

Nutrition and Aging

Considerations in an ICF/IID

Learning Objectives

- Define nutrition and its impact on the aging process.
- Describe regulatory requirements related to aging and nutrition.
- Describe physical changes that can impact nutrition in older adults.

Nutrition and Aging

What is nutrition?

“Nutrition is about eating a healthy and balanced diet so your 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.”¹

Nutrition and Aging

It is important to understand nutrition and its impact on the aging process. As you age, some changes make it more difficult to eat healthy. These changes may include:

- Increased difficulty getting around.
- Medicine that can change how food tastes, make the mouth dry, or take away appetite.
- Decreased sense of smell and taste.
- Problems chewing or swallowing food.

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According to Healthline (2017),

“Aging is linked to changes that can make you prone to deficiencies in calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B12, iron, magnesium and several other important nutrients. Aging may also reduce the ability to recognize sensations like hunger and thirst. To prevent these deficiencies, it is important to stay on top of water and food intake, eat a variety of nutrient-rich foods and consider taking a supplement.”⁴

Regulatory Requirements

Before going any further, it is important to review the regulatory requirements² related to aging and nutrition. These include:

- W211: The comprehensive functional assessment (CFA) must take into consideration the individual's age.

Regulatory Requirements

- W216: The CFA must take into consideration the individual's physical development and health.

This includes the results of physical examinations, health assessment data (including medication and immunizations), and a summary of all laboratory reports and medical interventions since the last evaluation.

Regulatory Requirements

- W217: The CFA must take into consideration the individual's nutritional status.

Nutritional status includes height and weight, eating habits and preferences, adequacy of total food intake, bowel habits, means through which the individual receives nutrition (e.g. feeding tube) and the skills associated with eating (i.e., chewing and swallowing disorders).

Regulatory Requirements

Some important regulations related to diet include:

- W460: Each client must receive a nourishing, well balanced, diet including modified and specially prescribed diets.
- W463: The individual's interdisciplinary team, including a qualified dietitian and physician must prescribe all modified and special diets.
- W474: Food must be served in a form consistent with the developmental level of the client.

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According to the National Institute on Aging (2019), you can improve healthier eating by making shifts in food choices over time.³

Shift From:	Shift To:
High calorie snacks (i.e., chips)	Nutrient dense foods (i.e., carrots)
Fruit products with added sugar (i.e., fig bars)	Fresh fruit
Refined grains (i.e., white bread)	Whole grains (i.e., wheat bread)
Snacks with added salt or sugar (i.e., cookies)	Snacks without added salt/sugar (i.e., nuts)
Solid fats (i.e., butter)	Oils
Regular cola	Water/flavored water with fruit/vegs
Sweetened lemon ice tea	Sparkling water with natural lemon flavor
Medium café latte with whole milk	Small café latte with fat-free milk



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Additionally, Robinson and Segal (2019) state

“Malnutrition is a critical health issue among older adults caused by eating too little food, too few nutrients, and by digestive problems related to aging. Malnutrition causes fatigue, depression, weak immune system, anemia, weakness, digestive, lung, and heart problems.”⁵

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Robinson and Segal (2019) suggest the following tips to prevent malnutrition as you age:

- Eat nutrient-packed food
- Have flavorful food available
- Snack between meals
- Eat with company as much as possible
- Get help with food preparation

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Additionally, Robinson and Segal (2019) state that improving your diet now can help you live longer and stronger, sharpen your mind, and feel better.

“Good nutrition can boost immunity, fight illness-causing toxins, keep weight in check, and reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, bone loss, and cancer. Along with physical activity, a balanced diet can also contribute to enhanced independence as you age.”⁵

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According to Robinson and Segal (2019), as you age, physical changes can affect diet:

- **Metabolism:** Every year over the age of 40, metabolism slows, and often we become less physically active.
- **Weakened senses:** Older adults tend to lose sensitivity to salty and bitter tastes first.
- **Medications & Illness:** Some health problems or medications can negatively influence appetite or affect taste.
- **Digestion:** Due to a slowing digestive system, less saliva and stomach acid is generated, making it more difficult to process certain vitamins and minerals.

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An article titled *Nutrition for Older Adults*¹ states that to stay healthy as you age, you should:

- Eat foods that give you lots of nutrients without a lot of extra calories.
- Avoid empty calories.
- Pick foods that are low in cholesterol and fat.
- Drink enough liquids, so you don't get dehydrated.
- Be physically active.

Final Thoughts

The importance of adhering to the regulations related to aging and nutrition cannot be stressed enough. It is imperative that each individual's age and nutritional status be assessed and addressed in a comprehensive manner. This will help to prevent diseases and ensure good nutrition as he/she ages.

References

¹ MedLinePlus. (2018). *Nutrition for Older Adults*. Retrieved from <https://medlineplus.gov/nutritionforolderadults.html>

² *State Operations Manual Appendix J - Guidance to Surveyors: Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities*. Retrieved from https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/downloads/som107ap_j_intermcare.pdf

³ National Institute on Aging. (2019). *Smart Food Choices for Healthy Aging*. Retrieved from <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/smart-food-choices-healthy-aging>

⁴ Healthline. (2017). How Your Nutritional Needs Change as You Age. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/nutritional-needs-and-aging>

⁵ Robinson, L. & Segal, J. (2019). *Eating Well as You Age*. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/eating-well-as-you-age.htm>

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