

# Highlighting the 'yes' list of foods to eat

All too often we hear dietary advice about what we shouldn't eat, but I'd like to cross over to the sunny side of the street and highlight foods that are on the "Yes" list.

There's a new phrase in nutrition education: Nutrient-Rich Foods, which is a consumer-friendly term used to identify those foods that pack a lot of bang for every bite.

Nutrient-Rich relates to those foods that contain substantial amounts of nutrients and relatively few calories (think whole-, fiber-rich grain foods, colorful fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy and lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts) as opposed to those foods that supply calories but relatively small amounts of nutrients, otherwise known as calorically dense foods (think chips, pop, candy, etc.)

So rather than belabor the kinds of foods that don't really promote optimal health, let's shift our focus to eating "richly" in the best sense of the word.

Emphasizing Nutrient-Rich Foods is especially important for older adults, because we just don't burn the number of calories we used to. For many of us, as our lives slow down, so does our metabolism (our fuel-burning rate), and we find our-

selves having to reduce the amount of food we eat or risk supersizing ourselves.

That means that we need to be spending our calorie budget wisely and consider how we can best meet our nutritional needs. Unlike the young basketball player who can seemingly eat any- and everything, older adults need to make healthy choices and make the most of every bite.

Sometimes I hear folks who are disappointed that we don't serve dessert items more often at the Senior Center; they'd like more cake with frosting.

The truth is, were so busy fixing healthy menus and being sure that we're meeting daily nutritional requirements for older adults, that we seldom can afford to serve an item that doesn't have a lot of good stuff. That's why you'll see more items like strawberry-rhubarb crisp or oatmeal muffins, because we're trying to serve Nutrient-Rich



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Benepe



Foods throughout our menus.

Still, older adults aren't the only ones who need to be eating Nutrient-Rich Foods. We all would do well to follow that rule, because many of us are overfed but undernourished.

I'm not saying that there aren't occasions for treats, snacks and low-nutrient-dense foods (I was at a Super Bowl party too), but in general, we all need to consider the nutritional quality of our food choices and ask ourselves what kind of fuel do we want to put in our engines (bodies) so that we can enjoy good health for years to come.

So where are these Nutrient-Rich Foods, you ask? Well, typically you can find them if you shop the perimeter of the grocery store and look for whole foods or those that are less-processed.

You can also check out some informa-

tive Web sites like [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) or [www.nutrientrichfoods.com](http://www.nutrientrichfoods.com).

Or ... you can join us for a meal at the Senior Center, where we enjoy a variety of Nutrient-Rich Foods every day.

And speaking of "rich" foods, I want to urge anyone age 60 or better to participate in the Senior Nutrition Program regardless of whether you're feeling rich or not. During these challenging economic times, we want to be sure that older adults are getting a good meal every day.

We are eager to serve a meal for any amount a person can afford. For more information, please contact us at 672-2240.

Your participation helps support our program and our community.

*Carolyn Benepe is the community nutrition director involved in the Senior Center Nutrition Program, which serves more than 110,000 meals per year to Sheridan County residents.*

*Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.*