

Eating Well – Tips For Busy Carers

Eating a healthy balanced diet is important for everyone. For a busy carer who needs to keep up their strength and mental alertness it is essential. But it is not always easy. If you're always helping someone else with their food at mealtimes, then it can be easy to forget to eat yourself, or you might just end up picking at stuff. You can also fall into the habit of eating the same thing over and over again.

So how to make sure you eat a varied diet and stick to a regular meal pattern? Here are some tips –

Eating

- Eat at regular intervals, don't postpone meals. Try to take the time to sit down to eat rather than eating on the go. It means you are more likely to eat a proper meal. Aim for three meals per day, including a proper breakfast.
- Stock up on healthy snacks (e.g. fresh fruit, nuts and healthy crackers) and try not to purchase unhealthy ones. If you have five minutes, wash and chop some vegetables ahead of time, and then they'll be ready for you for a snack or when it's time to cook.
- When you just don't have the time to cook, there is nothing wrong with an occasional frozen or ready-meal. Some of these can be high in fat and salt so it is a good idea to read the labels to find the healthiest options. The Heart Foundation website (heartfoundation.org.nz) has a useful section on 'how to read food labels'. Their 'tick' is also a good guide to healthier choices.
- Another option for purchased meals is Ezee Meals. These are home style frozen meals that are distributed through churches and social agencies around the country.

Planning

- Some carers say that deciding what to cook can be a problem. If possible, it is helpful to plan a week's menus before doing the shopping, then you have the ingredients to hand and don't have to spend time thinking about what to cook every day.
- It is also useful to keep a well-stocked pantry so if you haven't managed to get to the shops you still have options. Aim to keep a stock of long-life ingredients such as different types of dried pasta, rice, noodles. Tins of food such as fruit (in juice), vegetables (especially tomatoes which make a very easy base for sauces) and fish are also good to keep on hand. Some fresh vegetables such as potatoes and onions can keep for quite a long time as well.

Cooking

- Keep it simple. Healthy food does not need to be complicated. You can prepare easy, one pot meals like soups, stews, or curries. If you have a slow cooker these can be put on in the morning when you have some spare time.
- You don't have to make everything (or anything) from scratch. There are a lot of ways to reduce the time and



effort that goes into cooking a meal by using pre-prepared components such as frozen vegetables and meat already cut into strips for stir-frying.

- Using a microwave can also speed up cooking time – even baked foods can be often be microwaved first to reduce the total cooking time.
- When you do have time, cook up a storm. Make extra and freeze the remainder in meal size portions. These can then be heated up and eaten when needed.

Shopping

- If you have access to the internet, consider online supermarket ordering and home delivery. Countdown supermarkets currently offer this service. While you will have to pay for delivery, it can be more convenient, especially if you do not have a car. Delivery charges drop as the value of the order increases (the bigger the order the less they charge).

NEED INSPIRATION?

Cooking classes

'Senior Chef', is a programme through which older people learn cooking skills, share meals, and get to know one another. It is offered in a number of areas around the country. Local Age Concern divisions may also offer other cooking classes, including ones for men only. Ask your field officer about what is happening in your region.

Free recipes

'Feeding our Families' is a website that provides quick, low-cost food ideas, recipes, tips and information about healthy eating. Run by the Health Promotion Agency's Nutrition and Physical Activity Programme, it is aimed at families with children; however, the information is applicable whatever your age. feedingourfamilies.org.nz

The Senior Chef website also has recipes and food ideas. seniorchef.co.nz

If you are not online, check out your local supermarket. Free tear-off recipes are usually available in store.

MORE HELP

If you are finding food preparation is too much for you, help is available. You may be able to get assistance with shopping and cooking, or even have cooked meals delivered. Talk to your field officer about any problems you are having and what services you may be able to access.