

# First Line of Defense

## Senior Nutrition Tips Will Arm Family Caregivers with Resources for Healthy Aging

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When it comes to healthy aging, good nutrition is the first line of defense in keeping seniors strong and independent, according to the results of a recent study about the effect of nutrition on older adults.

According to research conducted for the caregiving company Home Instead Senior Care, 62 percent of adult children caring for an older adult (with an average age of 81) reported three or more nutritional risks in their senior such as:

1. Three or more prescribed or over-the-counter drugs per day.
2. An illness or condition that made the senior change his or her diet.
3. Having lost or gained more than 10 pounds in the past six months without trying.<sup>1</sup>

“We see seniors every day whose health is being impacted by such issues as multiple medications and illnesses,” said Paul Hogan, CEO of Home Instead Senior Care. “That makes nutritious and delicious meals an important tool in keeping seniors well-armed to stand firm against the ravages of aging. It’s really the first line of defense.”

The importance of nutrition to healthy aging is why Home Instead Senior Care has launched the *Cooking Under Pressure* nutrition campaign, which includes a handbook of

nutrition tips and healthy recipes for seniorsPartnering with nutrition experts at the University of Maryland and Duke University Medical Center, the company aims to provide education and support to seniors and their family members who are sometimes stressed-out by the demands of caregiving. The Foods for Seniors Web site, [www.foodsforseniors.com](http://www.foodsforseniors.com), provides additional information, research, and resources.

Statistics indicate that seniors can use the help. According to Home Instead Senior Care research, family caregivers reported that 72 percent of seniors rely on assistance to get groceries while 57 percent of seniors rarely cook for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

“Inability to shop and cook can be major challenges to eating healthy, especially among older adults who have recently been discharged from the hospital,” said Dr. Nadine Sahyoun, associate professor of Nutrition and Food Science at the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, who has extensively studied the impact of issues such as dental health, social support, and depression on seniors’ diets.

Research by Dr. Sahyoun of hospital-discharged older adults who qualify for home-delivered meals showed that 80 percent of those individuals had food in their kitchens, but they were unable to shop or utilize that food for cooking. “There are many other challenges to eating well and these include loss of appetite, memory problems, dental health, and use of certain medications,” she added.

“Without good nutrition, health can deteriorate very quickly, making seniors more susceptible to disease and infection,” Dr. Sahyoun said. “And without intervention, malnutrition can result in a downward trajectory leading to poor health and mortality.”

Social support and assistance with shopping and preparing meals for seniors are the vital ingredients needed to make a positive difference in many seniors’ lives, she noted. That can be help from a family or professional caregiver, taking part in a congregate meal program, (such as those at a senior center) or receiving Meals on Wheels. In addition, seniors and their family caregivers need to be educated in selecting food rich in nutrients.

“Older adults require less food as they age and they can’t eat as much, but their needs for vitamins and minerals don’t decrease. In some cases, they even increase,” she said.

That’s where the Home Instead Senior Care campaign can help. The Cooking Under Pressure campaign identifies 12 nutritious foods for seniors, recipes that feature those foods, as well as other resources that can help give caregivers the support they need.

“These resources really should provide family caregivers with the tools and information that will help equip their senior to stay strong and healthy,” Hogan said. “The good news is that family caregivers can head off a crisis by tuning into the early signs of trouble and knowing the foods and the habits that can help keep their loved ones healthy.”

# The 10 Warning Signs That Older Adults are Not Eating Properly

These 10 warning signs are red flags that your senior may not be eating right:

- 1. Loss of appetite.** If your senior has always been a hearty eater but no longer eats as he or she used to, it's time to find out why. Underlying illness could be the root cause.
- 2. Little to no interest in eating out.** If your loved one has always loved eating out at a favorite restaurant but no longer shows interest, dig deeper to determine the problem.
- 3. Depression.** Change in appetite is a classic sign of depression. Be sure to follow up with a physician if you suspect depression may be a problem.
- 4. Sudden weight fluctuation.** A weight change, losing or gaining 10 pounds in six months, is another sign that something could be amiss.
- 5. Expired or spoiled food.** Check the refrigerator for expired or spoiled food. Seniors could be "saving" food until it's no longer safe. Make sure that all food is labeled, with the date, in large letters and numbers.
- 6. Skin tone.** Observe your senior's skin tone. If your loved one is eating properly, the skin should look healthy and well-hydrated.
- 7. Lethargy.** If your older adult has regularly been active and enjoyed taking walks, but suddenly becomes lethargic, encourage a visit to the doctor. Poor nutrition could be to blame.
- 8. Cognitive problems.** Seniors who live alone might forget to eat. Dementia and cognitive problems can lead to nutritional deficiencies. Quick intervention is vital.
- 9. More than three medications.** Medication can influence both appetite and weight. Check with your senior's doctor to find out if medications could be the culprit.
- 10. A recent illness.** Illness or a hospital stay could make a senior stop eating. Keep tabs on your loved one's recovery, making sure reliable help at home is available.

*Sources:*

*1,2. The Boomer Project completed online interviews with 1,279 U.S. adult caregivers, ages 35 to 62, with a parent, stepparent, or older relative for whom they or someone in their household provides care. Questions regarding nutritional risk factors and stress adapted from Abbott Laboratories' "Determine Your Nutritional Health" checklist. Used with the permission of Abbott Laboratories, copyright 2008.*

For more information about the research study or the effects of poor nutrition on the elderly, contact Dan Wieberg, public relations manager for Home Instead Senior Care, by phone at 888-484-5759 or by email at [dwieberg@homeinsteadinc.com](mailto:dwieberg@homeinsteadinc.com).