



The Senior Sentinel

The Saratoga County Department of Aging & Youth Services will be closed Monday, January 16 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

From Our Dietitian

The Healthy Eating Habit

Happy New Year! It's that time of year when many of us set New Year's resolutions for ourselves especially with regards to our food choices. Although intentions are good, often times the motivation gradually fades and these resolutions are not met. After all, controlling desires require effort and thought, which is not much fun and can be counterproductive.

We often think of our food choices that we make everyday are a conscious decision however, in fact, many of the foods we buy, cook and eat are largely based upon habit. Habits are defined as behaviors or actions that are performed automatically without conscious thought. They consist of three components: cues, repetition and reward. We may be more likely to succeed in making healthier food choices if they become habit. Developing healthy eating habits does initially take some time and effort however, in time these habits will become effortless and will pay off in health improvements such as seeing a lower blood sugar and/or blood pressure level or an improvement in the number on the scale.

Below are some tips to help you develop healthy eating habits:

Start Simple: Pick one eating behavior you would like to change and think about how you can incorporate it into your daily or weekly routine. Set a cue to the action such as eating this food at the same time and place to remind you. Create a reward. Then repeat, repeat, repeat. For example: I would like to increase my intake of whole grain foods by one serving per day at my breakfast meal. Make it a point to purchase oatmeal or whole grain bread at the grocery store. If you have a habit of having toast or cereal for breakfast place the whole grain bread or oatmeal on the counter the night before so you will choose these options first. Reward yourself with praise by telling yourself for example that I am one step closer to meet the recommended whole grain goal of 3 servings per day which in turn can help me manage my weight.

-Make it easy and fun: This is important so that the healthy habit will be continued. The easier it is the more likely you will be to repeat it. If you do not have time to make oatmeal in the morning, place oats in a bowl with water in the refrigerator overnight. In the morning heat the oats in the microwave adding additional water as needed. Make it fun by thinking about and alternating different healthy toppings to have on your oatmeal i.e., one day berries, one day walnuts, one day both.

-Build on other habits: For example, if you like to have crackers with nut butter every night switch out saltine crackers for a whole grain cracker or crispbread. If you have a habit of having pizza every weekend, think of ways to make it healthier by choosing more veggies and lower fat meats and cheese.

-Make Swaps: Swap out healthier food choices for less healthy ones. If you like to snack at night, try popcorn or nuts instead cookies or cake.

-Recognize and break bad habits: Keep a journal of when and what you eat and identify specific cues such as I tend to grab more sweets when I am stressed, I eat more when I am alone etc. Then identify the eating behavior you want to change by eliminating the bad habit cue or context. For example, if cookies are your downfall, keep them out of the house. Most people would do best if they focus on making a behavior easy to repeat. Example: Buying already cleaned and chopped vegetables make it easy to add to meals when cooking. State to yourself then "I am going to keep these items on hand to accomplish this." This now becomes habit. Most of us also repeat actions when they are enjoyable. If you despise spinach then you won't make eating spinach a healthy habit. Pick what you like instead and stay with that, exploring more options as you go along.

New Year... Time to Get Organized

One way to get organized is to create a medical binder. A medical binder is a binder that contains a wide range of personal health information, medication history and current health conditions. Keeping a medical binder up to date is beneficial for setting up doctor appointments, screenings and tracking medications. Also, in case of an emergency and help with the caregivers responsibilities.

What should a medical binder include?

- Name, Birth date and blood type
- Information about allergies, including drug and food allergies
- List of all medications, dosages and how you take them. Also, include vitamins, dosage and how many times you take the supplements
- A list of physicians; record of appointments and for what for
- Dates and results of tests, procedures or health screenings
- Information about any major illnesses or surgeries you've had

Other useful information to include:

- The addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of your pharmacist and doctors
- Any medical history that has occurred in your family, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and mental conditions
- The name and phone number of an emergency contact or caregiver
- The name, policy number, address and telephone number of your health insurance company
- Whether or not you have an advance directive or living will and where it is located
- Any organ donor authorizations
- Important opinions and correspondence from specialists and providers
- Vision and dental records
- Any permission forms for release of information, operations and other medical procedures
- History of counseling you've received
- List of life style habits: smoking, drinking, sleep, exercise, and eating

Keep a health journal

A health journal maintains a more thorough health history, try journaling. For instance, keeping a diary to record emotions, when you have allergic reactions, or your eating, exercising or sleeping habits. Use the journal to write down questions for your doctor and keep track of how you were feeling or what was going on in your life at given times. Such journals can help you spot trends and take a broader look at your health. For example, a journal might help determine if you've become depressed or have developed a new physical health problem.

Suggestions supplies needed for the medical binder:

- Three-ring binder
- Clear, top-loading sheet protectors
- Three-ring folders
- Three-ring note book
- Special business card storage pages
- Dividers
- Labels
- Calendar

The supplies can vary based on how you organize your medical binder. There are a wide range of web pages that offer free downloads or templates of pages that can be easily filled in with the information needed for your binder. Store the binder in a convenient location and tell caretakers where it is. Make sure the binder is labeled "MEDICAL INFORMATION" so that it is easily accessible for your own reference, caregivers, and for emergency services.



Seasonal Depression in Seniors

Feeling a bit glum. One would feel that's an ordinary feeling after the glow of the holidays or the dark winter months. But when sadness persists for more than a week or two, it's a red flag on needing help with Seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression related to changes in the cycle of seasons. It can occur during anytime of the year, but it typically affects people during the winter. As the weather gradually gets colder and days get shorter, people affected by winter-induced SAD will generally begin to feel symptoms of depression. Signs of SAD include a loss of energy, changes in appetite and sleeping habits, irritability, and loss of interest in socializing and other activities. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, SAD occurs more often in women than men, and it is more common in those living farther north of the equator. SAD is more common in people with major depressive disorder or bipolar disorders. Additionally, people with SAD tend to have other mental disorders, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, an eating disorder, an anxiety disorder, or panic disorders.

Scientists do not fully understand what causes SAD. Research has indicated that people that suffer with SAD may have reduced activity of the brain chemical serotonin, which helps regulate mood. Research also suggests that sunlight controls the levels of molecules that help maintain normal serotonin levels, but in people with SAD, this regulation does not function properly, resulting in decreased serotonin levels in the winter. The senior population is more affected because seniors tend to stay indoors due to frigid, icy and snowy conditions during the winter months.

A vitamin D deficiency may also exacerbate SAD and vitamin D is believed to promote serotonin activity. Vitamin D is consumed by diet and when the body is exposed to sunlight. With less daylight in the winter months, people with SAD may have lower vitamin D levels, which further hinder serotonin activity.

Treatments are available that can help many people with SAD. They fall into four main categories that may be used alone or in combination:

- **Light Therapy**— This type of therapy is a mainstay for treatment of SAD. It aims to expose people with SAD to a bright light every day to make up for the diminished natural sunshine in the darker months. For this treatment, the person sits in front of a very bright light box every day for about 30 minutes. The boxes are about 20 times brighter than ordinary indoor light, filtering out all potentially damaging UV light, making this safe treatment for most.
- **Psychotherapy or "Talk Therapy"**— Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of talk therapy aimed at helping people learn how to cope with difficult situations. Psychotherapy focuses on replacing negative thoughts related to the winter season with more positive thoughts. This type of therapy also uses a process called behavioral activation, which helps individuals identify and schedule pleasant, engaging indoor or outdoor activities to combat the loss of interest they typically experience in the winter.
- **Medications**— Like other types of depression, SAD is associated with disturbances in serotonin activity, antidepressant medications are used to treat SAD. These medications treat the depression when symptoms occur and significantly enhance patients' moods. Commonly used are: fluoxetine, citalopram, sertraline, paroxetine, and escitalopram. All medications can have side effects, talk to your doctor about the possible right medication for you.
- **Vitamin D**— Because many people with SAD often have a vitamin D deficiency, nutritional supplements of vitamin D may help improve their symptoms. Seniors can prevent vitamin D deficiency by eating a variety of milk, yogurt, cereals and juice are fortified to contain extra doses of the vitamin. A person can also obtain the vitamin by eating beef liver, egg yolks, cheese or fatty fish like salmon. However, research whether vitamin D is effective in treatment have produced mixed findings, with some results indicating that it is as effective as light therapy.

If you feel you are suffering from SAD or maybe experiencing more serious than the winter blues. We encourage you to meet with your physician to determine the cause of your depression. Even non-pharmaceutical treatments like some of the ones discussed above are not necessarily a good fit for everyone. Seniors often have an existing medical condition and take many medications—factors that can complicate diagnosing and treating new health concerns. A physician will devise an appropriate course of treatment that will help your loved one improve their mood and energy levels so you can feel like yourself again.

*Information from: National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
AgingCare.com*

Nutritional Program Weather Closing

If the home delivered meals are canceled the information will be listed on your local T.V. Stations under **Saratoga County Senior Meals.**

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