



# *Nutritional Needs of the Elderly*

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**HERITAGE HILL HOME**

[www.HeritageHillHome.org](http://www.HeritageHillHome.org)

# *Nutrition*

Nutrition is a very important aspect that you should inquire about when considering an assisted living facility for yourself or a loved one. There are many factors that affect us as we age.

For example, many elderly that reside in nursing homes, hospitals or assisted facilities deal with is a chronic vitamin deficiency of vitamin D. This is due to poor diet intake of vitamins and lack of exposure to the sun. A lack of vitamin D severely restricts the immune system from protecting the body against bacteria and viruses.

Our bodies can undergo a considerable amount of change as we age and these changes influence the requirements that we have for nutrients. Body composition will change which changes the requirements for calories; the skin will influence requirements for vitamin D and changes in the intestinal tract can influence requirements for other vitamins when they are not absorbed as well as they were when we were younger, such as vitamin B12.

There is some research which suggests that diet and nutrition can also be used to treat conditions such as cataracts of the eye or retinal degeneration that can lead to blindness. We do know that nutrition is very important in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, stroke, osteoporosis, a declining immune function and especially cancer.

One of the most dramatic physiological changes that happen as we age is the change in the composition of lean muscle mass. Muscle mass is achieved easiest in our 20s and 30s and can be maintained into our senior years if we continue to exercise at the level at which we obtained the lean muscle mass in our 30s. However, as we age it becomes harder to become lean and attain a high level of cardiovascular fitness unless we maintain it from an earlier age.

While it may be difficult to attain high levels of fitness, current research also shows us that even at an advanced age of 90 years appropriate forms of physical exercise can reverse years of changes and increase muscle strength. This will increase the energy requirements of the body, improve the appetite, increase bone mass and improved sleep habits.

As the elderly age, there is a decrease in the production of stomach acid which is important to absorb dietary vitamin B12, folic acid and iron. As a result of these changes are higher incidence of vitamin B12 deficiency will occur in older people and can be important in blood formation, neurological function than cardiovascular function. A lack of vitamin B12 can mimic dementia and Alzheimer's disease but is reversed with the treatment of vitamin B12.

At Heritage Hill Home, we deal with the effects of nutrition on a daily basis, and it's an area that we give careful consideration to when it comes to our residents. Our residents have all the comforts of home, including a spacious backyard where they can go outside and get plenty of natural Vitamin D from the sun.

Another condition which the elderly face is sarcopenia, or the wasting away of muscle. Research shows us that, despite difficulty absorbing proteins, muscle loss is a result of a loss of interest in exercise as a major contributing factor. Exercise programs are used to ease depression, generally lifts mood and help slow the growth of degenerative diseases. By maintaining an exercise program, the elderly also gain the added benefit of having a much improved appetite.

At Heritage Hill Home in Forney, Texas, we meet with each resident to understand their nutritional and health needs – from diet to exercise -- and how we can best help them maintain optimal health. Residents have the option to take a stroll – escorted or unescorted – in the neighborhood, or participate in a structured exercise program through one of the nearby fitness centers such as 24 Hour Fitness or Slo-Fit, with regiments tailored specifically for seniors.



Most of our residents maintain an active lifestyle and choose to maintain certain aspects of their lifestyle, such as cooking for themselves. If this is desired, we have a kitchen that is the same as you would find in any personal residence, so the residents can enjoy the independence of cooking in their own kitchen, as opposed to a commercial kitchen found in most assisted living facilities.

For more information on **Heritage Hill Home**, visit us at [HeritageHomeHill.org](http://HeritageHomeHill.org) or contact Elizabeth Kimotho at 214-868-5892 or [Suzanne@HeritageHillHome.org](mailto:Suzanne@HeritageHillHome.org)

*Give us a call!*

## *Resources*

(1) University of Texas Medical Branch: Muscle Mass in Elderly Boosted by Combining Resistance Exercise and Blood Flow REstriction

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100514151926.htm>

(2) Journal of Applied Physiology: Aging, Exercise and Muscle Protein Metabolism

<http://jap.physiology.org/content/106/6/2040.long>