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National Nutrition Month — Healthy Food Shopping for Senior Adults

Serving size. Calories. Total fat. Percent daily value. Understanding food nutrition labels can be challenging, and many consumers just figure *why bother?* But for older adults, simply ignoring nutritional information can significantly compromise their health. To help make better food choices and create a healthy eating style, seniors and their family caregivers can turn to [National Nutrition Month](#)[®]. Organized by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the March event includes recipes, videos, articles and educational tools on ways for people of all ages to adopt good nutrition.

This year's theme is "Put Your Best Fork Forward," a reminder that every bite counts toward a balanced diet. Even small changes in more nutritious meal and snack options add up to long-term health benefits including stronger bones, greater muscle flexibility and increased longevity.

"As we age, we require fewer calories but more of certain nutrients including calcium, potassium and vitamins D and B12," said Susan Stover, Community Liaison for Right at Home Grand Ledge. "Many seniors encounter difficulties when shopping for and cooking nutrient-rich foods, but dietary obstacles are usually quite manageable with a little coaching and assistance. Staying active and independent as an older adult often starts in the grocery store aisle."

Stover recommends the following tips for helping the elderly shop for well-balanced foods:

- **Understand the basics of nutrition.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#), which has nutritional information about the food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins and dairy) and healthy eating pointers for older adults. Encourage seniors to pay attention to the key components of food labels: calories, sodium, sugars and fats. Help ensure that elders fill half a mealtime plate with fruits and vegetables. At least half of grains served at a senior's meal should be whole grains, and meats should be naturally lean or low in solid fats.

The National Institute on Aging website overviews the importance of [reading food labels](#) and including essential nutrients in food selections. Elders with diabetes, high blood pressure and other chronic health conditions are advised to consult with their doctor or a registered dietician on specific foods to include or avoid for healthy eating.

- **Plan first, buy second.** Smart food choices involve planning which ingredients you'll need for recipes and knowing their nutritional value, price and availability. Suggest seniors make a detailed list of foods and beverages to buy for several days at a time. For older adults who typically cook for one or two, consider which foods can be made in larger quantities but safely stored for additional meals. Snacks and desserts are tempting to purchase, especially when they are on sale, but these items should be occasional buys. The outer ring of the grocery store typically stocks more nutritional food selections such as fresh produce, unsalted nuts and low-fat dairy products. Wholesale stores are well-suited for families, but for older couples and individuals, the discounted large-quantity items may spoil before use.
- **Think accessibility.** For getting around the grocery store smoothly, elders may want to rely on a motorized cart or ask an employee for assistance with getting items off shelves. If fatigue sets in while shopping, seniors can rest in a chair at the store's pharmacy, customer service or entryway. Remind older adults to shop when they are well-rested and the shopping center is not crowded with other customers. To help eliminate impulse purchases, encourage seniors to hold off grocery shopping when they are tired, hungry or feel rushed.
- **Consider using grocery apps.** To make food shopping easier, a number of cellphone and mobile device [grocery apps](#) are available to create shopping lists, find coupons and scan barcodes. Several apps integrate menu planning, recipes and meal suggestions. Do a little research to make sure the app is user-friendly to match the senior's tech proficiency.
- **Arrange for assistance.** If grocery shopping with an aging loved one is not possible, perhaps a friend, neighbor or volunteer from a senior center or place of worship can help. Certain chain grocers and supermarkets offer online ordering and home delivery services. Some stores offer free delivery of groceries for seniors, and others charge a nominal fee. Many older adults benefit from professional at-home senior care services like Right at Home, which can provide a helping hand with meal planning, grocery shopping and cooking.

“National Nutrition Month raises awareness for ways to eat well as people age, particularly when dental problems make chewing a painful chore or diseases such as Parkinson’s or dementia affect swallowing,” Stover added. “One’s sense of taste and thirst can also lessen with age and lead to a disinterest in food or cause dehydration. These special health needs highlight the importance of encouraging seniors to stay engaged with their daily food choices, putting their best fork forward for every snack and meal.”

For additional information about National Nutrition Month and healthy eating for older adults, visit www.eatright.org or call the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics at 1-800-877-1600.

About Right at Home

Founded in 1995, Right at Home offers in-home companionship and personal care and assistance to seniors and disabled adults who want to continue to live independently. Local Right at Home offices are independently owned and operated and directly employ and supervise all caregiving staff, each of whom is thoroughly screened, trained, and bonded/insured prior to entering a client's home. Right at Home's global office is based in Omaha, Nebraska, with franchise offices located in 45 states nationwide and throughout the world. For more information on Right at Home, visit About Right at Home at <http://www.rightathome.net/about-us> or read the Right at Home caregiving blog at <http://www.rightathome.net/blog>. To sign up for Right at Home's free adult caregiving e-newsletter, Caring Right at Home, visit <http://caringnews.com>.

About Right at Home of Grand Ledge

The Grand Ledge office of Right at Home is a locally owned and operated franchise office of Right at Home, Inc., serving the communities throughout Eaton, Ionia and Ingham counties. For more information, contact Right at Home of Grand Ledge at <http://www.rahmidmi.com>, 517-622-1472 or by email at susan@rahmidmi.com.