

Hey Adults: Don't Eat Like a Kid

Everyone in their mid-40s is well aware that they are no longer 14.

As you get older, your body changes. Gone are the days that you could eat anything you wanted and not gain an ounce. So, it makes sense that your diet should change with you.

“This doesn’t mean just eating less as you get older, so you don’t gain weight, get fat,” says Sheah Rarback, nutrition expert and registered dietitian with the University of Miami Health System. “While it’s true that someone who is middle-aged needs fewer calories than a teenager, the need for a nutrient-rich diet remains consistent.”

So, instead of worrying about dieting throughout your life, focus on what you eat so you can stay healthy and strong no matter your age.

Childhood

Good eating habits start early.

Parents are instrumental in laying the groundwork for their child to grow into a responsible vegetable-eating adult. “If you grew up eating white rice and salty foods, it may be difficult to give that up,” says Sheah. “Childhood is the perfect time to make nutritious foods part of the family table and to get your children involved in the kitchen.”

The teenage years

AKA the “raiding the fridge” years

Growing uses up a ton of calories, so your child’s need for calories increases as well, which is why teenagers, particularly the boys, have such a reputation for being hungry all the time.

“If your teenager raids the kitchen and finds a bunch of cookies and chips, that’s what they’ll eat,” says Sheah. “Also, teenagers need more iron than younger kids because girls are starting their menstrual cycles, and boys are building more muscle.”

Sheah, who also does video counseling on nutrition with kids in school, suggests that parents make sure that they keep their refrigerators stocked full of healthy foods like fruits and low sodium lunch meat.



20 - 40 somethings

Hello, adulthood. Goodbye, 11 p.m. pizza.

If you haven’t learned how to cook yet, now is the time. Cooking at home makes a huge impact on your health. It is during this stage in your life that you should really start taking responsibility for your own healthy food consumption. “This is the time

you should be making dietary changes to protect yourself against chronic illnesses like heart disease or diabetes; not in your 60s when it might be too late,” she says. Women who may be preparing for pregnancy need to ensure that they get plenty of folic acid in their diet.

Menopause

THAT time happens to us all, ladies.

In their mid-50s, women tend to gain weight due to a lack of estrogen. According to Sheah, women at this age need 200 fewer calories to maintain their weight. “At this point in your life, you really don’t want to eat foods that are high in sugar and that have a lot of empty calories,” she says. But, it’s very important that you don’t cut back on nutrition because you are concerned with cutting back on calories.

She also suggests that you begin strength training to build muscle because muscles use more calories. People at this age can lose three percent muscle strength every year. “Keeping those muscles strong helps you maintain weight,” she adds.

The golden years

Feeling your age - and loving it.

Seniors often have other health issues that can be either helped or exacerbated by what they eat. Many older people are taking medications to lower stomach acid. But this also lowers the amount of calcium and magnesium in their bodies. In addition to a slowing metabolism, Sheah also explains that when you get older, your skin is less able to absorb vitamin D.

“Eating a diet rich in fiber will help digestion,” she says. “The muscle tone that you lose as you age also affects the muscles in your GI tract, and this can lead to constipation.”

No matter your age, eating healthy is vital to feeling healthy. And remember - you

are only as old as you feel.

Natasha Bright is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News. Her writing has also been featured on the Huffington Post and Scary Mommy websites.

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