

# Understanding the Influences on Older Adult Nutrition in Western NL and Promoting Positive Nutritional Change

## Objectives

1. To understand the factors, both individual and environmental, that influence the nutrition of older adults living at home in the community in western NL.
2. To explore the beliefs and perceptions of older adults and key informants about the role of community organizations and nursing practice in relation to older adult nutrition.
3. To identify the types of community-based programs and resources that could support positive nutritional change among community-dwelling older adults.

## Practice Points

1. The nutrition of older adults is individually impacted by their own personal access to healthy food, the affordability of good food, the personality characteristics of the older adult, and the time and planning requirements of eating well.
2. The environmental factors that influence the nutrition of groups of older adults living at home in western NL are the local food distribution systems, the economics of food, the NL climate, traditional practices related to food in NL, and social groups.
3. Older adults in western NL want local, community-based programming that makes eating healthy food easier, cheaper, and fits with their lifestyle.
4. Community-based nutrition programming needs to be advertised to older adults through communication strategies they engage with and should be consistently available, not one-time offerings of programs.
5. Community change agents, who are brokers between groups, champions of programming, and educators of health and services, should be employed. These community leaders would act as the medium between area residents and community organizations, health care, and academia, and would be a source of knowledge, inspiration, and a proponent of positive change.

## Methods (PI: Dr. D. Pittman)

1. Focus groups with older adults.
2. Individual interviews with key informants (community leaders, farmers, nurses, health administrators).

## Results

**Table 1. Overview of Individual and Environmental Determinants of Older Adult Nutrition in Western NL**

| Community-Dwelling Older Adult Nutrition in Western NL  |                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Individual Determinants of Good Nutrition               | Environmental Determinants of Good Nutrition     |
| 1. Personal Access                                      | 1. Food Distribution Systems                     |
| 2. Affordability                                        | 2. Food Economics                                |
| 3. Personality Characteristics Influencing Food Choices | 3. NL Climate                                    |
| 4. Time and Planning Requirements of Eating Well        | 4. Traditional Practices in NL                   |
|                                                         | 5. Social Groups                                 |
|                                                         | 6. Food-related Government Policies and Programs |

  

| Older Adult Individual Determinants of Good Nutrition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| <b>1. Personal Access</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| The ability of the older adult to access healthy food, both locally at smaller convenience stores and further away at larger grocery stores is influenced by their own physical abilities, living location, transportation options, and local weather.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>2. Affordability</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Healthy food costs more than poorer quality food. Individual older adults have varied amounts of income depending on age, work status, pension, and savings, with many being on a fixed income. The amount they can afford to spend on food determines what they buy and this may require them to shop the sales and budget for food.                                          |
| <b>3. Personal Characteristics Influencing Food Choices</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| The individualized knowledge of each older adult about the benefits of healthy eating, their cooking abilities, their past exposure to healthy foods, and their personal levels of interest and motivation to eat healthy or to prepare food.                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>4. Time and Planning Requirements of Eating Well</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Cooking healthy food requires time and planning for the necessary ingredients, which is dependent on the availability of food in stores and the freshness of the food. Some older adults, especially those who continue to work, find that they do not have time to cook or are not prepared to if they haven't planned in advance, such as by taking meat out of the freezer. |

Table 1 continued

| Older Adult Environmental Determinants of Good Nutrition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <b>1. Food Distribution Systems</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| How food is imported, where it is sorted, and how it is distributed back to communities for sale influences the quality, freshness, and availability of food. As there is no distribution centre in western NL, much of the food that is imported in Port aux Basques is sent to St. John's for sorting and storing and is then distributed back to western NL for re-sale. Once the food is at the stores, public accessibility remains a problem in western NL, with almost no public transportation systems connecting communities. |
| <b>2. Food Economics</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| The high cost of nutritious food, the gas needed for vehicles, the price of electricity required for cooking and storage of food, and other costs associated with goods and services. Local convenience stores sell food for a higher price than larger grocery stores, disadvantaging those who must purchase locally. The further away a community is from a large grocery store, the higher the cost of gas to travel there.                                                                                                        |
| <b>3. NL Climate</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| The growing season in NL is short, with only 3–4 months in the summer. The climate influences what can be grown outside at home or in communities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>4. Traditional Practices in NL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Residents of NL have traditionally relied on salt as a means of preserving meat. The traditional NL diet has also included a lot of breads and sweets, with limited use of spices, and a reduced exposure to some types of fruits and vegetables, such as varieties of green, leafy vegetables and tropical fruit. Past reliance on hunting and gathering as means of securing food becomes more difficult for older adults.                                                                                                           |
| <b>5. Social Groups</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Social groups can provide support and incentive for older adults to model healthy eating behaviours, such as sharing recipes and increasing awareness through shared discussions about food and health.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>6. Food-related Government Policies and Programs</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Social support programs need to target improved access to healthy, nutritious foods. Municipal planning regulations should limit unhealthy food options, such as fast food restaurants. Media and advertising campaigns should limit the promotion of bad food choices and should advertise local programming.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

Table 2. Areas for Positive Nutrition Change and the Role of Community Organizations and Nursing Practice

| Areas to Target for Positive Nutritional Change                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Food Availability (increase access, reduce cost, &amp; minimize effort)</li> <li>• Promote Education</li> <li>• Support Home Gardening</li> <li>• Decrease Food Waste</li> <li>• Develop Support Groups</li> <li>• Make Media and Communications Stronger</li> <li>• Supportive Policies and Programs</li> </ul> |

Table 2 continued

| Improving Older Adult Nutrition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Role of Community Organizations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Role of Nursing Practice                                                                                                                                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Gardens, Garden Clubs</li> <li>• Cooking Demonstrations and Classes</li> <li>• Farmer's Markets</li> <li>• Meals-on-Wheels, Food Kits</li> <li>• Supper Clubs, Family Food Events</li> <li>• Food Banks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigator</li> <li>• Educator</li> <li>• Advocate</li> <li>• Promoter of Health</li> <li>• Team Member</li> <li>• Leader</li> </ul> |
| Linking it All Together:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Community Change Agents:<br>Brokers, Champions, and Health Educators                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                              |

## Conclusions

- The nutrition of older adults can be improved with:
  - ◊ **Increase Access** that supports the production, distribution, and storage of food in NL.
  - ◊ **Reduce Cost** so good food is available at a fair price. Older adults should not pay higher costs for food based on personal circumstance or where they live.
  - ◊ **Minimize Effort** for community programming and the requirements to make or purchase nutritious food.
- Support community resiliency by utilizing local resources and promoting community-based programming that is responsive to local needs, multi-functional, and consistently available.
- Establish open, clear communication mechanisms with area residents, and between organizations locally, regionally, and provincially. The utilization of community change agents and the establishment of formal collectives can assist with this.