



KEEPING YOUR LOVED ONE HEALTHY

Healthy Eating

Good nutrition or healthy eating is a key to stroke recovery. Healthy eating can help to keep your loved one's blood pressure, blood sugar and weight under control. Healthy eating may even help prevent another stroke.

What Do You Need to Know?

The MyPyramid Plan from MyPyramid.gov can help you pick foods that are healthy. The food groups are listed below. The recommended serving size depends on the age, gender and level of physical activity.

Grains

Include grains in your loved one's diet every day. Grains have fiber, vitamins and minerals. Fiber lowers the chance of having another stroke. Wheat, rice, oats and barley are common grains. Whole grains are best. Whole grain cereals, brown rice, whole wheat pasta and whole wheat breads are good choices. Make half of your grains "whole."

Vegetables

Vegetables are another good source of fiber, vitamins and minerals. Choose dark green, leafy vegetables like spinach, broccoli and collard greens. The darker the leaves, the more healthy the vegetable. Orange vegetables like sweet potatoes and carrots are good choices too. Vary your vegetables.

Fruits

Fruits are also good sources of fiber, vitamins and minerals. Choose different fresh, dried, canned or frozen fruits. It's best to choose whole fruits rather than juices. Juices have more sugar and less fiber than whole fruits.

Milk, Yogurt & Cheese

Dairy products contain calcium and vitamin D. They help keep bones strong. Choose low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk (skim) products. If your loved one can't have milk products, there are other choices. For instance, some cereals and juices are fortified or have extra calcium and vitamin D. Mackerel, salmon and sardines are high in calcium and vitamin D. Lactose-free products or calcium supplements can also be taken in place of milk products.

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Meats, Beans & Other Protein Sources

Proteins are found in meat, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. Proteins help with muscle, bone and skin health. Pinto beans, kidney beans, chickpeas and split peas are also high in protein. It is important to limit red meat, which is high in saturated fat. Fish and poultry are better choices. Avoid processed foods, as they have a lot of salt. Too much salt can raise blood pressure. Stay away from frying. Instead, boil, bake or grill meats. Be sure to remove the skin and extra fat before cooking.

Fats, Oils & Sweets

A healthy diet includes some fats. The key is to choose healthy fats. Vegetable fats like olive, corn and soybean oils are better for the heart than animal fats like butter and lard. Trans fats are man-made fats. Trans fats are unhealthy and increase the chances of heart attacks and strokes. Trans fats are found in baked goods and some restaurant food. Soft, low-fat tub margarine is better to use than stick margarine. Snacking on nuts is a healthy choice. Encourage your loved one to decrease sweets and high fat foods. For example, limit added fats to the size of the top of a thumb.

Why Should Your Loved One Drink Plenty of Liquids?

Drinking liquids helps prevent constipation (trouble having a bowel movement). Drinking water is one of the best ways to get the right amount of liquids. To improve flavor, add a lemon or lime slice. Unsweetened tea, low-fat or fat-free milk and 100% fruit juice are good choices, too. Liquids are also found in foods like fruits and vegetables.

What About Salt?

Too much salt can raise your loved one's blood pressure. Cut back on salty snacks and processed food. Remember that your loved one should have only 2/3 of a teaspoon of table salt each day. This includes everything your loved one eats or drinks, not just what is added when cooking or eating. Remember that canned foods and many canned soups have added salt.

Helpful Tips

- Cook several extra meals at one time. Date and freeze the extra meals to eat later.
- Read the food labels or "nutrition facts" on packaged or processed foods. Many of these products are high in fat and salt.
- Add more salads, vegetables and fruits to your loved one's diet.
- Season foods with lemon juice, herbs and spices instead of salt or butter.

Does Your Loved One Have Problems Eating?

Dysphagia

After a stroke, some survivors have dysphagia or trouble swallowing. This makes eating difficult. The healthcare team will perform tests to find the cause of the problem. Most people recover from dysphagia in a short time. Sometimes surgery or medicine is needed. Speech pathologists are helpful in improving eating problems from dysphagia. Exercises to strengthen the muscles used for eating are often helpful. Your loved one may be taught to eat in a special way. For example, sometimes turning the head to the side while eating helps. Adding special thickening to drinks is helpful for some people who have problems swallowing liquid. Other tips are to sit up straight and slowly eat and drink. Suggest that your loved one take small sips of liquids and small bites of food. If it is unsafe for your loved one to swallow anything by mouth, a tube for feeding may be needed.

Decreased Appetite

Your loved one may feel less hungry after a stroke. Speak to your healthcare team to see if medicines are to blame. Try giving your loved one smaller meals through the day. If possible, have someone eat with your loved one. Talk with a dietitian (nutritionist) about other tips to improve your loved one's appetite.

Change in Taste

The stroke may have changed your loved one's sense of taste. This can also be caused by some medicines. To help, serve foods with strong flavors. Use spices and herbs to add flavor.

Remember

- Plan meals to include poultry (chicken), fish, beans, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Drink low-fat or fat-free milk.
- Bake, grill or broil foods, rather than frying foods.
- Use only 2/3 of a teaspoon of salt each day in all foods and drinks.
- Encourage your loved one to drink plenty of liquids.

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

MOVE! Weight Management Program

Web: <http://www.move.va.gov>

The Move! Weight Management Program is a VA diet and exercise program to help Veterans improve their health. To make the program more tailored to your needs, take the MOVE! 23 questionnaire.

There are also handouts on nutrition, exercise and emotional health. Information is also available in Spanish. For a list of handouts, go to this link:

<http://www.move.va.gov/handouts.asp?all>

My HealthVet

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has guides on eating well, exercising and taking medicine safely. It has tools to help track your progress and additional resources.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”

MyPyramid.gov

Web: <http://www.mypyramid.gov>

Phone: 1-888-779-7264

MyPyramid.gov has interactive tools to help you plan a balanced, healthy diet. They have information on the different food groups and tips to help you pick foods that are healthy.

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<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Web: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Phone: 1-301-592-8573

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) is a diet used by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to help prevent or reduce high blood pressure.

“Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with Dash”

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/introduction.html>

NIH Senior Health

Web: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov>

Email: custserv@nlm.nih.gov

NIH Senior Health has information on stroke and eating well. To see their list of stroke topics, go to this link: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/stroke/toc.html>

References: National Stroke Association. (2006). *Hope Recovery Guide*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from: http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/hope_full.pdf?docID=921.; National Caregivers Library. (2008). *Help with Eating*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from: <http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/Default.aspx?tabid=468>; National Stroke Association. (2008). Stroke facts; *Recovery after Stroke: Healthy Eating*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from: http://www.stroke.org/site/DocServer/NSAFactSheet_Eating.pdf?docID=987; United States Department of Agriculture. (2008). MyPyramid.gov. Retrieved September 2, 2008, from: <http://www.mypyramid.gov>; NIH Senior Health. (2008). *Eating well as you get older*. Retrieved September 2, 2008, from: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov>; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (n.d.). Retrieved September 2, 2008, from: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>.



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