

# Better food choices can lead to wellness

ERINN HUTKIN  
SPECIAL TO U-T SAN DIEGO

No matter at what age one might get started, it's never too late to change one's diet and boost one's health.

"As we age, the improved quality of life we get from making necessary healthy changes, in my opinion, is worth any slight sacrifices to get there," said 50-year-old Jen Arricale, a San Diego-based lifestyle fitness chef and blogger. "Once you get through the hump of the hard change, it will become a normal part of your life, and the benefits of all the good things you feel will outweigh the bad, and will help you forget all the things you had to give up to get there."

While a balanced diet is important throughout life, she said, it becomes even more important once a person reaches age 50.

"Proper nutrition is super important for a growing child, and it's equally as important for an aging adult," Arricale said. "The good news is that it is never too late to see the benefits of such a healthy eating lifestyle. ... Food can be our medicine if we let it be."

After all, she said, there are countless reports and examples of how healthy eating and an active lifestyle can make people feel better, and "literally reverse disease and cellular damage" that's occurring in the body.

Dr. Mike Fenster, a cardiologist, professional

chef, author of the book "The Fallacy of the Calorie" and an expert on diet changes for those who are 50-plus, feels that a good diet is especially important for mature adults. That's because many chronic issues, that seem to manifest in middle-aged and older adults, are often the result of a combination of genetics and foods consumed over decades.

When it comes to the types of foods that make up a healthy diet, he suggested sticking with "fresh and wholesome:" that is plenty of greens, vegetables and fruits, preferably not in deep-fried form. Proteins should come from fish or meat as close to naturally sourced as possible.

Arricale added that people should avoid processed foods, opt for unprocessed complex carbs, and eat healthy fats in moderation.

Fenster said to keep in mind that eating healthfully should bring pleasure, and tasty is the new healthy.

"No one eats simply for nutritional purposes, nor should they," he said. "Healthful eating is about choosing the proper quality ingredients. From there, it is a simple matter to transform it into something that not only provides sustenance, but is sumptuous to savor."

When it comes to changing one's diet to make it healthier, Arricale said that a "complete and immediate overhaul"

is much more challenging than making small, gradual changes.

"The easiest and most sustainable way to make healthy changes in our diet is to do it slowly and progressively so we don't get frustrated or feel too restricted or bored," she said.

People can start by speaking with their doctor about their particular needs and focus on foods that are best for them, as well as the quantities and how often they should consume them. It's equally important to discuss foods that should be avoided to stop deterioration, reduce inflammation and slow the aging process.

From there, she said, people can work with a nutritionist, dietitian or other expert to learn about the appropriate foods that align with what their health profile requires.

She added that there's plenty of free information on the Internet on recipes that use healthy ingredients and are easy to make. She said to keep in mind that healthy food must be prepared in a way that doesn't undo "all the good," such as when steaming broccoli and then covering it in cheese.

When it comes to phasing out bad foods from the diet and adding healthier choices, she said, those over 50 can create a "Red List/Green List Ladder." The "Red List" should have foods they need to eat less of or eliminate altogether, while the "Green List" are foods they can continue to eat or eat more often.

For example, in the



first week, choose an item from the Red List to eliminate for the week. At the same time, choose one or two items from your Green List to add in that week. After a week or two, it will become a normal habit. The following week, add another Green item or two and remove one or two more Red items.

“Keep this laddering activity up, adding more Green and less Red, and before you know it, you are the official owner of one healthy, easy, sustainable diet,” she said.

For those who struggle with motivation to make diet changes, Arricale said there’s the option of health coaches, accountability coaches, friends and free resources at senior centers.

“My No. 1 piece of advice for motivation, is: ‘You are worth it,’” she said. “You deserve to feel your best, live a happy, full life every minute of every day on this earth. ... Every little positive change does indeed make a difference.”