FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY LIFE AT RETIREMENT AND GRACEFUL AGING

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Abstract
Aging is the major reason for retirement from active service. In Nigeria, retirement is between the age of 65 and 70 years as the case may be. At such ages, intellectual and physical enthusiasm decreases; therefore, it is necessary to relieve workers of some vigorous and severe jobs that may break them down to the detriment of their health. Among the many challenges faced at retirement, this study is particular about the aspect of dwindling health and diseases. This study focuses on ways food and nutrition education can be a panacea to sustainable retirement. Morbidity and frailty increase when workers are aging and getting ready for retirement. Ignorance of nutrition and healthy eating at this stage of life will have devastating effect on the overall wellbeing of retirees. Protein and micronutrient malnutrition are associated with increased mortality, weakening of the muscle, depression, impaired immunity, skin problems, and poor cognition. Adequate knowledge on nutrition and education is essential for employees at retirement age for them to begin to see the importance of diet quality for a healthy life at retirement. This study concludes that poor nutritional intake due to ignorance of food and nutritional values can lead to chronic diseases like diabetes mellitus, high blood cholesterol, cancer, severe lung disease, heart disease, dementia, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, obesity and overweight. The study therefore recommends food and nutrition education for all employees mostly those close to retirement age as well as retirees for sustainable retirement years.

Keywords: Food, Nutrition Education, Healthy Life, Retirement, Aging

Introduction
As a person ages, many physiological changes (loss of muscle) occur, and comorbid conditions become more prevalent, which may increase malnutrition risk and health hazard. The alterations in energy and nutrient requirements may be challenging to meet as the energy needs decline, but other nutrient requirements remain stable or may even increase (protein, vitamin D). Comorbid conditions, infections, and acute stress situations increase physiological energy and nutrient needs, while the appetite may be poor. All these are great indications of challenging situations as a person grow older. Hence the need for retirement from active work.

The aging population is a powerful emerging demographic phenomenon in sub Sahara Africa and even Nigeria, with many serious implications for the elderly in particular and society at large. Long life is worth celebrating, but for the increasing liabilities of the elderly arising out of poverty, income insecurity, illiteracy, rural living, age related morbidity, feminisation, dependency and malnutrition (Holmes, 2004, NPC 2006;).

The importance of nutrition for individual health has generated numerous policy interventions aimed at reducing salt, sugar and saturated fat intakes. As Griffith and O’Connell (2010) and Cawley (2015) argue, public intervention is justified by the fact that individuals do not make optimal decisions due to lack of information on the costs and benefits of consumption, and/or negative externalities, they do not take into account the social costs associated with unhealthy eating. Aging is a good thing and indeed the improvements of modern technologies, medicine and healthcare have enabled us to do so, however, there is a gap between life expectancy and healthy life years (EU, 2012).

Spending more years in ill health and disability not only affects the quality of life of individuals, but also their families, which puts pressure on public health and care services, consequentially leading to substantial social and economic impact on the society. Therefore, it is important to identify
Appropriate strategies to help the population age healthier. This is particularly important during the retirement years. Retirement is to stay away from business, public life and active service. The major reason for retirement is age, this period is full of many challenges; as malnutrition at older ages is related with a number of unfavourable health outcomes, including the threat of premature death, coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, type II diabetes, sarcopenia, osteoporosis and weight gain. In order to curb or ameliorate this situation for healthy life at retirement, food and nutrition education is a key. The amount of calories eaten, the transition into retirement may affect the quantity of nutrients that individuals consume; which could be detrimental to their wellbeing at retirement. There is the likelihood that there will be massive impact of retirement on a wide range of nutrients: vitamins A, C, and E, calcium, cholesterol, saturated fat, and protein. However, proper food and nutritional education will guide the aging populace towards healthy life and sustainable retirement. This paper will discuss some issues as it concerns this study. Amongst are: aging and nutrition, retirement in Nigeria, food and nutrition education and significance of food and nutrition for sustainable retirement.

Aging and nutrition
Successful aging is an idea that is categorised by the prevention of disease and disability, maintenance of high levels of physical and mental functioning, and sustained engagement in social and productive activities (Rowe and Kahn 1997). Aging of an individual is influenced by genetic and environmental factors. It has been projected that environmental factors may account for as much as 75% of the aging process (Steves, 2012, Mangino 2014). Good nutrition throughout the lifespan supports healthy aging (Mathers, 2013). The significance of nutrition to the aging period of humans cannot be over emphasized. It is key to healthy life at old age. Nutrition has multidimensional effects on cognition, mood, functional ability, and survival (Morley, 2010, Safouris, 2015). Good nutritional status and diet quality prevent cognitive decline, weakening of the muscles, frailty, and loss of functional ability (Bauer, 2013) Nutrition is also important in preservation of normal immune functioning (Lesourd 2004). Essential macro- and micronutrients and trace elements are needed in maintaining the health of individuals and play crucial roles in both immune functioning (Mocchegiani, 2014).

Challenging health issues at retirement contributing to the increase of malnutrition include oral and dental problems, difficulty in swallowing, gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms, and some forms of diseases (Hickson 2006, Vuoristo 2010). In addition, metabolic disorders, cancer, infections, and many other diseases may contribute to malnutrition (Vuoristo 2010). Furthermore, unhealthy behaviors may restrict food choices, and alcohol abuse usually limits nutrient intake. The ignorance of nutrition and healthy eating as well as old customs may result in unbalanced and poor-quality-diets. Physical inactivity may contribute to development of malnutrition and it further accelerates the loss of muscle (Bernstein, 2012, Bauer, 2013).

Diseases, stress, and medications may increase energy and nutrient needs and at the same time reduce food intake. Inadequate or suboptimal intake of nutrients in the aging population is an important issue to address, because poor nutrient reserves accelerate the inflammation process that is associated with aging and diseases causing poor recovery from illness and increases mortality (Morley, 2010). Protein and micronutrient malnutrition are related with increased premature death and comorbidity, loss of muscle mass, depression, impaired immunity, skin problems, and poor cognition (McNaughton, 2012).

Older people are very heterogeneous in their cognition, health, and nutrition. As a person ages, many physiological changes (e.g. loss of muscle) occur, and comorbid conditions become more prevalent, which may increase malnutrition risk. The need of energy and nutrient requirements may be challenging to meet as the energy needs decline, but other nutrient requirements remain stable or may even increase (e.g. protein, vitamin D). Comorbid conditions, infections, and acute stress situations increase physiological energy and nutrient needs, while the appetite may be poor.

Furthermore, psychosocial issues such as perceived loneliness, poverty, unhealthy habits, and lack of cooking skills may affect nutrition in a negative way. Polypharmacy itself may affect appetite and absorption of nutrients. Malnutrition can cause sarcopenia and frailty, which may lead to disability, institutionalization, and increased mortality risk. Good nutrition is crucial to maintaining functional ability, cognition, health in older individuals.
Information on nutrient intakes may identify both older population groups and individuals with inadequate nutrient intakes that may lead to malnutrition. Nutrition education trials targeted at older people have mostly been directed at specific groups (e.g. cancer survivors, people with diabetes) with minor to moderate effects on the outcome measures.

Retirement in Nigeria

In the public and private organizations, retirement entails an official termination of a work life. It is a transition from active work to active world of leisure. The concept of retirement is viewed differently by different people. Some persons might see it positively and expect it with joy, while others may have a negative perceptions about retirement; as it is a phase of life with depression, economic suffering, ill health and death. Retirement is an inevitable period in the life of workers, both public and private workers.

According to Onoyas, (2013), retirement is a compulsory end that every employee should anticipate, whether in the public sector or in the private sector. Oniye (2004), opined that retirement emphasises separation from job with concern for the future. Deng (2010) asserted that retirement is the longest vacation and it is a pleasurable experience. Akinboye (2004) stated that retirement is a process in which an individual separates from routine work activities and this could be mandatory, compulsory or voluntary.

Asuquo and Maliki (2007) proposed three forms of retirement namely: mandatory, voluntary, and compulsory retirement. The voluntary or self-retirement arises when the individual chooses to end active service for personal reasons regardless of age, experience, length of service or retirement policies. This kind of retirement choice is taken by employees other than employers. The second type of retirement is the compulsory or forced retirement; is a situation beyond the individual’s anticipation and when he or she is ill prepared for it. It is usually viewed negatively because it is unplanned and reasons might include inefficiency, old age, and rationalization in work force (Elder & Johnson, 2003). Mandatory retirement is an expected form of retirement in which the person involved has reached the statutory age of retirement as stated in the condition of service of the organization. For instance in Nigeria, the retirement age as specified for Civil servants, Judges and Lecturers is sixty five years (65) or when they have put in thirty five years (35) of service for civil servants. Nevertheless, the Retirement Age Harmonization Act of 2012 puts the retirement age of judicial officers and academic staff of tertiary institutions at 70 and 65 years respectively because of the belief that the “older, the wiser”.

Overall, retirement majorly sets in due to aging, and aging comes with all its resultant challenges. This study is majorly concerned with healthy living of individual who have retired from active service. There are some determinants of sustainable retirement; amongst is proper nutrition; as malnutrition at older ages is associated with a number of unfavourable health outcomes, including the risk of untimely death, coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, type II diabetes, sarcopenia, osteoporosis and weight gain. Hence the significance of food and health education for sustainable retirement.

Food and Nutrition Education

The significance of good nutritional education to general wellbeing of both adults and children cannot be overemphasized. Food and Nutrition education is defined as “any combination of educational policies with environmental supports, designed to facilitate voluntary acceptance of food choices and other food and nutrition-related behaviours conducive to health and wellbeing” (Conteto, 2008). Food and nutrition education for workers in the form of seminars, workshops and conference is being practiced in most work places in Nigeria. Through this medium, worker learn and know the need of eating right for healthy living.

Nutrition education can be likened to any set of learning experiences chosen to promote the voluntary adoption of eating and other nutrition-related behaviors beneficial to health and well-being. It is a vital measure of providing nutrition services to older persons.

According to the World Health Organisation (2018), a healthy diet contains ‘fruit, vegetables, legumes (lentils and beans), nuts and whole grains (unprocessed maize, millet, oats, wheat and brown rice)’. In quantitative terms, consuming at least 400 grams of fruit and vegetables a day is considered part of a healthy diet.

Many retirees suffer ill-health or disability, this situation can be ameliorated workers are exposed to proper food and nutritional education before retirement age. Is not just enough to eat but to eat right; that is what food and nutrition is all about. We
are a product of the food eaten. Advocacy for healthy long life after retirement can be achieved if more of food and nutritional education is transmitted out through accessible channels to employees early enough before retirement age.

Food and nutrition education is necessary for both physical and mental health, as well as optimum productivity, so important in the work situation. Proper nutrition aids in stress management as well as the prevention and/or treatment of many disorders, including obesity, cardiovascular disease and strokes, and diabetes. Weight control is especially important since obesity is associated with many chronic health problems.

Food and nutrition education promotes healthy living by creating awareness on the benefits and hazards of taking different kind of food and also, it guides the individual on appropriate choice of food for healthy living and long life.

Food and Nutrition education at the workplace is important to foster proper eating habit. This can be done through carefully coordinated efforts of the employer, dieticians together with the food service and nursing or medical personnel. Nutritional seminar and workshops by both private and public employers to educate workers on the significance of eating rightly and healthy life style like exercising is a prerequisite for healthy retirement age. Numerous reviews on workplace interventions have shown that education plans based on diet, exercise, and lifestyle factors have generally led to improved dietary intakes (Mhurchu, 2010).

Workplace nutrition education plans can help to reduce many risk factors and short-term absenteeism, increasing work efficiency and lowering employees’ healthcare costs (Hochart, 2011). Besides, nutrition education in the workplace has successfully improved lifestyle habits in terms of nutritional intake and physical exercise, leading to health long life and sustainable retirement.

Conclusion

There are several determinants for sustainable retirement of workers, this paper focused on one of such determinants which is the importance of food and nutrition education to sustainable retirement. Healthy life on retirement is of utmost importance and food and nutrition is key to realizing and sustaining healthy life at retirement.

Since nutrition is an essential component for health, food and nutrition education plays an important role in healthy eating, i.e. a diet that contributes to the health and well-being of individuals. It educates the individual on the invaluable benefits of consuming fruit or vegetables daily. Malnutrition at older ages is associated with a number of unfavourable health outcomes, including the risk of premature mortality, coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, type II diabetes, sarcopenia, osteoporosis and weight gain. Using the knowledge from food and nutrition education to make good choice of food and good healthy life style like exercising will bring about a healthy life at retirement without any form of sicknesses and diseases or to a barest minimal.

Recommendations

(1) For workers close to retirement, government/employers should make food and nutritional counselling accessible to them on an individual or group basis.

(2) Food and Nutrition education at the workplace can be made compulsory and sponsored by the Government to encouraged proper eating habit among worker and mostly those at the retirement age.

(3) Government should make nutrition education programs available electronically to workers on their phones, laptops and other electronic devices for quick access to food and nutritional tips on a daily basis to guide their nutritional intake.

Importance of Food and Nutrition for sustainable Retirement

Good nutrition extends independence by sustaining physical strength, mobility, endurance, hearing, vision, and mental abilities. Nutrition education in most cases include information on physical activity in addition to nutrition. In cognisance of the need of physical activity on health and the prevention of disease, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend being physically active each day. Regular physical activity stands the ability of older adults to live independently, and helps the individuals with arthritis, depression and anxiety. It may reduce the risk of mental decline in older adults, and is effective in assisting to manage many chronic diseases.

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(4) Union executives and employers can form an alliance to encourage healthy eating through seminars, workshops and conferences.

(5) Food and Nutrition Education at work place can be done through carefully coordinated efforts of the employer, dieticians together with the food service and nursing or medical personnel.

(6) Nutritional seminar and workshops can be organized by both private and public employers to educate workers on the importance of eating rightly and healthy life style like exercising.

(7) Workers, especially those within the retirement age should make personal effort at ensuring they eat healthy and nutritional food and also get involved in physical exercise for them to enjoy healthy life at retirement.

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