

older people need more protein

Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages writes on the ever-changing challenges facing our older community.

Back in the day, a mere five decades ago, I was a perennially broke student with hippie tendencies. True to type, along with other peculiar habits, I grew beansprouts. This harmless and possibly even beneficial practice has just reappeared in my life once more.

I am the proud owner of healthy and tasty sprouts which I add to salads, sandwiches and soups. It's the ultimate easy winter gardening. I don't even have to go out in the rain to tend my crop.

However I have just heard that this fetish may not be enough to keep my muscles from wasting away. Apparently older people need even more protein than teenagers if our bodies are to repair and replace our ageing tissue.

And we must keep our weight up as a low body weight gives an increased risk of osteoporosis. That means, if we fall over, we are more likely to break a few bones.

The font of my new knowledge is the New Zealand Nutrition Foundation whose sights are on older people.

As a non-profit national organisation, I am confident they wouldn't promulgate information designed to promote any one product. They assure me that they only disseminate the findings of scientifically proved studies. This is not fake news.

Maintaining muscle mass is essential to my continued independence so, with my ears tuned to these messages, I absorbed some other worrying information.

The foundation's nutritionist, Anna Mrkusic, told me that older people can no longer rely on their bodies to let them know when they need food or drink.

The signals that tell us we are thirsty or hungry drop away as we age. Luckily mine are still intact. If anything, I love food a bit too much, but I will stay alert to this issue over the coming decade.

I also skimmed the Government's 179-page background paper on these issues, and found the less than startling information, that older people have lower levels of activity and eat less. This is another reason why a nutrient rich diet is important.

I also learnt, from a neighbour, of a trick to make this easy and palatable: apparently mixing milk powder into fresh milk adds nutrients without changing the taste.

Most studies show that we both enjoy our food more, and eat more, when we share our meals with others. So ensuring older people have company at mealtimes will not only add



by Ruth Gerzon



to the quality of their life, but also support their nutrition.

Many people have been catapulted into learning about the importance of nutrition through facing health challenges. Some, like new Whakatane resident, Chinglin Lee, extol the virtues of "superfoods" such as micro-greens.

The Nutrition Foundation, however, focuses on the old fashioned and cheaper vegetables such as carrots, cabbage and broccoli, saying these will suffice, as long as we have our five plus a day.

Mind you, some now say seven is the magic number. That's a bit of a worry. If the magic number gets even higher I won't have room for cakes.

Clearly there is work to be done to keep us healthy and independent as we age. The foundation initiated workshops in Auckland for older people who come together with a facilitator to talk about nutrition, cook and eat together.

They now plan to bring this programme here, in partnership with Eastern Bay Villages so we can take advantage of their training and resources.

We are now seeking people (of any age) who love cooking and care about nutrition, willing to volunteer as facilitators. If that sounds like you, or someone you know, then do get in touch.

In the Eastern Bay we already have similar workshops for people with diabetes that are proving effective.

Caroline Davies, a registered nurse at the Primary Health Alliance, facilitates these. She says some participants are inspirational, making significant changes to their nutrition



and activity levels, gaining control of their diabetes and lowering their blood pressure. There may be hope for us yet.

All this research has heightened my awareness of healthy eating, and I hope readers might like to consider their own food habits and those of older people in their lives. I will continue to grow beansprouts but with more protein rich meals, and certainly won't stop indulging in doughnuts.

When it comes to those, I endorse the 1915 music hall lyrics sung by Marie Lloyd: *A little bit of what you fancy does you good!*

SUPERFOODS: Chinglin Lee with a bowlfull of microsprouts. Photo supplied

Comments on this column, offers of volunteer cooking and queries about Eastern Bay Villages:

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All welcome at our three meetings about our villages initiative:

Whakatane:

Wednesday, September 5 – 1pm-2.30pm,
Knox Presbyterian Church, 83 Domain Road

Edgecumbe:

Thursday, August 30 – 1pm-2.30pm,
Reading Room, Edgecumbe library

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