.

Fiber: Did you know that fiber is a type of carbohydrate that the body cannot digest? It is found in many foods that come from fruits and plants, including vegetables, beans, and peas. Older Americans do not eat enough fruit. Adding more fruit to the diet can have significant benefits for overall health. Fruits, like vegetables, contain carbohydrates and provide extra fiber.

Proteins: often called the body’s building blocks. They are used to build and repair tissues and help the body fight infection. Extra protein is used for energy. Nutritionists recommend older adults eat a variety of nutrient-dense proteins such as lean (low-fat) meats and poultry. Keep in mind that seafood, eggs, beans, nuts, seeds, and soy products provide protein. Recent research studies have found that older adults’ diets are low in protein. Confused about whether to count beans and peas as vegetables or protein foods? Consider these as vegetables if you regularly eat meat, poultry, and fish. Count them as proteins if you are a vegetarian or vegan or if you seldom eat meat, poultry, or fish.

Dairy: Consuming dairy helps older adults maintain strong bones and provides several vital nutrients, including calcium, potassium, and vitamin D. There are many low-fat or fat-free choices in the dairy group which provide important vitamins and minerals, with less fat. Other plant-based milks (for example, almond, rice, coconut, oat, and hemp milks) may contain calcium, but are not always fortified with the vitamins and minerals present in dairy. Check for added sugars in dairy alternatives. Reading labels helps one choose unsweetened or low-sugar options. Fortified soy milk and yogurt, which have calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D added, are included as part of the dairy group.

Oils & solid fats: high in calories but are important sources of nutrients like vitamin E. Oils contain monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats which provide energy and help the body absorb various vitamins. [Healthy Eating As You Age: Know Your Food Groups | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](#)
[Healthy Eating | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](#)