

Celebrating 4th of July with our Seniors

Fourth of July usually means large gatherings of family and friends to celebrate the holiday with food and fireworks. If your July 4th celebration includes seniors, don't forget to consider any special dietary needs. Seniors face a vast array of challenges when choosing their daily menus and this can be especially daunting at cookouts and parties.

One of the most troubling, and little understood, considerations when planning a senior's diet is making certain that whatever food and beverages they select won't cause harmful interactions with the medications they are prescribed. Since many seniors are on multiple daily medications, you need to be vigilant about ingredients contained in the meals you are providing.

There are a few summertime food and drink choices that you may want to avoid or provide alternatives to at your next cookout. For example, grapefruit juice – something most of us would not hesitate to drink as a refreshing cocktail addition – can block the action of intestinal enzymes that break down certain drugs such as cholesterol-lowering ones. Since many seniors take these drugs, grapefruit juice should be avoided. Replacing grapefruit with another citrus fruit is not an option, as they would also provoke negative interactions. Strawberries are a good choice for a colorful, flavorful fruit taste addition that also provides the vitamin C and fiber that can be found in grapefruit.

While dark green leafy vegetables are really healthful and make a great summer salad they also contain high levels of Vitamin K – a vitamin that boosts the blood's ability to clot. These should best be avoided by seniors who are at risk of stroke and who have been prescribed blood thinners such as Coumadin. Instead have some fun with salads that are lettuce free – apple slaw is one of my favorites. Julienne apples, jicama and carrots, throw in some raisins and Voila, a delicious and safe salad for your barbecue.

Seniors with asthma should steer clear of caffeine. Caffeine can boost the effect that asthma medications supply and increase anxiety. Herbal teas make much more sense here and thrown over ice are the perfect beverage for a 4th of July celebration. There are also many caffeine-free cola drinks if grandparents grew up loving Pepsi and Coca-Cola.

For seniors who are suffering from depression, alcohol should not be a part of the daily routine. Alcohol dehydrates the system and can create dangerous interactions with opiate pain medications and sleeping medications. If your other guests are enjoying cocktails, be sure to offer some sparkling cider or alcohol-free beer and wine as an alternative as well.

Although there are definite red flags for seniors with complex prescription histories, you can still have pleasing and nutritious dishes for your summer holiday celebrations. When designing meals for seniors, it is important to keep individual needs a top priority. Every senior has a different history and a different list of pharmaceutical requirements limiting a "one size fits all" approach to menu selection. Be well informed on your senior's medication intake. That way, seniors can enjoy a diverse and exhilarating series of culinary experiences – experiences that are safe, healthy and sure to spark appetites.