

## A Healthy Diet Makes a *Mindful* Difference

This month takes a detour to explore nutrition as it relates to the aging body and brain. Aging bodies and brains are ever-changing and have specific needs. As you read...keep in mind that unless we, as care-givers, take good care of ourselves we will not be healthy and able to take care of those we care about (e.g. residents, patients, family members, etc.).

Balanced nutrition is essential for body and brain health. A well-balanced diet includes carbohydrates, proteins and fats. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture 2005) provides science-based advice on food choices for good health. The guidelines recommend a diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk; includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts; and is low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugar. For the good of yourself, your family and your residents educate yourself on the unique needs of the aging body and brain, and consider consulting with a registered dietitian.

Water is essential for the electrical transmissions within the nervous system that make us sensing, learning, thinking and acting organisms. Water makes up 50%–60% of our body weight (Kravitz 2008) and comprises as much as 80% of the brain. Ideally, we want to drink one-third of an ounce of water per pound of body weight each day (a quart per 100 pounds) and should double that amount when we are under stress. Coffee, tea, caffeinated soda and alcohol are diuretics and inhibit re-absorption of water in the kidneys, causing more water loss in the urine. A drop of just 2% in the body's water level can trigger fuzzy short-term memory, low energy, grogginess and trouble with processing information (Hannaford 2005). The take-home message...water is essential for improving brain health and enhancing lifelong learning.

Remember...the key to a healthy mind is lifelong learning. Boost brain health by eating right, exercising and doing *something different* now-and-then. This is great advice for your resident/patients too; ask them to do something/anything different than they would normally do it (e.g. brushing their teeth with the opposite hand, taking the North hall vs. the South hall to lunch, crossing their arms with the opposite arm over the top, etc). Understand that anytime you, or one of your residents, do something out-of-the-norm you are making connections between the right and the left hemispheres of the brain. Thereby, exercising the brain! ☺

Exercise is good physical AND mental exercise. Visit us at [www.fitxpress.com](http://www.fitxpress.com) where you will find resources for accomplishing these tasks with your residents and patients! There is something for everyone, and our chair exercise DVDs put the FUN into FUNction so your residents/patients will return to class time-and-time again! ☺

Be healthy...be happy!