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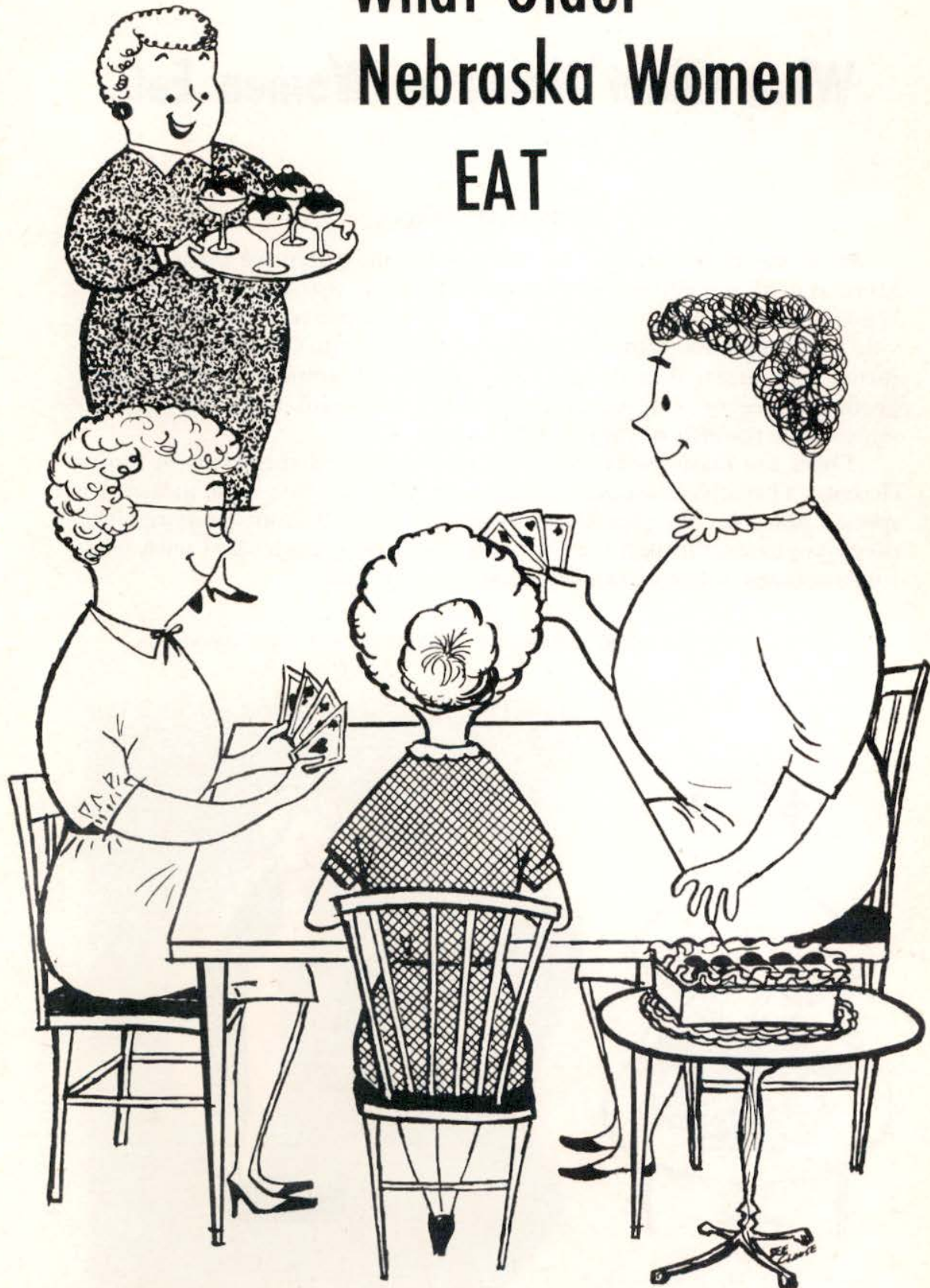
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What Older Nebraska Women EAT



What Older Nebraska Women Eat

Peggy Crooke Fry¹

INTRODUCTION

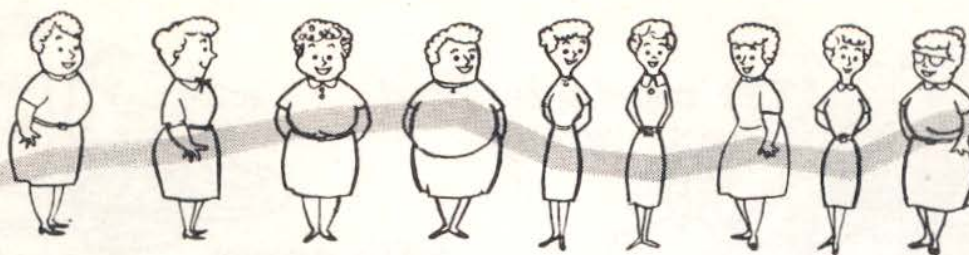
What we eat or do not eat affects how and when we begin to age. More and more evidence is accumulating each year to prove this true. We are a product of the foods we eat and the nutrients these foods provide. It is never too late in life to start eating better. Postponing better eating may mean that it will take longer to become nutritionally fit. Feeling energetic, happy, and interested in useful activities are just some of the rewards of good eating habits.

There are many Nebraskans who have reached the status of senior citizens. These Nebraskans in their 60's, 70's and 80's have attained a special place in our society. We can learn much from studying how they have eaten through the years and comparing their diets with what we have learned from similar studies in other states.

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The Research Study

Research workers at the University of Nebraska studied 32 women ranging from 60 to 90 years of age. All of these women live in the Lincoln area, but originally came from various places—farms, small towns and cities in Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska. Some are retired professional women, others have worked at clerical and domestic jobs, and still others have never worked outside their own homes.

Studies showed that the foods eaten by those in their 70's and 80's furnished somewhat less energy than the diets of women in their 60's. This would be expected, since our daily needs decrease slightly as we do fewer strenuous tasks.

When the diets were studied in terms of vitamin and mineral content, it was found that 41 percent of all the women were getting only two-thirds of the calcium needed, based on the recommendation of the National Research Council. If these women would add one cup of milk, or one ounce of cheddar cheese to the foods already eaten each day, they would receive the needed amount of calcium.

A cheddar cheese or some whole milk, rather than cottage cheese and skim milk, is recommended for these women. Cheddar cheese and whole milk contain much more vitamin A than cottage cheese and skim milk. The amount of vitamin A furnished by the foods of these women was, in 50 percent of the cases, only two-thirds that needed.

The amount of iron, B vitamins and vitamin A in the diet of these women and others like them would be much improved if they would eat 3 oz. of beef, chicken or pork liver, or heart and kidneys, once a week or even once every two weeks. Sixty-five percent of the women were getting only two-thirds of their needed iron. Very few eggs were used by these older women, and pork was infrequently eaten as the meat course. Eating at least five eggs a week and having a pork chop each week, in place of perhaps a ground beef patty, also would improve the iron, B vitamin and vitamin A content of the diets of this age group. Thirty-seven percent of the women received only two-thirds of the B vitamins that they needed daily.

The Institute of Home Economics in the U. S. Department of Agriculture has a guide to follow in planning adequate diets. This basic plan is developed around four groups of foods. The plan specifies that the *daily* diets of adults should supply the amounts shown in Table 1. These foods should be eaten every day because many of the nutrients cannot be stored by the body and are used as soon as eaten.

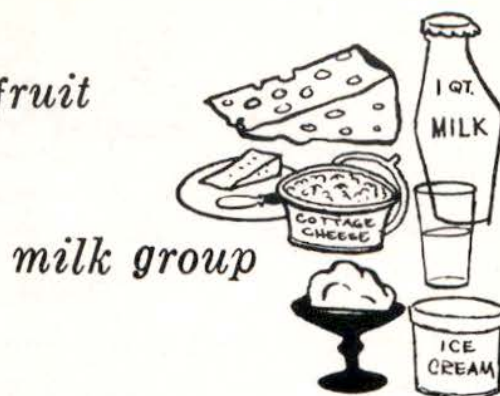
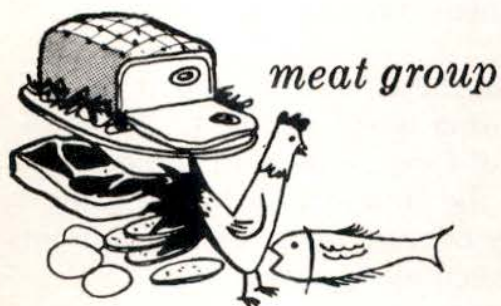


Table 1. The Foundation of a Good Daily Diet.

Milk.....	Two or more cups.
Meat.....	Two or more servings from the group: beef, veal, pork, lamb, poultry, fish or eggs, with dry beans and peas and nuts as alternates.
Vegetable-Fruit.....	Four or more servings from the group including: A dark-green or deep-yellow vegetable, important for vitamin A, at least every other day. A citrus fruit or other fruit or vegetable, important for ascorbic acid. Other fruits and vegetables including potatoes.
Bread-Cereal.....	Four or more servings of the group; whole grain, enriched, or restored preferred.

The other necessary calories are provided by foods ordinarily included in the day's menus to satisfy the appetite—such things as butter, oleo, other fats and oils, sugar and mixed dishes, baked goods and desserts.



A typical day's menu from the study of older Nebraska women was selected for us to examine:



Typical Menu

Suggested Changes in Menu

Morning

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup orange juice
1 cup puffed wheat
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup skim milk
2 slices bread
1 small pat of margarine

None



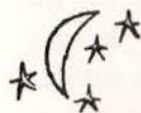
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Noon

2 slices bread
2 oz. meat
2 leaves lettuce
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ pats margarine
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ice cream
2 cookies

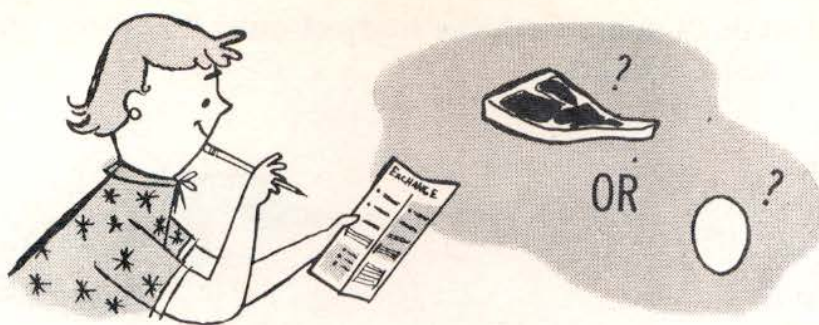
Add:
1 cup whole milk



Evening

2 crackers
 $\frac{1}{2}$ small pat margarine
 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. cheese

Substitute for cheese:
3 oz. cooked liver
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of broccoli, spinach,
tomato juice or tomatoes,
cantaloupe or 1 medium
sweet potato.

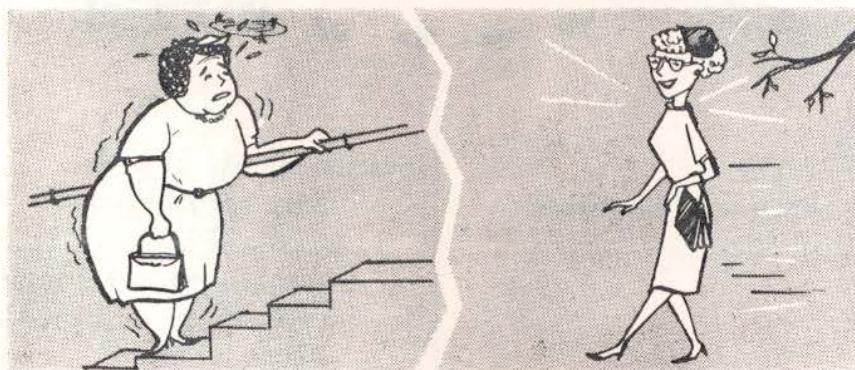


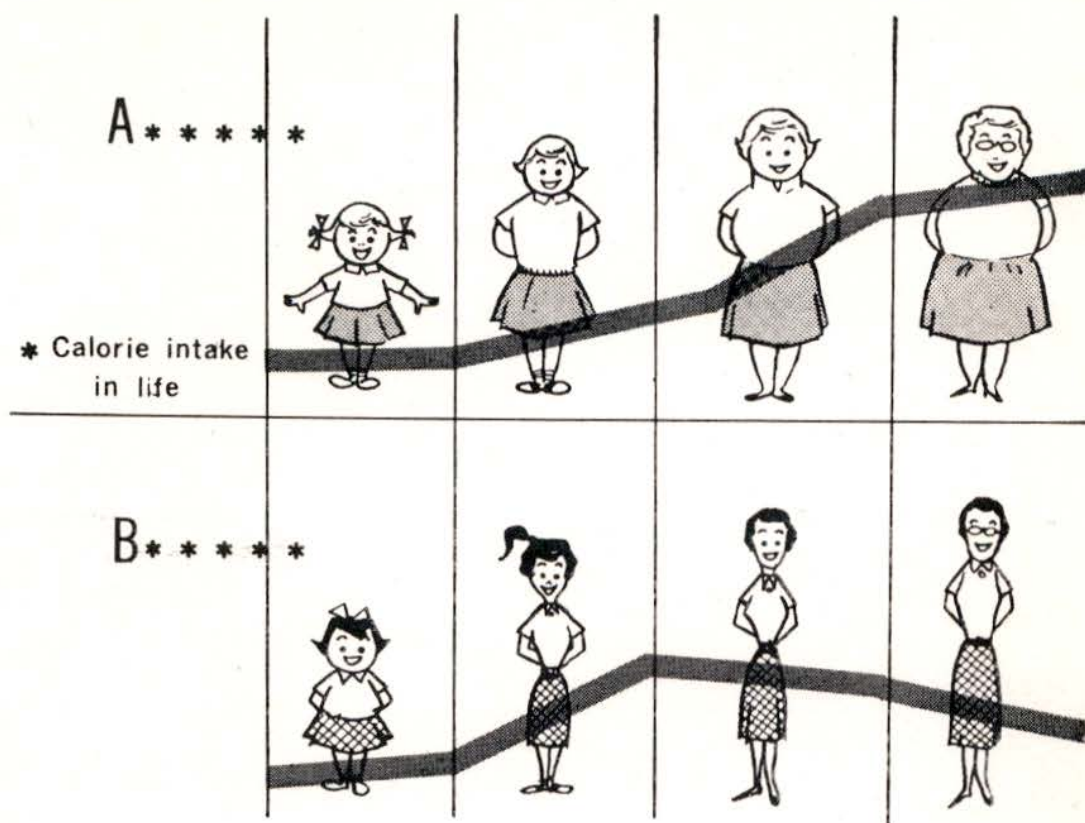
If, to the menu in column one, we added or substituted the food in column two, the meals eaten would furnish 100 percent of all the necessary nutrients, and sufficient calories as well. In addition, this menu for a day would compare very well with the basic guide provided by the Institute of Home Economics.

A cup of whole milk was added at the noon meal and liver at the evening meal. This was done so that the foods high in protein would be distributed among the three meals in a day. The meat or meat substitute foods are used better by the body if some of them are eaten at *each* meal—whether you choose to eat three or five times a day. The digestive system is more efficient if all the meat, eggs or milk foods are not eaten at one time during the day.

There is one more substitution to this particular meal plan. For the third meal, a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup serving of one food that is rich in both vitamin A and vitamin C was placed in column two. One of these foods will provide a good amount of *two* needed vitamins: broccoli, kale, or spinach, tomato juice or tomatoes, cantaloupes in season or a sweet potato.

One of the interesting things noted among these Lincoln women resulted from a comparison of their body weights with desirable weights for their heights. Forty-seven percent of the women were of normal weight, 47 percent were underweight and only 6 percent were overweight for their height and age. Statisticians and physicians often say that if we maintain an average weight for our height, or are around 10 percent underweight, we have a better chance of living longer. These older women living in Lincoln bear out the truth of this advice.





CONCLUSIONS

As we grow older, we usually need fewer calories (or energy for work) each day, but along with these fewer calories we still need *nearly* the same amounts of nutrients—such as protein, vitamins and minerals—as were needed at the age of 30. This means that the daily selection of foods is even more important when we are older than when we were young. In choosing foods, it is important to have every food provide us not just with energy, but also with energy *plus* some protein, some minerals or some vitamins. This will be of great benefit in keeping weight on the right mark, maintaining pride in appearance, interest in hobbies and activities, *and* health so we can do some of those tasks in the home, community or business which we want to do.

We know that eating habits are formed early in life, and that some of the same errors seen in older people are also found in young adults and adolescents. We have also learned that faulty eating habits contribute to an early beginning of aging.

It is our privilege to eat what we want, and how much we want. But this shouldn't mean allowing ourselves to grow listless, discontented and fatigued. Why not give ourselves the gift of good food and thereby make our senior years more lively because we feel fit in mind and body? It can be done, and economically, too!