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Factors Influencing Food Intake in Older Adults: Understanding the Challenges

Speaker biography

Dr. Carrie Ruxton PhD is a UK-based dietitian with a specialist interest in science-based communication. After qualifying from Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Carrie conducted an in-depth survey of children's diets, gaining her PhD in 1994. The results were published in the British Journal of Nutrition. She then worked as a hospital dietitian and university academic before becoming freelance in 2004.

Over the past 20 years, Dr. Ruxton has worked with a wide range of food/nutrition companies and trade organisations to communicate nutrition science for different audiences with the goal of helping more people to follow optimal diets. Carrie also has non-executive roles including serving on the boards of Food Standards Scotland (2015-23), the Nutrition Society (2020-24) and Quality Meat Scotland (2023-).

Dr. Ruxton maintains several areas of research interest including functional foods, fruit juice, eggs, children's nutrition and public health nutrition. She publishes regularly in academic journals and professional magazines and has contributed to TV, radio, print media and podcasts. Her awards include the BDA's Elizabeth Washington Award (2011), Emerald Literature Outstanding Paper Award (2011) and Complete Nutrition's Writer of the Year (2013-14).

Abstract

As the global population continues to age, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence food intake in older adults. Ageing brings about various changes in the body, including alterations in nutritional requirements and bioavailability, disease progression, dentition, and appetite. These changes require special consideration when it comes to the dietary needs of older adults as inadequate nutritional intake increases the risk of malnutrition – a common problem in frail adults. This presentation aims to explore the challenges faced by older adults in maintaining adequate food intake and the factors which contribute to these challenges.

Overview of Factors Influencing Food Intake:

- Physiological Barriers: Reduced appetite, early satiety, altered sensory perception, poor dentition, swallowing issues, gastrointestinal ageing and associated digestive issues.
- Psychological Barriers: Depression, anxiety, cognitive impairment and dementia.
- Social Barriers: Isolation, loneliness, poverty, lack of support, low education.
- Diseases/Treatments Barriers: Acute or chronic diseases, disability, need for therapeutic diets, immobility.

These factors can increase the risk of malnutrition leading to severe consequences for older adults' health and well-being. The result can be increased frailty, decreased immune function, and higher healthcare utilisation. To address this, nutritional interventions are crucial, such as the provision of oral nutritional supplements (ONS).

However, there are challenges associated with ONS compliance which include:

1. Buy-in from patients: Ensuring that the patient understands the benefits of ONS and actively participates in the decision-making process.
2. Support from staff: Healthcare professionals play a vital role in providing guidance, encouragement, and monitoring to improve compliance with supplements.
3. Preferences: Allowing the patient to have a say in choosing the flavor of the supplement can enhance their acceptance and compliance.
4. Low volume: Offering supplements with a smaller volume can make them easier to consume, especially for older adults with swallowing difficulties.
5. High energy-protein dense ONS: Providing concentrated supplements that are rich in energy and protein can help meet the nutritional needs of older adults.
6. Ease of opening: Ensuring that the packaging of the supplements is easy to open, particularly for individuals with limited dexterity.

7. Temperature: Serving the supplements at a preferred temperature can enhance their palatability and acceptance.
8. Setting of delivery: Creating a comfortable and pleasant environment for supplement consumption can positively impact compliance.
9. Monitoring intake: Regular monitoring of supplement intake can help identify any issues or barriers and allow for timely interventions.
10. Texture/Consistency: Offering supplements with different textures or consistencies can cater to individual preferences and swallowing abilities.

In conclusion, understanding the factors that influence food intake in older adults is essential for addressing the challenges they face in maintaining proper nutrition. Nutritional interventions, such as ONS, can help address malnutrition, but healthcare professionals need to ensure high compliance in order to achieve cost effectiveness.

References

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Watch the 19:05 minutes conference talk with Dr. Carrie Ruxton **FACTORS INFLUENCING FOOD INTAKE IN OLDER ADULTS: KEY DETERMINANTS FOR IMPROVING NUTRITIONAL COMPLIANCE**



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