Good nutrition is one of the cornerstones of healthy ageing, along with physical activity and social engagement.

Older people need more of certain nutrients, particularly protein and calcium, so a balanced diet is important. Eating a wide range of foods from all of the food groups is more likely to provide all of the essential nutrients. Fad diets that avoid whole food groups should be avoided.

It can be a challenge to provide all food groups in an aged care menu, but a well planned menu that includes foods that residents like to eat can ensure that all residents can achieve the nutrition that they need. A texture modified diet will limit a resident’s choices, and when appetite is also poor residents can struggle to eat the wide variety of foods that they have been used to.

Soft and bite sized, minced and moist and puree diets must be planned at the same time as the regular menu, with suitable options identified at all meals and mid meals. All food groups must be considered.

Meat and alternatives

Protein is found in meat, fish, chicken, eggs, dairy foods and legumes. On a texture modified diet a protein component is generally served at lunch and dinner. It is important to consider how much actual meat goes into the dish. For example, a casserole with 50% meat, thickened with mashed potato may provide far less than the average meat serve provided to those on a regular diet. The serve of the meat component may need to be larger to compensate. If the resident eats only little then a smaller serve of vegetables is acceptable to maintain the protein content of the meal.

Also consider protein options at breakfast e.g. pureed scrambled eggs or baked beans.

Dairy foods

Milk is another excellent source of protein and is generally offered in abundance on a texture modified diet e.g. milk to drink, milkshakes, custards, yoghurts, ice-cream, white sauces etc.

Make sure that cereals e.g. porridge are made with milk.

Fortified milk (1 cup milk + 1 Tbsp milk powder) can be used wherever milk is used in making cereal, baking etc.

Grated cheese can be added to many dishes but make sure that the correct consistency of the dish is maintained.

Cereals (grains)

This food group can be difficult to achieve on an aged care menu.

- Weetbix and porridge are generally served at breakfast
- Cakes and puddings can be pureed with some custard or cream for desserts or snacks
- Incorporate rice/ pasta into soup or a main meal (however, the protein component should be the priority)
- Try an Allbran/ prune puree mix at breakfast
Fruits
Residents on a texture modified diet are generally provided with sufficient fruit - at breakfast, desserts, snacks and as fruit juice.

Vegetables
Vegetables are often provided twice per day. As documented above, it is acceptable to provide a smaller serve of vegetables if appetite is poor - the protein component is the most important.

Fats and oils
All meals should be fortified with additional fats as below.

Malnutrition
Approximately 50% of individuals in an aged care home are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition. The reasons are numerous, with many having medical problems affecting requirements, loss of appetite, dementia and perhaps even dislike of the food. Residents who require a texture modified diet tend to be the most at risk of weight loss. They are often more unwell than those who do not need modification of their diet, but also the food can be unappetizing. It is important to make every mouthful count. All texture modified foods should be fortified with protein and energy additions.

Fortification
- Protein is the nutrient that is needed the most, so encourage the meat, fish, chicken, egg portion of the meal in preference to ‘eating all of the veggies’.
- Add items such as milk, milk powder, egg, grated cheese, legume powders to boost protein in the small amount of food that is eaten.
- Use full fat dairy foods.
- Use cream, oil, butter, margarine to add additional calories to the food.
- If a resident prefers the dessert and refuses a main course, offer 2 desserts instead!

Nourishing fluids
A wide variety of nourishing drinks can be offered to boost intake for those who are eating poorly. Use a Food First approach and try out recipes for:

- Milkshakes
- Smoothies
- Iced coffee
- Hot chocolate
- Fruit sherbet
- Juices

Add a variety of ingredients – check with residents what they prefer. Develop a rotation so that there is something different every day. Get the Lifestyle staff involved in making a milkshake of the day. Commercial supplements can also be useful – consult with your dietitian about when they should be used.