

SENIOR SCAPE: Know Your Nutrients

By Sylvia Dickens

Do you know the nutritional value of the foods you eat? Are you getting enough of the right ones for you, as a senior? Researchers have made great strides in recent years in discovering how our nutritional requirements change as we age. Seniors especially need to pay close attention because our bodies do not absorb or use the nutrients in food as well as they once did. We need more of certain vitamins, Vitamin D and C for example.

But, how do we lay-people know what we need? We aren't nutritionists. The lengthy delay in getting food from the field to our plate and the cooking processes demolish the natural nutrients.

We might get by with nutrient-starved foods as youngsters, but it's not so easy at our age. We need an expert advisor to put us on the right track. That should start with your doctor who can tell a lot from a simple blood test.

During Nutrition Month in March, the Centre made available some literature on food choices. Here is some of what it showed. Potatoes have potassium which helps to keep blood pressure at a normal level. Milk provides protein, calcium, vitamin D and A for strong bones and teeth. Carrots contain the antioxidant beta-carotene which keeps cells healthy and reduces certain disease risks. They also help keep eyes and skin healthy. Beans are high in fiber and an excellent alternative to meat. Meat can contribute to bone loss so beans enable you to minimize your meat intake. Fish provides omega-3 fats and protein that benefit the heart. You can test your eating habits by going online to www.nutritionscreen.ca. Developed by nutrition researchers and registered dietitians, the tool shows you what you are doing right about eating healthy. It provides tips on how to improve your eating habits. And it provides links to nutrition resources, tools and recipes.

Visit the site and take the Eating Habits Quiz for Older Adults which contains 14 short questions about your eating habits. It takes less than 10 minutes and then you'll get your personalized results. You can return to the site later to track your progress. If you do not have access to online, you can contact EatRight Ontario at 1-877-510-5102 and talk to a dietitian for free advice. The service is available Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and evenings Tuesday and Thursday until 9 p.m.

Alternatively, you can order a booklet, "Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods" from Health Canada. You can email them at publications@hc-sc-gc.ca or call 1-866-225-0709 and ask for HC Publication 4771. It is 60 pages of charts listing foods by category and their nutritional value such as calcium, iron, sodium, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, vitamin A, folate, vitamin C and B12, niacin, riboflavin, fats, energy and more.

Stay Active

Nutrition is just one aspect of a healthy lifestyle. To maintain strong bones, muscles and a healthy cardiovascular system you need physical activity. This can be walking, swimming or doing certain hobbies around the house like gardening or woodworking. Anything that keeps you moving is beneficial. Soon, the 55+ Ontario Senior Games will begin. It's the perfect time to get your body moving while challenging other seniors.

The OSGA 55+ Games are geared to attract amateur participants over the age of 55. The OSGA's goal is to promote an active and healthy lifestyle. Seniors at all levels of skill and experience are encouraged to try new events or get back involved in their favorite activities.

The summer games begin in early May, so visit www.ontarioseniorgames.ca to find out how to get involved.

Bocce season starts

It's that time again for all bocce addicts to warm up your sneakers and your swinging arms. Spring is finally here, summer is on its way, and it promises to be a great season with our new bocce courts. The new season begins May 1 at 10 a.m. and continues every Tuesday and Thursday mornings, weather permitting. Information on the Wednesday afternoon play times will follow when the bocce committee determines the demand.

Come out, help build the numbers, and have a good time!

For more information on the Aurora Seniors' Centre, drop by 90 John West Way, visit www.auroraseniors.ca, email auroraseniors@rogers.com or call 905-726-4767 between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday.