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ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS FOR EVERY STAGE OF AN ADULT WOMAN'S LIFE

We can't ignore the fact that our bodies completely transform throughout our lives. After all, mirrors are unavoidable, right? From the texture of our skin and the firmness of our muscles to the capacity of our organs, everything changes. And our body's demand for nutrients as well. The foundations of healthy eating remain the same and, if you read our advice below, you will find that you already know some of these principles. But can you identify which nutrients become more important when a woman reaches her most fertile years? Or when you reach certain turning points? That's what we're going to talk about here.

From 20 to 39 years old — pregnancy, menstruation and consolidated bone structure

This is the phase in which menstrual flow is usually intense, a lot of iron is lost and, at the same time, it is also when the demand for calcium increases due to the consolidation of the female bone structure. It is also the time when women who intend to have children begin to plan, in other words: it is time for a diet rich in specific nutrients for the upcoming baby.

Folate and folic acid: these help protect against neural tube defects in the developing fetus and play an important role in producing red blood cells in the bone marrow.

• *Where to find it: Beef liver, lentils, asparagus, spinach, broccoli, avocado and folate-enriched grain products such as bread, pasta, rice and cereals.*

Iron: essential for delivering oxygen throughout the body, it also affects growth, neurological development, cell functioning and hormone synthesis. Women in their 20s and 30s need to be careful and compensate for the loss of this nutrient during menstruation.

• *Where to find it: heme iron, which comes from animal red blood cells and can be found in meat, seafood and poultry; non-heme iron which is found in peas, lentils, dried fruits, chestnuts, broccoli and beets.*

Calcium: necessary for the health of bones, heart, muscles and nervous and circulatory systems. Having good calcium reserves is important during this stage of life because they consolidate women's bone structure, ensuring stability and mobility in old age. The time to develop good habits starts now, and it's never too late!

• *Where to find it: milk, cheese, yogurt, dark leafy greens, seeds and nuts.*

From 40 to 59 years old — up-to-date immunity, firm skin and a protected heart

In this phase, women are more vulnerable to heart and circulatory system diseases while at the same time being more prone to reduced immunity. The muscles, skin, bones, and blood vessels tend to lose firmness. For these reasons, it's time to look carefully at opportunistic diseases and the aging of the body and reinforce some essential nutrients.

Vitamin D: works together with calcium to support bone health and also helps in maintaining the immune system. Insufficient vitamin D leads to more fragile bones in old age. After the age of 40, in general, women's skin decreases its ability to synthesize this nutrient, so pay attention to your vitamin D reserves.

• *Where to find it: salmon, egg yolk and fortified milk. But a little sunbathing is the best medicine to help the body produce its own vitamin D.*

Omega-3 fatty acids: improve cognition and heart health, in addition to regulating the body's cholesterol and triglyceride levels. This is important at this stage of life when a woman's risk of developing cardiovascular disease begins to increase.

• *Where to find it: salmon, walnuts, chia seeds and flaxseed are sources of omega-3.*

Flavonoids: antioxidants that strengthen immunity and keep the cardiovascular and nervous systems humming.

• *Where to find them: cocoa or chocolate with at least 80% cocoa (you liked this tip, right?), and fruits and vegetables in shades of red and yellow.*

Vitamin C: famous for preserving the body's immunity, it also contributes to the production of hormones and chemical messengers in the body. It is a powerful antioxidant and contributes to collagen synthesis, which means: strong bones and firm skin and muscles. Who doesn't want that, right?!

• *Where to find it: citrus fruits, peppers, kale, broccoli and strawberries.*

From age 60 onwards — strong muscles, stability, energy and hydration

As the female body ages, special attention should be paid to digestion: essential nutrients must be well absorbed and the intestinal tract must function regularly. In addition, strengthening your muscles with a diet rich in proteins helps with stability, in avoiding even greater fragility and, ultimately, even falls and fractures. (It's scary, but we have to face it, and it could happen to anyone.) Hydration is also key as water is an essential element for the general functioning of the body.

Proteins: essential for building and maintaining muscles, especially at a time in life when women tend to experience increasing muscle loss. These also help keep your stomach satiated and protected. It is common for some women at this stage to have difficulty with digestion and so they

begin to avoid protein consumption. The ideal is to maintain a varied diet, consuming this nutrient from different sources.

- *Where to find it: lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans, seeds and nuts.*

Magnesium: important for many bodily processes including the regulation of muscle and nerve function, blood sugar levels and blood pressure (real enemies of the 60+). This nutrient also helps produce proteins, bone cells and DNA. Magnesium absorption decreases as we age and medications such as diuretics make this condition even worse.

- *Where to find it: legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, leafy greens, milk and yogurt.*

Water: technically not a nutrient, but it is a great ally and is involved in all the biochemical reactions in our body. Many women at this age do not even feel it when they become dehydrated, and so attention to regular water consumption becomes extremely important. To give you an idea, hydration supports everything from saliva, which helps us chew and digest food, to the production of digestive enzymes, to the elimination of waste through urine and feces. Drinking water also energizes your muscles and hydrates your skin, which becomes drier as you age. In fact, you could probably use another glass right now!

- *Try to consume 8 to 10 cups of water per day to keep the body hydrated.*

Dietary fiber: Consuming 30 to 50g of fiber per day helps keep the GI tract healthy and reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and some types of cancer. Also, this nutrient is associated with important blood glucose control, helping to curb diabetes, weight gain, and cardiovascular diseases, among others.

- *Where to find it: fruits, vegetables, oats, brown rice and beans.*

Vitamin B12: keeps the body's blood and nerve cells healthy and also helps stabilize DNA. Vitamin B12 also helps prevent a common disease after 60: megaloblastic anemia, which makes people feel lethargic and weak. Vitamin B12 absorption may decrease with age due to H. pylori, gastric atrophy and certain medications, so it is important to stay attentive at your levels.

- *Where to find it: dairy, red meat, eggs, fortified cereals and nutritional yeast.*

Understanding that our body is always changing and adapting our intake of essential nutrients to each stage of life will make your body function much better and help improve your quality of life. Sometimes this takes a little time, but what's good about this life doesn't, right?

Until next time, here's wishing a full and nutritious life for you!

Isabel.

- *If you have questions, need nutritional advice or want to discuss a specific condition, please contact me, I will be happy to help.*