



Milwaukee's Lifestyle Magazines

NORTHSORE ■ CITY ■ WEST

The Longevity Game

diet

It's never too early or too late to make healthy foods an important part of one's lifestyle.

Dena McDowell, a registered dietitian at Froedtert Hospital, says research shows that certain foods do promote longevity. "The better your diet is, the less chance you have of developing heart disease, cancer or diabetes, or having a stroke. If you are older and already have some of these conditions, healthy foods still are beneficial," says McDowell.

Authoritative voices such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the American Heart Association recommend diets similar to those eaten in the Mediterranean region. "It's more of a plant-based diet with more fruits and vegetables — five to nine servings a day," says McDowell. Those in Mediterranean countries also generally use monounsaturated oils such as olive oil and canola oil rather than butter or other saturated fats. Meals are built around legumes (beans) rather than red meat found in the typical American diet.

Breaking eating habits built over decades can be difficult, McDowell admits. She recommends that older people make gradual changes, for instance substituting rice for potatoes at dinnertime once or twice a week. For lunch, soup with a non-meat protein source, such as beans, is a good choice.

Seniors who need to increase their hydration — six to eight cups of water a day are recommended — also should increase slowly. "Water is important to help the bowels and digestion, and helps the skin and your energy level," says McDowell.

According to McDowell, seniors' grocery lists also should include whole-grain breads and cereals. To increase good cholesterol (HDL) and reduce bad (LDL), McDowell suggests adding ground flax seed in cereal or yogurt, or to recipes for breads or muffins. Flax seed is rich in beneficial omega-3 fats, which also can be found in fish oil caplets.

A daily multivitamin is important, too, as well as dairy-rich foods or calcium plus Vitamin D supplements to head off osteoporosis; Vitamin B-12 for energy and to relieve tingling in the hands and feet; and Vitamin E for heart health.

Excess weight produces free radicals, which are reactive by-products of the normal activity of cells. Antioxidants in fruits and vegetables protect cells against damage by free radicals. "It's the aging process, in essence," says McDowell. "This is when your cancer risk increases, you develop wrinkles, and plaque builds up in the heart."

McDowell recommends that older adults work closely with their health-care professionals. "If somebody is on a lot of medications, they should inform their physician (about dietary changes)," she explains.

"For instance if you change your diet and you start dropping a lot of weight, the doctor needs to know that's why."

Faye Wetzel holds a pile of flax seed, a healthy addition to your daily diet.



- Story by Cathy Breitenbucher