

The Importance of Appropriate Nutrition Assessment and Nutrition Education for Older Adults

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As the population of older adults continues to increase, there is even more urgency to establish nutrition assessment standards to evaluate the nutritional status of this vulnerable population, and to provide appropriate nutrition education and intervention. There is a high prevalence of undernutrition among seniors, and the cases of insufficient energy or micro and macronutrients are alarming. Unfortunately, this nutritional state is often misdiagnosed because of inappropriate assessment. The nutrition diagnosis needs to be accurate in order to provide effective intervention. The nutrition assessment of older people is sometimes challenging because older adults are often dealing with chronic medical conditions that require multiple pharmaceuticals for therapy. Therefore, drug-nutrient interactions are a prime concern among this population group.

Nutrition education is an essential component in improving dietary habits and food choices, in order to reverse the under nutrition and improve the nutritional diagnosis. Poor dietary habits and lack of physical activity can be the main reason for poor nutritional status among older adults. The positive impact of nutrition education on the nutritional status of older adults has been confirmed by many studies. A study conducted among the senior Korean community indicated that after nutrition education was delivered, nutritional knowledge, nutritional attitudes and dietary habits were increased significantly.

The joint position paper by the American Dietetic Association,

American Society for Nutrition and Society for Nutrition Education encourages the provision of government supported food and nutrition programs for screening, assessment, nutrition education, counseling and therapy, to ensure more healthful aging. This in turn will be a cost effective policy that rebalances long-term care away from nursing homes to home- and community-based services. The position paper indicates that there is evidence that older adults benefit from health promotion and nutrition education significantly, and that effective assessment, education and intervention programs can enable older adults to maintain their health, enjoy food and most importantly, have a higher quality of life [1]. To maximize the positive impact of such programs, more research needs to focus on and emphasize the development of appropriate nutritional assessment tools for application to older people, aiming to improve and detect under nutrition and prevent and reduce the prevalence of chronic clinical conditions before they occur [2].

References

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