

A significant percentage of the elderly population in Western countries suffers from excess malnutrition (overweight and obesity), which exposes the person to greater health risks including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, and physical disability.

According to data from studies of the Italian population called "Passi" (for seniors "Passi d'Argento"), among the population **over 65**, overweight people are **43.5 percent** and obese people are **14 percent**. Excess weight is more frequent in men and increases with age, reaching the maximum value in the 65-74 age group (**60.9 percent**) and then decreasing until reaching the lowest value in the over 85s (**49.4 percent**). Overweight or obese people are more likely to suffer from **hypertension** and **diabetes** than the general population.

Aging is a completely natural process. In fact, during life we experience a series of physical and psychological changes. After the age of 50, both height and weight tend to progressively decrease. As we age, there is an increase in fat mass (especially in the abdominal area), a reduction in muscle mass, a demineralization of the bones and a reduction in body water. The main manifestations of this problem are the following:reduction

- in strength,
- power and muscular resistance,
- balance and motor ability.

If the lack of lean mass is associated with an excess of fat mass. It affects one in five people over the age of 50, is associated with an increased risk of disability, morbidity and mortality and is in fact due to the simultaneous coexistence of obesity

and low muscle mass and strength. In the elderly, it is then necessary to prevent nutritional deficiencies based on needs and the consequent malnutrition.

In general, the diet of the elderly does not differ qualitatively from that of adults, although both energy needs and appetite decrease with the passing of the years, due to sensory alterations, the appearance of chewing problems and changes that involve the stomach and intestines.

The only way to ensure that your body receives an adequate nutritional intake is to resort to a diet **as varied as possible**. Even in this phase of life, as in adulthood, the essential condition for enjoying good health is to maintain an optimal body weight. This is not always an easy requirement to achieve and in the elderly it must also take into account the risks associated with malnutrition by defect. It is important to ensure a complete intake of all nutrients with a varied and balanced diet and above all not to exclude any food. **For an elderly man, the daily energy requirement is around 2,000 kilocalories, while for a woman it is between 1,700 and 1,800 kilocalories. However, it is not only the quantity of food that has an impact, but also its quality.**

The Mediterranean diet for the elderly includes additions to the indications for adults. In particular, it is necessary to pay close attention to water consumption, which must remain around 1.5 liters per day. Its intake is essential in all phases of life, but even more so after the age of 65. There are three reasons: a general tendency to dehydration (due to the reduced perception of the sense of thirst), an increase in urinary fluid losses and the overall reduction in nutrition. The consumption of broth, vegetable puree, tea and herbal teas without sugar can help to integrate an adequate amount of water daily.

## The decalogue of longevity

- To maintain a good state of health even during old age, we start at the table.
  - Vary foods, but do not give up fruit and vegetables to prevent mineral and vitamin deficiencies.
  - Drink water even when you do not feel thirsty, to avoid dehydration.
  - Learn to distinguish simple carbohydrates from complex carbohydrates
  - To keep blood sugar levels (blood sugar concentration) constant, prefer complex carbohydrates, such as cereals, bread, pasta, rather than simple carbohydrates such as sugar, sweets and sugary drinks.
  - Add a side dish of vegetables to each main meal;
  - In...saturated is better than saturated - Limit foods high in saturated fats, preferring those, such as fish, rich in unsaturated fatty acids. Season with olive oil in the right quantities;
  - Proteins? Yes, just enough - To prevent the loss of muscle mass, you need to eat foods containing proteins of both animal origin (milk and dairy products, meat, fish, eggs) and vegetable origin (legumes);
  - Maintain an active lifestyle even just with a walk;
- Pay attention to the amount of salt you add to dishes and always prefer iodized salt;

#### AVERAGE PORTIONS:

- milk/yogurt: 125 grams
- fresh cheese: 100 grams
- aged cheese: 50 grams
- meat: 100 grams
  
- fish: 150 grams
- eggs: 50 grams (1 egg)
- fresh legumes: 100 grams (raw)
- dried legumes: 3 grams (raw)
- bread: 50 grams
- pasta/rice: 80 grams (raw)
- fresh egg pasta: 120 grams (raw)
- potatoes: 200 grams (raw)
- salads: 50 grams
- vegetables: 250 grams (raw)
- fruit: 150 grams

#### MINERALS AND VITAMINS,

**VITAMINS A AND C, IRON AND CALCIUM** are the micronutrients most often deficient due to dietary errors, the adoption of a monotonous diet and the tendency to prefer long cooking times and high temperatures. **CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D** deficiency increase the risk of an individual developing osteoporosis. And, consequently, greater bone fragility, which is the basis of the higher incidence of fractures in this segment of the population.

To increase calcium intake, you could focus on dairy products and cheeses, but with the risk of ingesting too many calories through the fats they contain. It is better then to choose water with a good calcium content, dried fruit, such as walnuts and almonds, and sesame seeds. Finally, let's not forget oranges: a glass of fresh, freshly squeezed orange juice can provide a calcium intake of about 70 milligrams.

Vitamin D is a hormone synthesized in the skin thanks to exposure to sunlight that regulates bone metabolism; it induces greater intestinal and renal absorption of calcium, maintaining high mineralization and bone health. This explains why its role is fundamental in preventing osteoporosis (bone fragility). One of the main causes is lack of exposure to sunlight, which makes the choices made at the table even more important. Vitamin D is a micronutrient found in modest quantities in foods: fatty fish (salmon and herring), eggs, green leafy vegetables, milk and dairy products. A balanced diet, which includes the consumption of these foods, is therefore sufficient to meet the minimum requirement. However, if the elderly spend very little time outdoors they may find themselves in a condition of hypovitaminosis.

Thanks to the greater supply of essential amino acids, animal proteins have a greater protective action against the loss of muscle mass and strength than plant proteins. This means that meat should be consumed 2-3 times a week, white meat is healthier than red meat and the consumption of cured meats and sausages should be limited to exceptional cases. At the same time, it is important that the diet of the elderly guarantees adequate intakes of fish, for omega-3, milk and dairy products,

especially for calcium and vitamin D, and legumes which, if combined with cereals, represent an excellent single dish for both lunch and dinner.