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HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Learning to eat for your age

By FUAD AL QUDSI

NUTRITION NEEDS vary during every stage of the life cycle to suit the body's evolving requirements. The good news is, if you already have a nutritious diet, you just need to be aware of common problem areas for older adults — those who are at least 70, for the purposes of this article.

It's hard to imagine anyone who lives in the Monterey Peninsula not getting enough nutrients, especially when we're surrounded by a year-round abundance of fresh food. However, older adults tend to lose their sense of taste, and some experience loss of appetite. While sodium, saturated fat and added sugar make foods more appealing, they're not great for you, so use herbs and spices to vary the textures and flavors of your meals.

Your activity level — and many prescription medications — affect dietary needs, so it's important to consult your doctor or a registered dietitian if you need help choosing or preparing a healthy diet.

Having said that, there's nothing mysterious about any healthy eating. Nor does it require anything you can't find at one of our many grocery stores and farmers markets. Now, let's have a look at some specifics.

Muscle and bones

Studies have shown that lower muscle mass in older adults has been associated with greater weakness and less mobility, which can result in less independence as you get older. For older adults, the NIH recommends consuming at least .45 grams of protein per pound of body weight each day to build or at least maintain muscle mass. That comes out to about 68 grams for someone who weighs 150 pounds.

What does that look like? You can get 20 grams from one 4-ounce serving of salm-

on and another 43 from a cup of diced chicken breast. Tofu, beans, nuts, eggs and dairy are also good sources. If you're sipping a latte with 8 ounces of milk, you're picking up 8 grams right there — plus some calcium and vitamin D, which are also critical to bone health.

As people age, bones become more porous, making them more susceptible to fractures. You probably know of at least one person whose broken hip has led to hospitalization and weeks of rehab. An adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D can help keep bones strong. Dairy is the best dietary source of these nutrients.

Vitamin B12 and fiber

Aging also means your body makes significantly lower amounts of something called the intrinsic factor, a protein found in the stomach that helps you absorb vitamin B12. If this causes a B12 deficiency, it can lead to pernicious anemia, which has symptoms that include paleness, fatigue and weakness. If you consume animal products, you're probably getting enough B12, but if you're a vegetarian or you have other concerns, ask your doctor or dietitian about supplements.

Digestive muscles weaken with age, making constipation more frequent, so the USDA says that for women and men over



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HEALTHY LIFESTYLES



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50, daily intake should be 21 and 30 grams, respectively. Fiber, found in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, can help prevent constipation and lower cholesterol. 34

Age is also a risk factor in developing heart disease, but adequate potassium can benefit cardiac health.

Luckily, it's not hard to find. It's in most fruits and vegetables, with the richest sources being bananas, potatoes and avocados. Also, like fiber, these foods are often loaded with other nutrients.

Keep drinking water

Let's not forget proper hydration — there's a reason to tote that water bottle along on your daily seaside walks. Older

adults sometimes don't drink enough fluids because their sense of thirst diminishes. Dehydration can cause fatigue, weakness and poor digestion, but milk and unsweetened fruit juice can help with fluid intake and provide extra nutrients. Caffeine and alcohol contribute to dehydration, so consume them in moderation.

If it's difficult to consume three traditional meals to get everything you need, try having five or six smaller ones throughout the day. Dive into some cookbooks or search online sources — there are hundreds of databases and thousands of food bloggers out there — to get out of a recipe rut. Really, it can be a lot of fun.

Fuad Al Qudsi is a registered dietitian with a bachelor's degree in human nutrition and food science.

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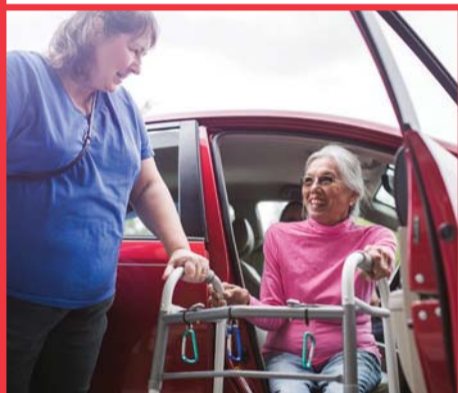


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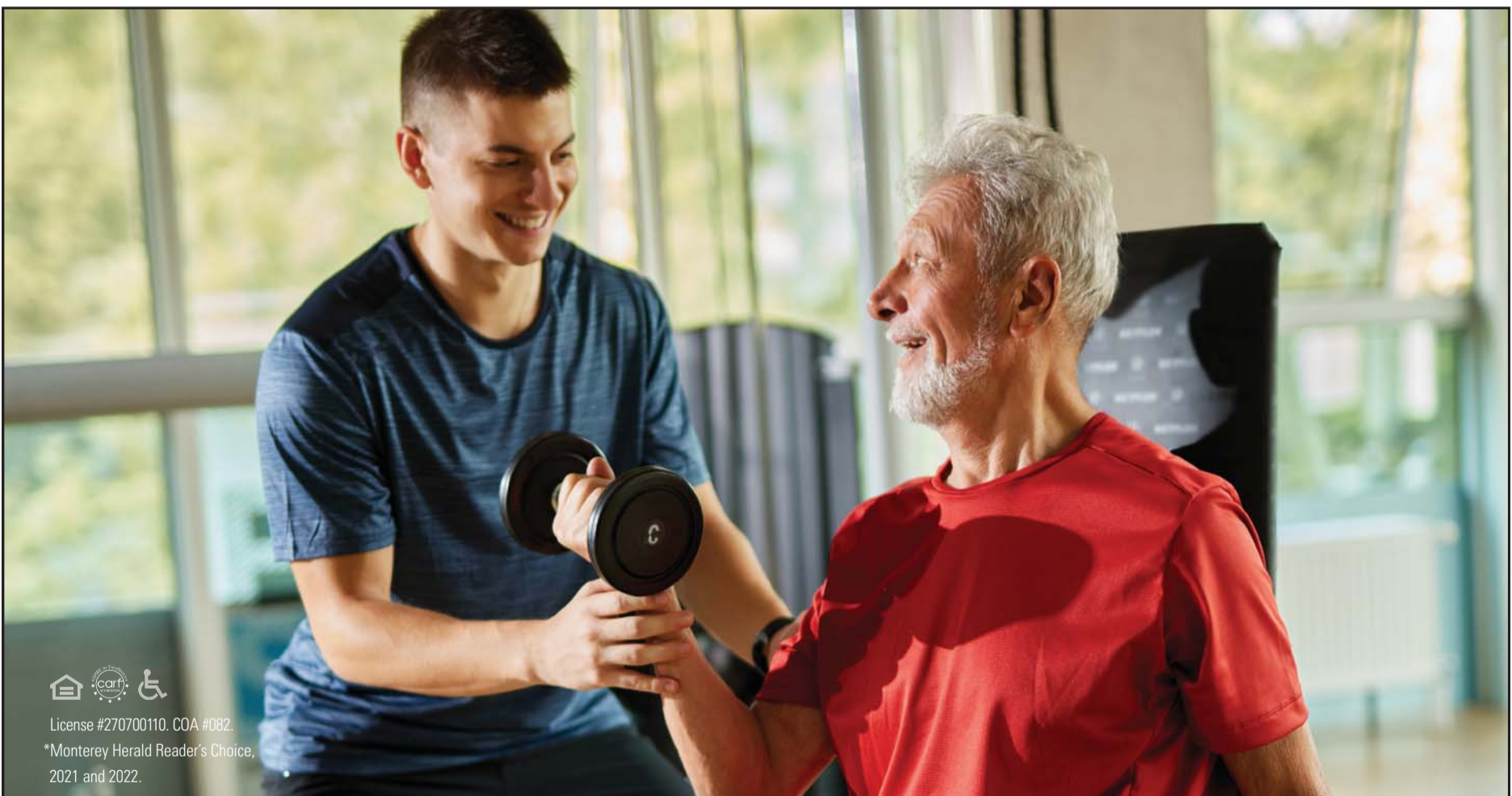
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Older people often don't feel thirsty, even when they need water, which makes it especially important for them to make sure they stay hydrated.



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