

# CELEBRATING OLDER AMERICANS MONTH: NUTRITION “POWERED BY CONNECTION”



## WHAT IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH?

Celebrated every May, Older Americans Month was first established as “Senior Citizens Month” in April of 1963, when only 17 million living Americans had reached their 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of these older Americans lived in poverty and with few programs in place to meet their needs, interest in older Americans and their concerns grew. The theme this year is “Powered by Connection,” which recognizes the impact that meaningful relationships and social connections have on our health and well-being.

## ISOLATION AND ITS IMPACT ON NUTRITION

There are many indicators or warning signs used to help dietitians identify poor nutritional health in numerous settings. These include rapid changes in weight, loss of appetite, poor dentition, use of multiple medications, income, lack of social support, or living alone. According to Meals on Wheels America, “One in three seniors lives alone and one in four feels lonely.” As we age, social networks tend to dwindle due to changes in mobility, retirement, declining health, and loss. The need for social support only intensifies as older adults become more reliant on others to meet their increasing needs, yet they likely have fewer people to rely on. Studies show that eating alone and having insufficient help with important tasks such as grocery shopping and meal preparation are not only associated with an increased risk in mortality, but poor nutritional outcomes and behaviors as well. Socially isolated older individuals have been found to be more physically inactive, lack variety in their diet, consume fewer fruits and vegetables, and opt for quick, nutritionally incomplete meals or snacks to curb hunger.

## THE POWER OF A MEAL ENJOYED WITH OTHERS

From dining with friends and family, celebrating holidays with special meals, and cooking for loved ones, food has been used to connect us with one another for centuries. In fact, studies have shown that people who dine with others regularly eat healthier and report a better quality of life. Eating with others provides a sense of structure and belonging while offering greater opportunities for improved nutrition. Coming together over a meal can also provide meaningful ways to connect with others over shared beliefs and cultural interests. Benefits may include...

- ✓ Improved nutrition, reduced risk of chronic conditions and diseases, enhanced mobility
- ✓ Opportunities to connect with others, create stronger relationships, reduced loneliness
- ✓ Increased self-care, sense of well-being, reduced anxiety and/or depression

## RESOURCES SPOTLIGHT

Are you or someone you know experiencing isolation or feelings of loneliness? The following organizations listed below are here to offer helpful resources...

- American Association of Retired Persons
- Area Agencies on Aging
- Meals on Wheels San Antonio
- National Council on Aging