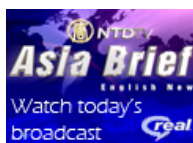


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Food as Medicine, Part 1

By Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.

Apr 03, 2006

 Special to The [Epoch Times](#)

In ancient times, food was our ancestors' first medicine. In fact, Hippocrates, considered one of the founding fathers of Western medicine, said: "Let thy medicine be thy food, and thy food, thy medicine."

While each of us has unique nutritional needs, the following are general guidelines. How each of us responds to specific foods is unique. While a certain food substance in one individual may be curative, in another it may aggravate symptoms or a condition.

Some of us are more sensitive to certain foods than others, and individual constitutions may be more or less tolerant to some of the suggestions below.

Make changes gradually. Your body has all the wisdom it needs to heal itself, but it also needs gentleness. Cravings for foods and/or substances considered unhealthy are merely signs that on one or more levels (body/mind/spirit) you are not getting what you need.

Our bodies recognize the nutrients in food that are closest to their natural form and that have not been chemically or mechanically altered.

Try to eat fresh cooked food that is in season whenever possible.

Try to avoid frozen food and leftovers. Food that is cooked and then refrigerated or frozen not only has little nutritional value but also can be toxic. When we eat food that is lacking in nutritional value, we may develop cravings, and may overeat to compensate for inadequate nutrition.

If you eat animal protein (beef, poultry), make sure it is organic. Non-organic sources contain HGH (human growth hormone) and antibiotics. HGH can affect endogenous hormone activity and should be avoided especially if you are dealing with male or female reproductive organ issues (breast, uterine or prostate problems). Antibiotics can interfere with the natural flora that live in our intestines, causing digestion and absorption problems. Also, they can interfere with our immune function.

If dairy products are part of your diet, make sure these are organic. Non-organic sources contain HGH and antibiotics.

If you include fish in your diet, make sure it is fresh, not farmed, and local. Farmed fish is often fed growth agents and antibiotics.

The best dairy products are made from raw milk (milk that is not pasteurized). Raw milk products contain all the necessary enzymes and nutrients needed for proper digestion. Pasteurization destroys these natural enzymes. Foods that lack these natural enzymes can contribute to malnutrition and overeating as the body tries to compensate for the lack. See www.realmilk.com for sources of raw milk by state.

Try to eat produce that is organic and in season. Our bodies are sensitive to the change of seasons, and recognize most optimally the nutrition from foods that are local.

Regarding grains, avoid all processed white flour and grains. Eat only whole grains.

If you eat at restaurants and are eating meat or fish, try to choose a source that you are certain of, unless the restaurant is reputable and uses organic sources. Fresh, unfarmed, local fish would be safer than poultry or beef.

Next Week: Preparation and storage of food



NATURE'S MEDICINE: Careful food selection can improve our health. (Stephen Chemin/Getty Images)

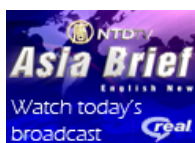
Dr. Muehsam is a holistic physician practicing in New York City.

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Food as Medicine, Part 2

By Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.

Apr 11, 2006

 Special to The [Epoch Times](#)

How we prepare and store our food can affect how our bodies digest and absorb nutrients. How much we eat and in what combination affect these functions as well. In Part 2, we describe what cooking practices to avoid, how best to store food and beverages, suggestions on portion size, and food combinations.

Food Preparation and Storage

Do not use a microwave for any purpose (cooking, reheating, thawing, or boiling water). This form of electromagnetic radiation alters the chemical nature of food and water, severely reducing its nutritional value. Our bodies will experience malnutrition in response to eating microwaved foods, and we may experience cravings and overeat to compensate.

Try to avoid storing food in plastic wrap and plastic containers. Plastics are hydrocarbons that can modulate endogenous hormone activity. If you must, use paper or unbleached parchment paper to separate the food from the plastic.

Try to avoid bottled drinking water in plastic bottles, for the same reason.

Avoid aluminum foil for storing food and cooking. This heavy metal has been found to be associated with Alzheimer's and other chronic neurologic conditions.

Avoid aluminum cookware for the same reason.

Avoid all cookware made of synthetic materials, for example, Teflon.

Glass and ceramic are good materials for cooking. Heavy-gauge stainless steel and cast iron are good choices also, but make sure they aren't coated with Teflon, graphite or other substances.

Food Combining and Portion Size

If animal protein is part of your meal, eat this first, before eating complex carbohydrates, such as potatoes and pasta. To digest protein, the stomach needs concentrated digestive juices, which become diluted as we eat.

If you are eating animal protein, eat between two and four ounces at a meal. Make sure a meal of animal protein has adequate fat. For example, including the skin on the turkey or chicken is actually healthier than eating only the meat.

With the exception of bananas, fruit should be eaten alone as a separate meal or snack. Combining fruit with other food types (especially grains) can result in improper digestion.

Our bodies are happiest with small meals more frequently, rather than large meals many hours apart. Going without meals for too long actually puts our bodies into starvation mode; our metabolism will slow down and we will be in a fat-storing mode. However, each of us is unique with regard to portion size and frequency. Some of us need to eat as frequently as every two hours; other constitutions can space meals four or sometimes even five hours apart.

Each meal should be able to fit into the palms of your two cupped hands; more volume will not be digested.



GLASS JARS: Storing food in glass avoids the problems of food stored in plastic, which can result in compounds in the plastic being absorbed by the food. These compounds have estrogenic effects, which may upset the endocrine balance of the consumers. (Photos.com)

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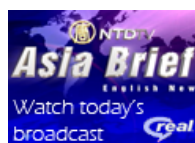
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Food as Medicine, Part 3

By Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.

Apr 16, 2006

 Special to The [Epoch Times](#)

In Parts 1 and 2, I gave general suggestions on food choices, preparation, and storage, details on portion size, and food combining. Part 3 addresses specific food types, beverages, and provides guidelines for making choices and gentle changes.

Sugars and Sweeteners

Avoid all artificial sweeteners. These can confuse your body into thinking it is getting sugar. It will respond by increasing the insulin level, increasing fat storage and increasing sugar cravings.

Avoid refined sugars: cane sugar, brown sugar, fructose, glucose and corn syrup. When shopping, check labels for these hidden sources of sugar. Frequent consumption of refined sugar can lead to obesity and diabetes.

If you use honey as a sweetener, make sure it is raw honey. It contains all the necessary enzymes for digestion and will minimize the insulin effect.

More body-friendly sweeteners include rice syrup, barley malt syrup and Stevia liquid or powder.

Fats

Use high-quality fats and oils that are unrefined, cold-pressed and organic. Refined oils may be processed at high temperatures, which can cause the beneficial effects of these oils to be lost.

Avoid all hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils. They contain trans fatty acids, which have been shown to have adverse effects on blood fats.

Avoid margarine and any other "fake" butters and oils. These also contain trans fats.

Avoid "non-fat" and "low-fat" products. These are not necessarily better for you than full-fat products, and, in fact, can contribute to nutritional deficiencies. Low fat frequently means high carbohydrate, which can make losing weight difficult.

Raw butter is best. It contains more vitamins, minerals and a better quality fat than standard butter. These advantages are enhanced when it is made from raw milk from range-fed cattle. See www.realmilk.com for sources.

Fat does not make you fat. In fact, eating too little fat can keep you fat or make you fat. It is an essential nutrient, and if you don't have enough in your diet, your body will experience malnutrition. When we don't get all the nutrients we need, the body tries to compensate by overeating. Also, the body will hold onto any "extra" body fat when in a stressed state.

Beverages

Try to avoid all iced drinks. Iced drinks inhibit the digestive fire. If you crave these, it is a sign of excess heat in the body. This craving will lessen as energies become balanced.

Avoid carbonated beverages (sodas). These inhibit digestion, absorption and elimination.

Avoid concentrated fruit juices. These have unnaturally high concentrations of sugars.

Room temperature water is the optimal drink.

Do not drink with meals because this dilutes digestive juices. At most, two or three sips of room



THE HIGH AND LOW: Stevia and artificial sweeteners (Louise Valentine/The Epoch Times)

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temperature water are okay, but cold beverages inhibit the digestive process.

Discontinue all caffeinated beverages, including green tea, decaf coffee, decaf tea and decaf sodas. Caffeine is an irritant to the nervous system and can lead to mineral imbalances. Decaf coffee and decaf tea do contain some caffeine.

To ease caffeine withdrawal, try grain coffees, kukicha and bancha teas, but these teas do contain caffeine.

Alcohol is really a poison and toxic to the body. If you find yourself enjoying regularly drinking alcoholic beverages, it's a sign that your body/mind/spirit needs something you're not getting.

Desserts

While desserts are very much a part of our dietary culture, our bodies don't do well having dessert immediately after a meal. The food we have just eaten will not be properly digested.

If you are craving dessert after a meal, it is best to wait for at least an hour. Then ask yourself if you are still hungry for that food. Often you will not be. If you are, ask yourself if it is true hunger, or habit hunger.

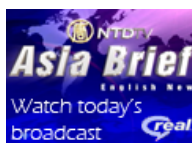
If it is true hunger, by all means, have it. Depriving our bodies of what we are craving can be more harmful than having a particular food.

Over time, as your body/mind/spirit gets into balance, such cravings will lessen.

Next week: Food cravings and how to eat

Dr. Muehsam is a holistic physician practicing in New York City.

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Food as Medicine, Part 4

By Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.

Apr 23, 2006

Cravings and taste preferences are helpful clues about a person's nutritional and energetic balance. It is not only an issue of what we eat, but also how we eat. In this part, I will discuss cravings and mindful eating.

Cravings

Sweet, salty, sour, spicy and bitter are the five principle tastes we experience. If you have strong cravings for one or more of a particular taste, it is a sign of an imbalance.

Cravings for sweets and carbohydrates are very common. Sometimes the cause is physical, digestive or metabolic problems or fatigue. Sometimes the cause is emotional. Sadness or lack can cause us to crave these tastes and food types.

Cravings for other tastes, such as spicy and salty, indicate other types of imbalances in body/mind/spirit.

Try not to deprive yourself when you have strong cravings. This can be more harmful than avoiding the desired tastes.

How to Eat

How we eat is just as important as what we eat. The physiological mechanism of digestion is affected and inhibited by our eating habits. Indigestion can lead to cravings and overeating, because the body's nutritional needs are not being met.

Make time for each meal. Always eat sitting down. Eat mindfully. Before your first bite take time to pause and breathe gently and deeply.

Just eat. Don't read, watch TV, work, or talk on the phone. Digestion and absorption will be inhibited if you are doing anything in addition to eating.

Eat when you are in a relaxed mood. Avoid unpleasant thoughts and stressful conversations at mealtime. These will inhibit the digestion and absorption processes.

Eat slowly, and chew each bite until it is a mushy liquid consistency. Digestion starts in the mouth. By giving our salivary enzymes time to do their job, we can optimize our digestion. Otherwise, food will not be digested or absorbed, and we may become malnourished, have cravings and overeat to compensate for what we are lacking. If eating slowly is a challenge, try putting down your utensils between bites.

If you have tendencies toward emotional overeating, try to do deep abdominal breathing before you eat. Also, it can be helpful to keep a journal where you write your thoughts and feelings in a stream of consciousness style before meals. Pause to get in touch with what you really need, what you are really hungry for. Is it food, or is it something else? Part of my practice is helping patients get in touch with that "something else."

Most importantly, honor yourself with gentleness and patience. All the suggestions above are just that—suggestions. Don't berate or judge yourself if the suggestions feel difficult and hard to follow. As your body/mind/spirit comes more into its natural state of balance, all will come naturally, without effort.

Dr. Muehsam is a holistic physician practicing in New York City.



SWEET CRAVING: If you find yourself craving this kind of food, it may indicate a systemic imbalance or an emotional need. (Photos.com)

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