[IMAGE]

Nutrition for Women

A Guide to Lifelong Health

By Chelsea Cooper

Nutrition In Your 20s:

In your 20s, you need extra calcium to keep bones strong, especially if you are physically active. Soy also has been shown to protect against cancer and heart disease. How a woman eats in her 20s will determine how healthy she will be later in life.

Nutrition In Your30s:

More women are putting off having children until their 30s. During this period of time, a woman needs extra vitamins and amino acids. Making sure she gets enough folic acid is a must. This can be done by eating green vegetables, such as kale, broccoli, asparagus, and collard greens. She should stay away from foods and lifestyle choices that could be harmful to her fetus.

Nutrition In Your 40s:

As a woman hits 40, her needs change dramatically. A woman's metabolism begins to slow down and, depending on her lifestyle choices in the past, she also could be losing important minerals and vitamins. To help speed up her metabolism, she needs to eat small meals every four hours throughout the day and incorporate daily exercise into her schedule.

Nutrition In Your 50s: and Beyond

Bone loss speeds up at this point, so calcium becomes particularly important. Calcium is important to maintain a normal heart beat and regulate blood pressure. Weight-bearing activity (resistance training) is very important in helping prevent osteoporosis and keeping bones strong. Once estrogen levels decline following menopause, a woman's need for heart-protective foods increases.

Women of different races standing in a group. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark A variety of factors affect a woman's nutritional needs, including menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, perimenopause and menopause. Due to these factors, extra attention should be given to a healthy diet and a few key nutrients, the most important of which are calcium, folic acid, fiber, iron and fluids.

Calcium

Good Sources: low-fat milk, broccoli, turnip greens, yogurt/cheese.

The link between calcium and osteoporosis is well-established, yet many women still are not getting enough calcium to protect themselves. The most important time to get sufficient amounts of calcium is while bone growth and consolidation are occurring - a period that continues until approximately 30 to 35 years of age. The idea is to build up calcium deposits early on, as this may delay fractures that occur later on in life.

Folic Acid

Good Sources: fortified cereal, green leafy veggies, whole grains, bread.

Folic acid is vital for women of childbearing age and women trying to conceive. According to the National Academy of Sciences, women of childbearing age should consume 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. Folic acid guards against birth defects in babies and may prevent some cancers, genetic diseases and heart disease.

Fluids

Good Sources: water, sports drinks, tea, natural juices.

Drink at least 2.5 liters of fluid per day. Fluids are often overlooked in the nutrient category. Although we need them to live, we usually don’t think of them as necessary nutrients. Athletes and very active women need more fluids than those who aren’t as active. Dehydration contributes to fatigue more than any other nutrient deficiency.

Women of different races standing in a group. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Fiber**

Good Sources: bran muffins, whole-grain cereal, apples, pears, raw veggies.

Fiber helps the digestive tract move and prevents diseases such as colon cancer. The lack of fiber is more common than most women suspect. Some symptoms include feeling sluggish for an extended period of time, feeling bloated, and waking up feeling tired and "blue."

Iron

Good Sources: meats (steak, pork, chicken, ground beef), seafood, juices, cereal.

Women may lose up to 15-20 mg of iron each month after menstruation. Iron-deficiency anemia is very common in young women. Iron is needed to make new cells, proteins and hormones. Iron also helps protect

the body against infection.

Many of today's health problems, including birth defects, premature births, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension, strokes and heart disease, can be reduced or prevented by a healthy diet and lifestyle. I would be remiss if I did not at least mention regular exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle. Regular exercise can help improve self-esteem, mental health and physical health. Twenty to 30 minutes of exercise, three times a week, can help reduce the risks of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

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