



## Strategies for The Promotion and Maintenance of Good Nutritional and Health Status of Old People in Delta State of Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*The study sought the measures for improving the nutritional and health status of old people in Delta State of Nigeria. The sample comprised three hundred and eighty nine people, which included doctors, nurses, nutritionists, Home Economists, Students and elderly people. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The data was analysed by computing, the percentages and mean of the responses. Findings showed that some of the measures used by the old people in Delta State in promoting and maintaining good nutritional and health status are as follows:- Old people should not eat too much of carbohydrate foods. They need to eat meals that contain leafy vegetables and also eating of fruits. They need to avoid eating between meals. Meals served must be varied and served promptly. Meals must be attractively served. Others are taking less strenuous regular exercise daily, old people need to live with their children or relatives to avoid loneliness, avoidance of drinking of alcohol and smoking. They need regular medical checkup. It was recommended that people who have old people should provide comfortable accommodations for them and give them adequate care.*

**KEYWORDS :** Nutritional Status, Health Status, Leafy vegetables, Fruits, Meals, Attractively served, Regular exercise, Regular medical check-up.

### Introduction

Ageing is a natural process of increase in one's age. It is the process of growing older. Ageing starts at conception. It is a normal physiological process accompanied by progressive alteration of the body homeostatic adaptive responses. The process of ageing produces observable changes in the structure and functions of the body. It increases vulnerability to environmental stress and diseases, Tortora and Grasbowski, [1]. They outlined some obvious characteristics of old age as graying and loss of hair, loss of teeth, wrinkling of skin, decreased muscle mass and increased fat deposits. They concluded that the physiological signs of ageing are gradual deterioration in function and capacity of response to environmental stress.

There is increase in the number of old people worldwide Nwagu and Okafor, [2]. There was a projection by the World Health Organization (WHO) [3] that by the year 2020 more than 1000 million of the people in the world will be over sixty years old and two third will be living in developing countries. This poses an increasing concern for the well-being of the rising number aged 60years and above. As such there is need to change from the pessimistic view that equates ageing with ill-health, increasing financial burden in the welfare state to a focus on active ageing (WHO) [4] and Nelson [5], If wellness is optimized during young adulthood, then one can exert greater control over the physical and mental aspect of ageing. With foresight and energy, individuals can shape a creative, graceful and ever triumphant old age Nwagu and Okafor [2].

Nwabueze [6] noted that the increased ageing population is due to improved nutrition, declining infection, better standard of living, prospect in education, health care and biomedical technology. Active ageing will ensure continued productivity and independence in post-retirement period. WHO [3] outlined the main factors for promoting active ageing. They are physical, social, mental, emotional activities and prevention of diseases, disabilities, and positive attitude towards ageing.

Nwagu and Okafor [2] stressed the need that old people should be active in order to be physically, mentally and socially fit. They emphasized the value of work as not just in getting physical cash but that productivity is natural and intrinsic demand for self fulfilment and self satisfaction for humans. Morris [7] and Gazt, [8] stated that there is need to keep working in order to keep the muscles, the heart, lungs and other organs of the body working.

Insel and Roth, [9] noted that human beings jeopardize their health through inactivity thus encouraging the muscles and even the brain to wither and deteriorate. Papalia and Wendkos, [10] noted that the

more active older people are, the healthier they remain. They opined that the elderly should be encouraged to maintain an active life style through such activities as regular exercise, shopping, attending meetings and occasions, visiting, telephoning or writing to friends, reading newspapers, sewing, gardening, planting, sculpting, engaging in church activities and working as they are able. Nwagu and Okafor [2] reported that brisk walking has been shown to improve performance and muscular work in people who exercise in their 70s by as much proportion as comparable exercise in the young. It was pointed out by Mann [11]; Morris [7] that such a rise in fitness that occurs in exercise will counter frailty in getting about, for instance where an elderly person wants to cross a busy road. Regular physical exercise and adequate nutrition from the early years through old age are essential Morris, [7]. Such practices have helped the elderly persons to remain strong, healthy, active and less dependent on people for their survival.

In order to promote good health, old people need to avoid smoking. Such avoidance slows down the ageing related decline. When one develops healthy life style early in life and practice them through old age helps the body to be in good health. It helps the body to adjust to the natural changes that occur as one ages. WHO [13] stated that health promotion and disease prevention are necessary for the health of senior citizens. It was also stated that good health and wellbeing are vital tools for continued productivity and independence after retirement. In the area of maintenance of good health, Nwagu and Okafor [2] stated that smoking and alcoholism are inimical to optimal health and should be avoided.

People's perception about ageing varies. Certain individuals view old age as a problematic period of unrelenting decline and withdrawal from society. To other people, old age connotes a period of growing gradually unto maturity with a high sense of fulfillment. Others get into old age with a sense of regret and complaints.

Old people vary in their abilities and emotional status. This could depend on or reflect the individual's perception of life. Anthony's message [14] was that older people should educate their children. They can be positive role models and also create pleasant memories. For instance grandparents can pass along their cultural heritage to their grandchildren and then return the favour by listening attentively as the youngsters tell their stories. In addition, older people have responsibilities commensurate with health, abilities and other obligations to undertake some forms of service to others. Recently the concern about old people has been brought to limelight. This made the United Nations to designate 1999 as the year of older people. Old people along with children are usually classified as vulnerable group. They need love, care, and attention.

People's Daily Online Survey Report [15] stated that over 20 percent of older people were not accessing world food programme. The report also showed that many older people claimed not to have proper shelter while 61 percent claimed to have chronic diseases that needed specialized treatment or drugs, which were not available to them. About 29 percent of the old people were not targeted by humanitarian organizations for supplementary food aid. Few old people have adequate food either in quality or quantity.

In many places, old people are usually neglected and forgotten. The Report from People's Daily Online Survey [15] showed that old people are noted to be neglected and forgotten in Sudan Dafur Camps. They are frequently included in international food and health programmes. Although old people along with children are classed as vulnerable group, many interventions were not being directly targeted by aid agencies. Emmanuel and Adebayo [16] stated that the dynamics of intra household distribution of economic resources are basically tilted against women, children and the aged people. These constitute some of the members of vulnerable group. Most old people are poor. They are vulnerable to poverty. Many old people do not have access to good quality food. This is an indication of food insecurity which has adverse effects, Ukoh-Aviomoh [17] outlined the effects of food insecurity as follows: malnutrition, deterioration in health of citizens, diseases and low life span. Anyakoha and Eluwa [18] stated that old people are characterized by reduced physical activity resulting in decline of energy expenditure. This implies that the quantity of energy food for the aged needs to be slightly reduced. The need for protein, vitamins and minerals remains unchanged. In some cases there might be an increase in these nutrients due to tissue breakdown in old age. An aged person who stays indoor all the time or is bedridden could be short of vitamin D. Foods rich in vitamin D (Cholecalciferol) are liver, fish, cod liver oil. This could be included in the old persons' food to strengthen the bones. Some elderly people have dental problems. This could prevent them from taking adequate diet. In such cases, food that should be served must be well cooked for ease of chewing.

The digestive system of the elderly people may not be as efficient as that of young persons. Anyakoha and Eluwa [18] advised that the cooking methods that aid digestion need to be adopted in preparing meals for the aged. The foods that will not digest easily such as oily or fried foods should be avoided. They recommended that good supply of leafy vegetables and fruits are necessary for aged people to meet their folic acid and other vitamins need. A good supply of vegetables could be a source of roughage. They advised that aged people should remain as active as possible in order to help to stimulate digestion and to strengthen bones and muscles. During old age there is rapid increase in the ageing process. Worn out cells need to be replaced. The body's resistance to diseases and infections is low. As such there is need for the aged people to promote their nutritional and health status. This could be altered through the application of certain basic principles/measures. This is the focus of this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the measures to improve and maintain the nutritional and health status of elderly people in Delta State.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the measures elderly people in Delta State can use to improve and maintain their nutritional status.
2. Find out the measures elderly people in Delta State can adopt to improve and maintain their health status.

**Methodology**

**Design of the Study:**

The study is a survey research design meant to investigate the measures for promoting and maintaining the nutritional and health status of elderly people in Delta State.

**Population and Sample:**

Doctors, Nurses, Nutritionists, Home Economists, students and all the old people who have retired from government services in Delta State. The Doctors and Nurses were from government hospitals. The Home Economists, Nutritionists, Students were from Colleges of Education and the Delta State University, Abraka. From these a sample of 389 people was randomly selected.

**Instrument:**

The instrument comprised the demographic information and the measures for maintaining good health and nutritional status using a 4- point scale.

**Method of Data Collection and Analysis:**

The copies of the questionnaire (389) were administered to the people by research assistants to respond to. After completion they were immediately retrieved. Those that were not completely filled were discarded. A total of 386 copies of the questionnaire were used for the study. The percentages and mean of the responses of the items were calculated. From the 4 -point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree representing 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively, an item with a mean of 2.50- 4.00 shows agreement. It shows the item is either a good nutritional or health measure. Any item with mean below 2.50 shows that the item is viewed as not being an important nutritional or health measure.

**Results**

Findings show that 30 (10.5 %) of the people were health practitioners. Thirty six (12.3%) were nutritionists, fifty (17.5%) were aged people. One hundred (35.0%) were Home Economics Lecturers and students. Seventy (24.5%) were teachers.

Sr. No.	Measures	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Percentage of agreement
1	Eating lightly at dinner	218	100	-	-	3.69	89.3
2	Avoiding eating of very oily meals.	230	25	10	3	3.80	66.4
3	Avoiding eating of too much of carbohydrate foods	193	118	45	23	3.27	80.6
4	Eating of mixed diet comprising of all nutrients in adequate proportions	118	182	73	-	3.12	77.7
5	Eating much of vegetable meals.	195	116	-	-	3.63	80.6
6	Avoiding eating between meals.	199	118	25	33	3.29	80.4
7	Drinking of enough water to aid digestion	196	111	-	-	3.64	79.5
8	Drinking of enough water to prevent constipation and dehydration.	193	120	-	-	3.62	81.1
9	Eating of foods that can easily be chewed.	202	150	20	-	3.49	91.2
10	Provision of good storage facilities.	216	124	-	-	3.54	88.1
11	Old people must avoid overfeeding	311	40	13	11	3.74	90.9
12	Meal served to old people must be varied.	142	151	-	-	3.57	93.3
13	Old people's meals must be attractively served	210	150	-	-	3.57	93.3
14	They need to be advised to eat nourishing foods in season.	244	57	2	-	3.80	78.0
15	Meals for elderly people should be promptly served.	215	-	153	-	3.58	55.6
16	Avoid over spicing of meals for elderly people.	201	159	60	18	3.08	56
17	Serve meals for elderly people with unbreakable utensils	104	150	14	-	3.20	65.8
18	Warm food to the desired temperature before serving to elderly people	198	68	53	-	3.40	68.9
19	Only nourishing meals should be served to elderly people.	225	58	-	-	3.79	73.3

Table 1 showed that each of items 1 – 19 has the mean above 2.50. Each item has percentage above 50. This indicates that all the items were perceived by the respondents as important measures for improving and maintaining the nutritional status of elderly people in Delta State.

**Table 2:**  
**Measures for improving and maintaining the health status of elderly people in Delta State.**

S/N	Measures	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean (X)	Percentage of agreement
1	Include rest period while working	216	102	-	-	3.60	79.8
2	Avoid lying down all the time	184	190	5	1	3.47	96.9
3	Do some light jobs daily	120	210	-	-	3.29	85.4
4	Take regular less strenuous exercise before going to bed and getting out of bed	183	196	-	-	3.48	97.9
5	Avoidance of smoking	205	70	17	20	3.47	71.2
6	Avoid drinking alcohol	215	129	-	3	3.60	89.1
7	Old people can live with their children or relatives to prevent being lonely	199	160	28	-	3.44	98.2
8	Old people should avoid living alone	240	106	10	3.52	3.52	89.6
9	Old people who can read should be encouraged to have some time for studying whatever is of interest to them to improve their moral and social life	166	197	14	-	3.40	94.0
10	Elderly people could be allowed to attend social gathering with their relatives if appropriate	199	169	13	-	3.49	95.3
11	Old people need to be taken out for regular medical checkup	119	239	-	-	3.33	92.7
12	Interesting video programmes could be made available to old people to watch to give them a sense of belonging.	195	176	-	-	3.53	95.9
13	Old people could be allowed to listen to radio and other mass media programmes	197	1060	-	-	3.55	92.5
14	The apartment of old people should be well lit	155	180	-	-	3.36	86.8
15	Avoid using mat or torn carpet for the flooring where old people reside to prevent fall	216	24	12	-	3.60	64.2
16	Clothes that are protective enough need to be given to old people to prevent cold	120	252	-	20	3.32	96.4
17	The needs of elderly people have to be met promptly	160	196	12	-	3.40	92.2
18	Practicing of good oral hygiene	27	120	-	-	3.68	98.2

Table 2 showed that all the items 1-18 had the mean above 2.50. The items had percentages above 50. This indicates that all the items were perceived by the respondents as important measures for improving and maintaining the health status of elderly people in Delta State.

### Discussion of Results

The study identified the measures for improving and maintaining the nutritional and the health status of the elderly people in Delta State. Some of the nutritional measures are as follows- eating lightly at dinner, avoidance of overfeeding. The avoidance of eating too much of carbohydrate food is an important measure to prevent obesity. Anyakoha and Eluwa [18] advised that a slight reduction in energy food, eating of mixed diet comprising of all nutrients in adequate proportions and taking much of vegetable meals will supply most of the needed nutrients for the maintenance of good health. Drinking of enough clean water will aid digestion, prevent constipation and dehydration in the aged.

Varying of meals of old people will prevent monotony of meals. The meals for old people should be served promptly, attractively using unbreakable utensils and warmed to desired temperature. Only nourishing meals should be served to elderly people.

Some health measures identified are as follows. Old people should include rest periods while working. This is to prevent them from breaking down. Elderly people need to avoid lying down all the time. This prevents weakness. They need to do some light jobs daily. They need regular exercise. These activities help their body to function adequately. Nwagu and Okafor [2] reported that brisk walking has been shown to improve performance and muscular work in people who exercise in their 70s. They recommended that old people should be active in order to be physically, mentally and socially fit. In support of this, Morris [7] and Gazt [8] stated that there is need to keep working in order to keep the muscles, the heart and lungs and other organs of the body working.

The avoidance of smoking and drinking of alcohol are good health measures. Such avoidance slows down the ageing process, in the area

of maintenance of good health, Nwagu and Okafor [2] stated that smoking and alcoholism are inimical to optimal health and should be avoided.

Old people should avoid living alone. They can live with their children or relatives. Living alone does not promote good mental or social health. They need to interact with other people. Elderly people could be allowed to attend social gatherings with their relatives if appropriate. This will give them a sense of belonging. Elderly people could be allowed to watch interesting video programmes, listen to radio and other mass media programmes. These could be refreshing to them.

Elderly people need to be taken out for regular medical check up. From this, certain diseases could be detected on time and treated early enough. There is need to give the elderly people protective clothes. This will prevent cold. They need to be encouraged to practice good oral hygiene to prevent dental problems. The needs of elderly people must be met promptly. This could prolong longevity.

### Conclusion

The study identified the measures for improving and maintaining the nutritional and health status of old people in Delta State. In order for the old people to maintain good nutritional and health status, the co-operation of old people and those taking care of them is highly needed. If this is done, it is hoped that the old people in Delta State will be in good health. Thus they are likely to have a longer productive and rewarding life span.

### Recommendations

- People who have old people should take good care of them.
- People with older people should provide adequate comfortable accommodations for them. At best, they should allow the older people to live with them to prevent the problems of loneliness.

Loneliness could lead to loss of appetite and can also speed up the ageing process.

- During the years of working, people should have much savings, invest in shares and landed property which can be sources of income at old age.
- People should be educated to know that old age is an important period of growing into fulfilment and maturity.
- People should be educated not to neglect or despise the aged. They should rather be loved and well cared for.
- Old people should not be isolated but could be allowed as much as necessary and possible to stay with other older or younger people. This will give them a sense of belonging.
- Old people should be given opportunity to listen to or watch various programmes that they are interested in such as nutrition or health programmes
- Active Ageing Education should be given right from primary school age. This will prepare people's mind to plan for and enjoy their old age. The government should increase the retirement age to 70 years so that those who are strong and continue up to that age with their job. This will help in keeping elderly persons active and productive. Part of the salaries earned can be used for feeding and health maintenance.
- The government should establish programmes such as financial support, substituted feeding, transport, health care for the old people's homes with well-trained and capable staff.

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