

Nutrition, exercise key to being healthy after 50

By Kathryn Reed

Eat well and exercise. That was the message delivered by Barton Health dietician Lynn Norton for people who are 50 and older who want to live longer.

She spoke to about 50 people on March 6 at Lake Tahoe Community College about nutrition and aging. And while much of the information delivered that night was routine, it was a reminder to get moving and watch what you consume.

With 20 percent of the population expected to be 65 and older by 2040, aging and nutrition will likely be a growing topic.



Lynn Norton talks March 6 about nutrition and aging.

Photo/LTN

Norton said energy levels on average decrease 2 to 5 percent each decade as people get older. She said the way to stem that decline is to do aerobic and muscle strengthening exercises multiple times a week.

With exercise burning calories, the odds are people will then be at their ideal weight, too.

She mentioned how people who are overweight also tend to have more issues with high blood sugar levels and high blood pressure.

As people get older, they have changes to their digestion and nutrient absorption. B12, zinc and calcium absorption declines.

"To counter this, eat nutrient dense foods," Norton said.

While she said supplements can fill in the gaps, she offered more warnings about supplements than recommendations.

Constipation can be an issue for older people. Proper fluid and fiber intake can help with that condition, Norton said. She suggested adding wheat bran to foods.

Paying attention to bone mass is also critical.

"Fifty percent of women older than 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis, 25 percent of men," Norton said.

She recommends getting a bone density test and vitamin D test so if a deficiency turns up, the correct treatment can begin.

When it comes to having a good immune system, Norton recommends eating oily fish, nuts, seeds, fresh fruit, vegetable, wholegrain, cereals and lean meats.

These were the same foods she promoted throughout much of her talk.

While she said studies have shown limited alcohol has benefits, she said much more could have effects on dementia.

Norton said, "We have a high alcohol population in ICU and ER. We move them from ICU with dementia to long-term care. It really is a long-term problem."

She said proper diet and physical activity are how people will be healthy as they age.

