

## What is missing in Your Pantry?

Nutritionists have identified several nutrients which are often not consumed in adequate amounts by adults over the age of 50 years. Good nutrition is important as we age and it is important that we include for optimal health.

- **Protein** is important for optimal immune function, wound healing and fluid balance. The major sources of protein among US adults are beef, poultry, milk, cheese, fish, eggs, pork and ham. All of these sources contain saturated fat. Moderation and portion control is important. Select lean cuts of meat, low fat or nonfat milk and eggs.
- **Calcium and Vitamin D** and physical activity help reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Both men and women can get osteoporosis which causes bones to become brittle and break. The major dietary sources of calcium are milk, cheese and calcium fortified orange juice. The major sources of Vitamin D are milk and breakfast cereals. Sunlight is another source; however, some older adults may need to limit their sun exposure due to skin cancer risk, medications or other health considerations.
- **Vitamin B-12** is important for nerve function including cognitive performance and healthy blood cells. Natural dietary sources include beef, milk and fish. However, the absorption of vitamin B-12 diminishes with age. Therefore it is recommended that adults over the age of 50 get their vitamin B-12 from fortified foods such as breakfast cereals or from a vitamin supplement.
- **Folate or Folic Acid** is needed for growth and repair of body tissues including healthy blood cells and it may help reduce the risk of heart disease and some form of cancer. The best sources of folic acid are fortified grain products such as bread, rice and pasta. Folate, the natural form can be found in orange juice, dark green vegetables and beans. However, the absorption rate of folate is only half of folic acid. Therefore, enriched grains are the better choice for folic acid.
- **Zinc** is required for wound healing. This is very important because open wounds can easily become infected. The major dietary sources of zinc in the US adult diet are beef, some breakfast cereals and whole grains.
- **Potassium** can help lower blood pressure; reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and decrease bone loss. The major dietary sources of potassium in the US diet are in fruits and vegetables.
- **Fiber** improves digestive health and promotes fullness without additional caloric intake. This is because it includes plant parts that the human body cannot digest or absorb. The major dietary sources of fiber are fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.
- **Water** is the "Forgotten Nutrient". It is recommended that adults consumer 8 8-ounce glases of liquids each day. Water helps regulate body temperature, transports oxygen, nutrients and medications to every cell of the body. With age, the ability to detect thirst diminishes. Therefore, older adults are more susceptible to dehydration which can cause bladder infections, kidney stones and confusion. The best beverages are water, lowfat milk, 100 percent fruit juices, decaffeinated coffees and teas.