
Nutrition Fact Sheet



Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a complex disease that affects the brain, causing a gradual loss of brain cells. Approximately 4.5 million Americans have this illness, which is the leading cause of dementia.

Nutrition and AD

Providing a healthy diet for people with AD is often challenging for caregivers. However, maintaining good nutritional health not only has medical benefits, but also enhances quality of life. Additionally, it can help reduce caregiver burden. Some of the benefits of good nutrition include:

- Prevents weight loss.
- Maintains ability to perform daily activities.
- Reduces infections, skin breakdown and chance of falls.

Nutritional Strategies

Providing well-balanced meals and snacks, in accordance with individual food preferences, level of independence, and any other existing medical conditions (diabetes, hypertension), is the focus of nutritional therapy for AD. Use the Tufts University Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults (see below) as a guideline in planning nutritious meals and snacks. Ensuring good hydration is another consideration. Aim for 64 ounces of water or other non-caffeinated fluids per day. If the person is not eating well and losing weight, try increasing the density of foods given. Some ideas are: add dry milk powder, protein powders, carnation instant breakfast powder, blended tofu or quality fats – nut butters, canola oil, olive oil- to foods.

Changes in hunger and thirst cues occur in people with AD. Depending on their disease progression, they may need either physical or verbal cues to guide the eating process. Adapt feeding techniques only as needed in order to maximize independence.

Here are some general tips:

- Place utensil in person's hand and guide to mouth.
- Provide verbal cue i.e. "this is your spoon".
- Keep fluids accessible in a clear dispenser.
- Prompt lower functioning people to drink every two hours.
- Remove individual utensils only as they no longer are used appropriately or present a danger.
- Incorporate finger foods – no utensils required.

For more information:

God's Love We Deliver, Nutrition Department
212-294-8103 or 800-747-2023
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Tips to enhance the meal environment:

- Choose plates that provide contrast with food items.
- Use solid color, unpatterned placemats to avoid confusion.
- Remove non-food items (paper, bones, pits, condiments) that may be ingested otherwise.
- Offer smaller portions or items separately to minimize confusion.

Throughout the progression of AD, the ability to chew and swallow safely becomes impaired and is eventually lost (dysphagia). This can be a life-threatening situation if food is aspirated into the lungs. Symptoms of dysphagia include: drooling, coughing during or after meals, choking or gurgly voice. Modifications in the consistency of food (soft, minced, pureed) can be used to maintain and improve the ability to eat. An evaluation by a Speech Pathologist is necessary to determine what alterations in food texture and liquid consistencies are appropriate. Here are some ideas for those needing softer foods:

Type of Food:	Foods Generally Included:	Foods Commonly Excluded:
Bread and Cereal	Bread, toast, cooked cereal, pancakes, moist pastas, casseroles	Crackers, dry rice, dry cereal flakes, tough breads
Dairy products	Butter, margarine, creamy or blenderized cottage cheese, soft cheeses, yogurt, thickened milk, ice cream	Dry cottage cheese, melted hot cheese
Eggs	Poached, scrambled, omelets	Runny eggs
Meat, fish, poultry	Moist ground meat in casseroles, meatloaf, meatballs, tender fish without bones	Dry ground meats, chunky meats, dry fish or fish with bones
Fruits	Soft, canned fruits with seeds, pits and skin removed; ripe bananas, chilled, thick pureed fruits, soft fruits in gelatin	Raw fruits except for bananas, thin pureed fruits, stringy pineapple
Vegetables	Soft canned vegetables, bakes, mashed or boiled potatoes with margarine or gravy, thick pureed vegetables	Raw vegetables, chunky vegetables, stringy vegetables, corn
Soups	Thick soups (blenderized)	Thin soups or chunky style
Desserts	Fruit whip, gelatin, apple or peach crisp, moist cookies without fruit or nuts, pudding, sherbet, ice cream	Dry cakes and cookies, desserts with raisins, nut, seeds, hard candies, chocolate

Adapted from Krause's Food, Nutrition, & Diet Therapy, 9th Edition, 1996.

For more information:

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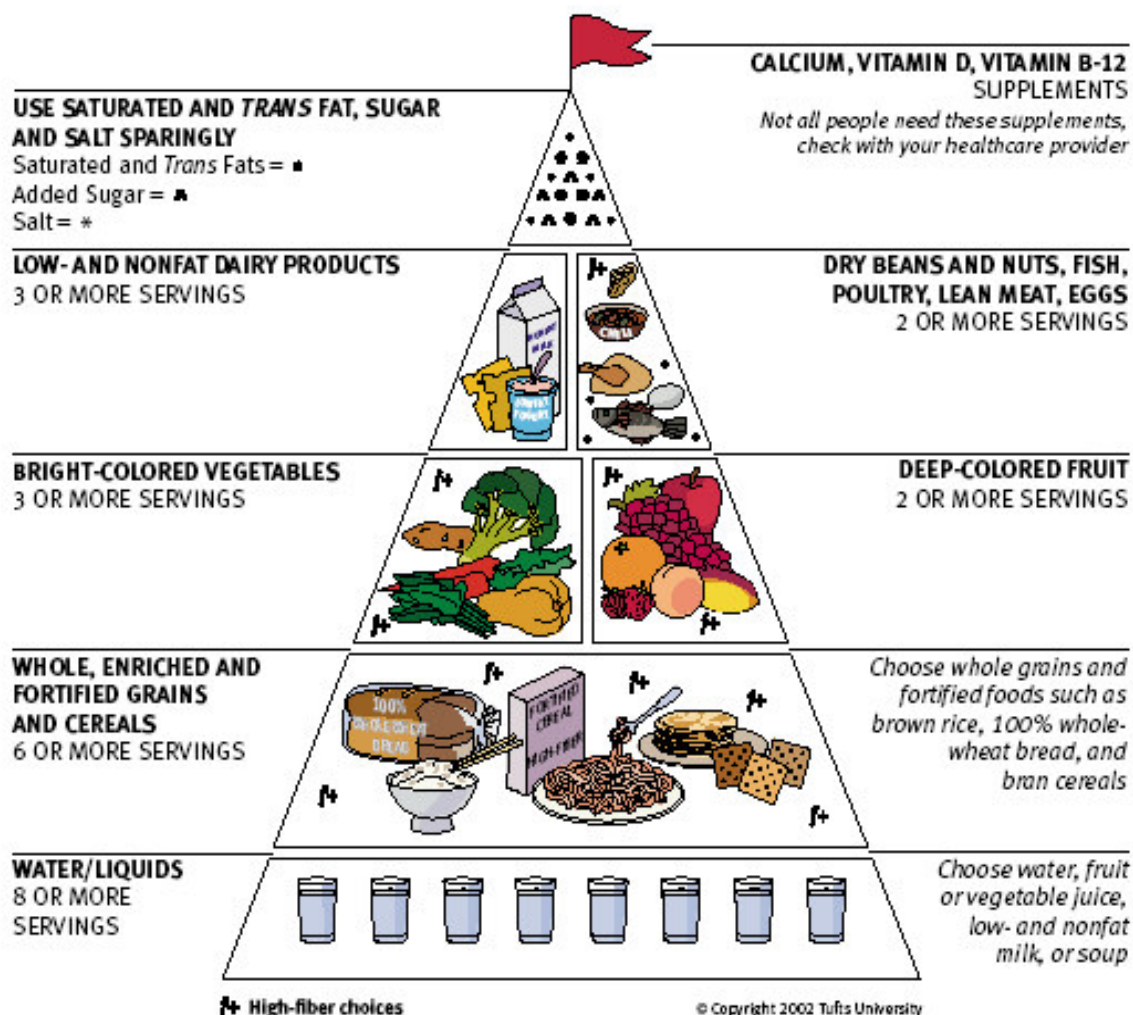
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TUFTS

Food Guide Pyramid for Older Adults



For additional copies visit us on the web at <http://nutrition.tufts.edu>

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