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Smith Crossing dietitian:

Try new foods for vibrant health



Maggie Stock

"Trying new foods is important throughout life," says Maggie Stock, dietitian for Smith Crossing, a continuing care retirement community located at 10501 Emilie Lane in Orland Park.

"Expanding your list of favorite healthy foods makes sense because taste buds change throughout our lifetimes. Also, our digestive systems may no longer tolerate foods we loved 10 years ago."

At Smith Crossing, our chef and I collaborate to blend culinary adventure with good taste. We may feature fruits, such as star fruit or yellow watermelon, newer to many Americans. We also encourage residents to try new vegetables by pairing them with something familiar; for instance, we suggest pouring spaghetti sauce over cooked spaghetti squash instead of pasta.

"Maintaining a constant weight with balanced nutrition always is our goal," says Stock. "No one ever seems to lose a taste for ice cream, but it's not a good idea to live on ice cream alone! Some people just stick to meat and potatoes and that's not good either."

To guard against weight fluctuations and to maintain optimum health, weigh yourself every day and make an effort to expand your taste palette for healthy foods throughout your life, advises Stock.

Many reasons for changing palettes

Hormonal changes, shifts in appetite, lower activity levels, a diminished sense of smell and certain medications dramatically affect our ability to taste or tolerate certain foods. Left unchecked, over time, not adjusting a diet can become life-threatening. Many people gain or lose significant amounts of weight, Stock says.

New sources for better health

Many older adults struggle with blood sugar fluctuations due to diabetic conditions. To address this, eat complex carbohydrates such as brown rice, whole grain breads and pastas, and beans. It's also important to include low-fat, low-sugar sources of protein such as cottage cheese and yogurt.

Nuts are good sources of protein and roughage. But if chewing is a problem, try peanut butter and other nut butters, but Stock suggests going easy on them because they usually contain added

fats so they're easier to spread and sweeteners for taste.

Some people may have difficulty digesting whole grains and beans. If foods containing more roughage haven't been part of your diet, it's best to introduce them gradually, Stock says. Start with smaller amounts just two or three times a week.

Try Greek yogurt or fresh fruit instead of sugary snacks, desserts and breakfast treats such as donuts and Danish.

To lower cholesterol and derive the benefits of omega 3 vitamins, replace red meat with fish. If you're not used to eating seafood, start with tuna, salmon and tilapia, Stock says.

Adults taking steroids for arthritis or asthma can develop persistent hunger cravings. "Often people taking steroids never feel full," Stock says. One solution is to eat five smaller meals and drink several glasses of water throughout the day.

Water is essential for body function, and helps us feel full. Because some older adults completely lose their sense of thirst, they might overeat. So in addition to trying lots of healthy foods, drink at least one glass of water with each meal and another glass with each snack.

Those reluctant to give up soft drinks should try water infused with different types of fresh fruit for

flavorful refreshment. "That way people can still feel like they're treating themselves," Stock says.

Make a habit of sampling new healthy foods, Stock says, but remember it doesn't mean feasting on fattening pizza and sausage samples at the grocery store.

"Everybody pretty much knows what pizza tastes like," she says. "It's more about being adventurous when it comes to trying foods that are good for you."

About Smith Crossing

Smith Crossing is one of only 13 continuing care retirement communities in Illinois awarded a five-year accreditation for

"exemplary conformance" to international standards set by CARF-CCAC, the industry's sole accrediting body.

Sponsored by Smith Senior Living, a not-for-profit organization serving older adults since 1924, it provides spacious residences and engaging programs for independent living, as well as assisted living, memory support and skilled nursing care.

It also provides short-term rehabilitation services for residents and others requiring assistance after surgery or a medical incident.

For more information about Smith Crossing, call 708-326-2300 or visit SmithCrossing.org.