Preface

Appropriate nutrition is vital for maintaining health and enhancing quality of life and becomes even more important as we grow older. Nutrition and health status in general are influenced by lifelong eating habits as well as choice of food. Eating habits result from several factors such as culture and income, while the selection of food we purchase is affected by availability, personal living arrangements, etc.

Deficient nutrition may prolong recovery from illness, increase public health costs and the number of institutionalized cases, and lead to inferior quality of life. The need for adequate nutrition does not depend on age and we would like to pass on the message to older people that nutritional quality is essential for a good quality of life.

Older people are unlikely to change habits formed in childhood but often reduce the amount of food they eat due to several reasons associated with aging. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise to hear that malnutrition occurs frequently in this population group, particularly in institutionalized elderly. These people, who usually do not select their food themselves, would benefit most from intervention programs such as the development of diets designed specifically for the nutritional needs of the elderly.

The primary aim of the EC-funded project Nutri-Senex (contract No. 506382), with 32 partners from 11 European countries, is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly. The frail elderly, i.e. those who require constant care, will likely benefit most from the outcome of the project, but its activities are not confined to this subgroup. The project aims to improve the understanding of how diet can promote healthy aging. The global objectives are to coordinate research on the nutrition of the elderly, improve their quality of life, reduce public health costs through the prevention of nutrition-related diseases, and encourage the development of nutritionally balanced food products which are specially designed for the elderly.

The 2007 annual meeting of the Austrian Nutrition Society was organized in co-operation with the Institute of Nutritional Sciences of the University of Vienna. The meeting program emphasized the role of nutrition and lifestyle in improving the quality of life of the elderly as a vulnerable population group. The main outcomes of the Nutri-Senex project are summarized and disseminated to the main stakeholders in the area. The organizers thank the European Commission for supporting this meeting.

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