



Senior Care Nutrition: Dietitian Interview – Senior Care Corner Show Transcript

Barry: Welcome to the Senior Care Corner Show. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us!

Barry: You'll find us online at seniorcarecorner.com with solutions, tools and information for families and other caregivers of senior adults.

Well Kathy we've got a special treat for our feature segment today, we're going to be talking with the Menu Dietitian (and founder of [Nutrition for the Health of It](#)) and get into a little bit more in a few minutes but we don't have to go very far to find her. Before we get there thought, I believe you have some news items for us?

Kathy: Indeed I do! I found some very interesting news articles that I thought our caregivers would like today. Our first news item:

Irregular Heartbeat in Old Age Leads to Memory and Thinking Decline

A recent study found that older people who suffer from rapid irregular heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation or afib are likely to also develop memory and thinking problems.

Afib is common in older age and increases the risk of stroke.

The study author states that heart health is an important factor related to brain health.

They studied 5100 participants over 65 years who had a history of either afib or stroke at the beginning of the study. They were tracked for seven years and each year got a 100 point memory and thinking test. Scoring 78 or below indicated dementia.

11% of the participants developed afib during the study. Those with afib were more likely to get lower scores in memory and thinking at earlier ages compared to those with no history of afib. Over age 75, the rate of decline was three to four points faster per every five years among those with afib compared to those without afib.

Researchers now want to study the reason why decline occurs and develop strategies to prevent the decline.

Barry: That is very interesting. I hope they come up with good from that.

Kathy: Right! Alright, our second news item today:

For Your Fridge: Do Not Resuscitate Order

Many people especially older adults have made end-of-life decisions and put them on paper including a do not resuscitate or DNR.



They've talked with their children and other family members about their wishes and what type of life sustaining measures that want or don't want.

One local Emergency Medical Service collaborated with the local Medical Center to develop a standard DNR form that can be signed and have a doctor sign which is then placed right on the refrigerator.

They have a magnetized "File for Life" folder that hangs right on the home refrigerator. The DNR form and folder can be obtained from the local fire station or senior center in that area.

In addition to the DNR form inside the File for Life, there's a card where the senior can record medical information, prescriptions and dosages.

This medical information and DNR form will help emergency responders' direct care when it's so easily accessible to everyone.

In most places, EMS personnel must perform CPR if there's no accessible form indicating advance directives. Having this directive right on the refrigerator will help paramedics and other health professionals know what to do.

Barry: That's a great idea, I hope it catches on. It's good for more than just the first responders but a family member who has to meet the senior loved one at the hospital. You know we know those things need to be accessible but having them right there on the fridge, all you got to do is pop in the door and run right back out again. Great idea!

Kathy: Right! It's very good and I really like the medication dosages information too because when you rushed to the hospital, they don't always know what medications you're taking. So it's doubly good.

Our next news item:

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Barry: That’s a good idea. Especially anything that really helps people get the right care they need and gets doctors making sure they’re looking for the right things

Kathy: True. In our final news item today:

Brainpower in the Very Old May Be Improving

Recently researchers found that a group of 95 years olds scored better than those born 10 years earlier after testing their mental abilities.

23% of the elders scored in the highest category compared to 13% of the earlier-born group. Thirty questions were asked of both group including tasks.

The researchers felt that not only education but also intellectual stimulation and better diets earlier in life held the key to the differences.

Because many more people are living to older ages, in fact in the United States in 2010 the census counted 425,000 Americans over 95, it’s important to determine what the cause might be.

The researchers also found that the older group functioned physically better than the earlier-born group and were able to do basic living tasks better.

Previous findings support that people are functioning better at given ages than in the past. Researchers caution that even in better functioning group, 40% had dementia.

Barry, it will be interesting to see how our lifestyle changes that we’re making earlier in our life will affect us as we age.

Barry: Yes and we hope that continues to improve so that’s good news.

Well thank you for those news items Kathy. Kind of surprised me this time not having one that tells us the benefits of getting active but I'm sure you'll have it for next time!

Well it's time for our feature segment folks. We get a lot of questions at Senior Care Corner along the lines of nutrition, people wanting to know what their senior loved ones should be eating and how they can do to make sure they are getting the right kind of diet. Well we've got the expert actually in house here.

Kathy is a dietician whose been working with seniors in a number of settings for more years than she's going to let me tell you but she's also got a separate site called "Nutrition for the Health of It" where she actually shares nutrition information for the population in general. But today we've asked her to sit down and answer some of the questions we've been getting along with ones of nutrition for seniors. Why don't we just dive right in?

First of all, Kathy, welcome to Senior Care Corner.

Kathy: Well thank you I'm excited to be here as Menu Dietitian today.

Barry: Laughs.

Kathy: And share some nutrition information with everyone.

Barry: We're glad to have you here. And I'm not just saying that because you could kick me if I didn't. Let's start with our first question we've got here:

1. Does healthy eating mean something different for seniors than for the rest of the family?

Kathy: Well that's a really good question to start off with and one that caregivers need to keep in mind as they go about their daily caregiving because it's true that aging adults have different nutritional requirements than younger adults.

There are specific nutrients that aging adults have a problem with getting enough of that in their diets. The first nutrient is Vitamin D and calcium. We know that older adults need more of those particular nutrients in order to keep their bones strong and prevent fractures. One of the things we know is that seniors tend to fall down and break bones and if we can keep their diets rich in vitamin D and calcium, we might be able to prevent some of those fractures. What we need to remember is to shoot for three servings a day of dairy foods; whether they be milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, any kind of low fat dairy would be a very helpful addition to their diets.

Another important nutrient that we tend to lack as seniors is Vitamin B12. Most of us and especially seniors don't get enough of this vitamin and what we know is that it can make them tired, fatigued. Good sources of vitamin 12, vitamin B12 include fortified

cereal, fish, seafood and lean meats. Your senior may even need a supplement in order to get enough B12 and you need to talk with your doctor about whether or not that's something he wants to supplement.

Potassium is another nutrient that we need to pay extra attention because seniors don't get enough potassium and that could help them control their blood pressure. Getting enough potassium should also be in combination with lowering the salt in your diet in order to make good strides in blood pressure. Good sources of potassium of course are fruits and vegetables and low fat dairy foods.

Another thing we should pay extra attention to with our seniors is Fiber. Whether or not we're getting enough fiber in their diet to help keep their bowl regular, one of the things we know fiber can do it help us control chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. What we want to remember is to include whole grains in our meals every day and at least half of your grains should be whole, now that's pretty hard to do when you're used to eating white bread and white dinner rolls and that type of thing but there are many ways that we can increase the whole grains in our diet and we need to start including those foods in our daily intakes.

Barry: Well that's true of everybody isn't it?

Kathy: It is, but especially seniors because they're taking a lot of medications that could actually slow down their bowels. So if we need to get fiber and of course water with the fiber, to help keep our bowels moving and prevent that medication related constipation.

Barry: Interesting.

Kathy: Another thing we want to be aware of as senior's age is watching the Fats in their diet, now of course we all want to watch the fats in our diet but especially with seniors and those that have heart disease already. And we want to try to prevent stroke and heart attacks in those people so we want to look at what kind of fats they're taking. Make sure that our fats are unsaturated and we avoid as many trans fats as we can but what we also want to do is kind of keep the general fat in diet down. We don't want to eat a lot of fried foods and greasy foods. That also leads to heart burn and other problems as well.

Another important point that we want to remember when we're talking about seniors who are aging is Calories. As we get older, we tend to slow down, we become more sedentary. We don't need as many calories as we did when we were younger in order to keep our weight at a healthy level and maintain our current weight. However, what comes along with lowering our calorie intake and our portion intake, we tend to eat a little bit less; is that we're also eating less nutrients. So we really need to put our focus on eating good, healthy, nutrient dense foods if we're going to reduce the amount of

foods overall. We need to make sure we're getting the best and biggest bang for our buck when we are eating as seniors. So we want to look for things that are high in nutritional value and not kind of junk foods that are calorie laden without any good nutrient content.

Barry: Yeah I remember older loved ones in our own families really started cutting back what they were eating and it just didn't seem like they were getting enough calories.

Kathy: Exactly. And some of the things that we eat as older adults, especially when we're living alone, is things that are quick and easy and fast. And those are usually the foods that aren't nutrient rich; the good whole foods are harder to prepare and we tend not to take the time to do that so we tend to miss out on the nutritional value as we age. And that's what we really want to focus in on is getting the good healthy foods in.

The other thing that we really want to pay attention to when we're trying to make sure that our seniors are getting good intakes is Protein. One of the first things to go from the diet of a senior is meats and things that are a little bit more difficult to chew or perhaps more difficult to prepare, as I said just a minute ago. When you have to cook for one or two, making a full meal or a meatloaf or whatever you're making in terms of your Sunday type dinner; we tend not to do that so we want to just go for the easy thing like opening a can of soup and eating a bowl of soup for dinner. And that's not really giving us enough lean protein sources to keep our muscles strong and what tends to happen is we lose our muscles. You see seniors who are thinning out and just not keeping their muscle tone up. And of course what happens when you don't have strong muscles? We fall down more.

So it's kind of a vicious cycle that we have to try to break out of. But one of the things that we really can do then is encourage them to eat a protein source at every meal. It doesn't have to be a tremendous amount of protein, not a twelve ounce steak or anything, but just a little bit of protein at every meal will help them maintain their muscle mass.

Barry: That's sounds like something of a paradox then. If they keep eating what they did when they were young, they're going to put on a lot of weight. But if they cut back to maintain their weight, we've really got to watch to make sure they're eating the right things.

Kathy: Right. We know that we can decrease the portions of the food that we're eating as long as we're eating good healthy nutritional value foods then we can still maintain the nutritional content without over eating the calories.

Barry: Well that kind of leads in a way into the next question we've got here and it's something that people have asked us and I know it's something you hear a lot of times on the job working with seniors and their families.

2. What do you tell a family caregivers who's trying to get their senior loved ones to eat better only to have them say something like "Well I've been eating this food for 70 years and I'm still alive so why should I change now"?

Kathy: That's so funny and so true. I hear that every day working Barry.

What we've learned is that as the population ages and our particular seniors, each person is diagnosed with multiple chronic diseases. Just think about your own senior, how many diseases do they have? Generally it's more than one. It's important that we do everything that we can through a healthy lifestyle to keep the diseases in check. More often than not, some of our health behaviors in our lifetime really has led to them getting the chronic disease. One small change in our diet, our physical activity level or any other health behavior that we have like smoking, can make a big difference in how we live with many chronic diseases. For instance, controlling the carbohydrate load in your diet can really improve your blood sugar control. When your blood sugar is in good control you'll feel better and you can put off and hopefully prevent complications. The goal for our seniors is to age successfully. We want them to feel good and healthy every day and be able to live fully, engaging in activities, keeping them happy, meeting with people, going out and doing shopping and other things that they enjoy. If they don't feel good because their diabetes is out of control or they can't breathe, those are things that we can change and watching our diets and staying physically active can help achieve good control of your chronic disease. Definitely, some of us doing what we've always done may not be the best thing if we want to stay healthy as we can, like I said small changes can make big differences.

Barry: You know you mentioned a few times about special nutritional needs being driven by medical conditions that seniors might have. Well as a family caregiver:

3. How would we know if a senior loved one is supposed to be on a special diet so they, so we know how to focus on the right foods and to avoid the foods that they shouldn't be eating?

Kathy: That's a good question. Sometimes we don't know what's going on but in order to find out we need to:

- Communicate with our health care providers such as our doctors, physician extenders like nurse practitioners or nurse managers that take care of your family member when they go in for checkups. Now you might want to go in

- with them and just kind of hear the treatment plan if you're not sure that they're going to be able to communicate that with you.
- You can also ask your pharmacist about the medications they're taking and how those medications relate to nutritional indications such as are they taking blood thinners do they need to watch some vitamin K sources in their diet to manage their blood thinners. Or are they on diabetic medications and you weren't aware that they were diabetics so now you want to help them control the carbohydrate portions of their diet; or any other chronic disease that's managed by medications usually it comes with certain treatment factors that would really help and be beneficial to incorporate in the diet.
 - Be sure that your senior understands their treatment plan. As I said if they're not able to understand it when they go the doctor by themselves and you don't think that they understand it maybe you could attend the doctor visit with them and kind of hear it for yourself. Or why don't you go together with your senior to an educational class such as a diabetes class. Most people don't know that one of the annual benefits of Medicare is to be able to attend diabetes classes for diabetes monitoring, education, and reinforcement of the knowledge to be sure they are managing that diet and lifestyle well. It's a benefit of Medicare that most people don't take advantage of and I suggest you find a diabetes educator in your area and see if you can attend a class with them and really try to take advantage of that benefit to benefit your senior.

Barry: That's really interesting. A lot there, I guess a lot like everything we do comes down to communication.

Kathy: Yes absolutely! We need to be open to all the people that actually interact with our seniors and be sure that we're getting the messages that they're getting. Sometimes they don't remember. It's hard to get all those bits of information when you go to see your doctor, as you know and I know when we go it's like "what did they say? I think I missed that" and perhaps we didn't get it all because our mind was on something else. So it's a good thing to just be part of that healthcare team.

Barry: We've talked a lot in the questions so far about seniors who are still preparing their own meals or we're preparing meals for them but they're still in the home now of course a lot of seniors, at some point in time move into a nursing home.

4. For family members whose older loved one is moving into a nursing home, is there anything they should ask or say to be sure their senior loved one gets the right foods for their needs?

Kathy: Well certainly as we said a minute ago about being open and communicating with their healthcare team.

- Whenever a senior enters a long term care facility that's the best thing to do as well, get to know the health care team in the facility.
- Attend a care plan meetings where you'll be able to collaborate with the team on all aspects of care in the facility not just eating but nursing care, activities and the whole food service plan. Be a part of that team and be a part of that process.

Barry: Is that something that they normally allow?

Kathy: They do! They actually, it's mandated by the government that you have a quarterly care plan meeting when your family member enters a nursing home. And I encourage you to take part of that meeting if you get the notice that it's coming up. Try to schedule it so that you can be there, it's a very important part of being engaged with the treatment plan of your elder.

- Another thing you can do when you have a senior that's entering a facility is meet with the dietitian or food service manager in the facility. Each facility has one of these people available. Then you can review with them the meal preferences that your senior has. You're the best source of information about which foods your senior loves, the foods that they hate, the foods that they will never eat or the foods that they never have eaten but maybe are willing to try now. Share that with the facility and let them help your senior.
- Another idea is to come to the facility during a meal. Whether it's a surprise visit or something that's planned and enjoy it together with your senior. This is a good way to test the food for yourself and see if everything meets your needs and is up to your standards. Most dietary departments would love to hear your feedback so that they can make it the best experience they can for your senior. Everyone in facility usually wants your senior to stay healthy as long as they are there.
- Also the best thing that you can do throughout the time that your parent is in a facility is to continue to be their advocate while they're there. Not just for eating but for all parts of their experience there. Your senior is counting on you to look out for them.

Barry: So that's interesting. So we can and I guess really have to stay involved even when they move into a nursing home to make sure that they are getting the care.

Kathy: Absolutely! Absolutely!

Barry: Here's a question another direction but something that well, we've seen ourselves in our own lives.

5. There are many seniors aging in place in their own homes who suddenly find themselves in the situation where the spouse or partner who did all the cooking is gone and they're left to fend for themselves. Do you have any suggestions for family caregivers who want to get the seniors who haven't done much cooking started preparing their own meals?

Kathy: That's a good one Barry and I definitely have lots of suggestions.

- That's a situation that occurs regularly as seniors who are living on their own lose a spouse. What I have found lately though is kind of interesting. Generally the traditional person that we think is cooking all the meals is not always the woman anymore. Lately, I have encountered more and more men cooking more than the women in their marriage. I find that very interesting. So it's not always the man that we have to worry about, sometimes it's the woman who's left.

Barry: And often it's the woman who outlives her husband. So in those cases, you know that can be exactly this problem.

Kathy: That's true.

- So what we need to think about is it's important for family members to be observant. You really need to go into the house, into the kitchen and look around. What are the foods that they have in the house? What's in the cupboard and the refrigerator? What are they cooking and eating? Are they happy with just a can of soup every night for dinner or just eating a danish for breakfast? And is that what you want for them?
- Or more so than that, is the food they have expired and spoiled? Do we want to be sure that what they're eating is fit to eat as well?
- You also may need to help them grocery shop and encourage them to buy other things like frozen dinners that they may not be used to but could microwave that'd be better than eating just a bowl of soup for dinner, it includes all the food groups. You may also want to buy as many pre-made foods that you can that are healthy that don't require that much preparation such as precut fresh fruits, frozen vegetables, whole grain cereals, dairy products-make sure they're getting yogurt so they have it in the refrigerator to eat and be sure they're getting a lot of protein sources that are easy to cook that don't require a lot of cooking like a whole meatloaf such as canned chicken or frozen meat patties that be available whenever they want.
- You may also want to, once they buy the food and you help them with those choices, prepackage it and prepare it into smaller portion sizes so that you've got a whole meal just for them all ready to go to be microwaved or cooked

instead of having a big bag full of frozen chicken breasts that they have to do something with now and of course they're never going to touch that. So the more that you can get into one meal containers, the better and you might get better benefit and use out of that.

Barry: That sounds like something, you know, that's something especially you should do with them for a while so they learn to do that when they go out shopping on their own. They don't have to look for something for one but they know to come home and break it up into smaller portions.

Kathy: Right, right. But that may be something that you want with them each time you visit. That they've purchased all this stuff, now let's make some meals and do it together and it become a togetherness activity, you could do that as well.

- Another suggestion is: every time you visit bring your senior loved one a family meal that you've prepared in your home. That way you'll know for sure here's their good meal for the day.

Barry: Well that could good too; especially since a lot of things may be that they've loved for their entire lives are things that are a little more complicated than they can cook so you can bring back a cherished memory.

Kathy: That's right. I mean, how many of us love homemade lasagna but they're not going to make it for themselves anymore. But when you make it for your family and bring them a plate, they'll really appreciate that.

- Another thing you can do is schedule perhaps one meal a week in their favorite restaurant. Then you'll know they're going to eat a full meal when they get to that restaurant once a week.

Barry: It's something they can do with friends and neighbors too.

Kathy: That's true.

Barry: A double benefit of really staying social.

Kathy: Right encourage them to stay engaged.

- However, if you're a long distance caregiver and you can't do some of these things; one of the things you can do is set up a "Meals on Wheels" program where healthy meals are delivered right to the senior's door. Now in some places there may not be a "Meals on Wheels" dedicated organization for you to take part in. But there are also other agencies and local business that DO provide "Meals on Wheels" at a reasonable cost. You just need to connect with them. Sometimes "Meals on Wheels" programs, they may have a waiting list

and so in the mean time you can also hook up with these local businesses that can do the “Meals on Wheels”. That’s a good solution for many seniors.

Barry: Yeah and maybe combine the last two suggestions there and a lot of local restaurants will deliver. And maybe you can get one of their favorite meals delivered once and a while.

Kathy: Exactly. Right, exactly.

Barry: Well that’s some great stuff here Kathy. I think we’re going to have to have you back for another time in the future. Before we close out, you know, our feature segment here, we do often stress the need for family caregivers to care for themselves so I really do want to ask a question here that’s more tailored to family caregivers.

6. There are many caregivers, such as those caring for both their parents and children, who find themselves rushing around all day and constantly drinking coffee or soft drinks, you know to keep themselves going. Are there any other things they should be drinking to exchange some of the coffee cups and cans of soda?

Kathy: Well that’s a good question. We tend to get really busy as caregivers and may neglect our own health, so definitely what we want to do is not forget our own health. We need to be healthy caregivers so we can provide what we need for our seniors. In terms of drinking and not drinking things that aren’t as healthy for us, there are a couple of suggestions that I have.

- We need to stay hydrated when we’re running around.
- And one of the best things we can do is try to limit high calorie beverages that we drink like sodas, and juice, and sports drinks and sweetened beverages like iced tea.
- So what do we do instead of all those high calorie drinks? Well we could use water in place of those and I know a lot of people are crinkling up their nose “Oh Kathy, I don’t want to drink any more water. I can’t possibly drink 8 glasses of water a day.” What we want to do then if you can’t drink that much at least drink some, do some substitutions for those higher calorie drinks. But in order to make water more enticing, you may want to put in a slice of lemon or lime or even an orange wedge. That gives it a lot of flavor to your water without adding calories really of any importance.
- You might also want to try sugar free drinks such as crystal light or sugar free iced tea. And don’t forget you can use sugar substitutes in order to reduce the calories and still take advantage of some sweetening.
- We do want to limit caffeine. I’m not saying to avoid all caffeine but to be drinking coffee all day long is probably not the healthiest thing you can do.

Barry: Well thanks Kathy that's a great answer and I think you provided some really good information here. I want to remind everybody, as I've said before; you can find more general nutrition information from Kathy at Nutrition For the Health of It dotcom. We'll put the link in the show notes. But also if you do a search on nutritional information on Senior Care Corner, there are a number of nutritional articles for seniors that she's prepared out there and you can go ahead and take a look at those.

Kathy: Well thank you for having me, I've really enjoyed talking about my passion, nutrition.

Barry: Well Kathy, since you went ahead and shared so much information with us, why don't I go ahead and do your quick tip this time?

Kathy: Sounds good to me.

Barry:

Keep Seniors Safe from Scams Showing Up At Their Home

Well recently we have heard people being victim of theft from an unusual place – their own mail box!

We've got some tips for staying safe from scams and criminals; you know especially those that show up one way or another at your home:

1. Don't put any outgoing mail in your mailbox with the red flag up especially anything containing cash, checks or other personal data! That's just very enticing and a lot of people go by and will just grab that up! Yeah, sure you lose some money but you can also lose personal information that can be used to steal your identity. If it's a bill you're paying, you may not know until they come to turn off your power or your water or something that that bill wasn't paid.
2. Be sure to take any important mail directly to a post office box or a dedicated mail box with a delivery time that same day. Or even give it to your carrier when they come by. A lot of them will go ahead and take mail when you hand it to them.
3. Next tip is: Don't answer the door to a stranger. If your senior loved one doesn't have a peep hole, go ahead and install one for them. It's an easy do it yourself project for most people. And it really can help keep them safe so they're only opening the door when it's somebody they recognize or somebody who shows them identification that positively identifies them as somebody for whom they should open the door.

4. Also, remind them not to give out any personal information such as their social security numbers, credit card numbers or other data over the phone to anyone. The bank's not going to call them and ask them for it! The Social Security Administration's not going to call them and ask them! You know, anybody that needs that information will provide a formal route for providing it. So many seniors get their identities stolen because they are so free with information like that and trusting that the person at the other end of the phone is who they say they are.
5. Speaking of information over the phone. Be sure to talk with seniors about callers who are playing on their family love to extort money from them. This is something that comes and goes but seems to be happening more and more. Make them aware that a person calling from the police station or from out of the country telling them to wire money to a grandchild in trouble just isn't real. Quite often somebody will call and say that they are a grandchild, they'll even have the right name, and they'll say that they're in trouble and they need some money. Too many seniors fall into that trap and send a lot of money they never see again.

And just remember, seniors are often targets of unscrupulous people. In order to protect them from scams, keep the conversation going about the dangers they could pay from a visit either over the phone or in person. You know, each time you talk to them don't make it sound like you're nagging but find another way to tell them about it, even if you bring up a story that you've read in the paper or something. Just to remind to keep themselves protected.

Well that's our quick tip for today and that wraps up our episode. Once again, want to thank Kathy, the Menu Dietitian for the great information. And want to thank all of you for joining us. Please come by SeniorCareCorner.com for more and stop by Senior Care Corner on Facebook as well. And we do want to remind you to stop by [Nutrition for the Health of It](#) and find more information that you yourselves or others in your family can use. We hope to see you next time here on the Senior Care Corner Show and until we do we hope you have a great day!