

FOOD AS MEDICINE: A HOLISTIC PHYSICIAN'S GUIDE TO NUTRITION

Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.



Food as Medicine

Food is our first and our best medicine.

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."

Hippocrates also understood that that our thoughts, attitudes and feelings impact our health, and, in fact, all aspects of our lives. He spoke of the links

between mind, body and soul, and also of the importance of treating the person who had the disease, not the disease that person has. Keeping all of this ancient wisdom in mind: how we think and feel about ourselves, how we think and feel about food, and even how we think and feel when we are eating are, in fact, *more important* than our food choices.

Whatever we choose to eat, we'll digest and absorb it best when we're feeling calm and peaceful. It's all about the science of the nervous system. We need to be in a state of physiologic relaxation to digest and absorb.

Just a little aside on the terms: digestion is the breaking down of food into easily absorbable parts and absorption is the taking in of these more easily absorbable parts.

If we're feeling stressed about anything in our lives, then we're not digesting and absorbing our experiences so easily. And this carries over directly into how we digest and absorb what we eat.

If we're not feeling calm and peaceful when we are eating — and even when we're preparing food — we won't digest and absorb what we're eating optimally. That's literally how we create "indigestion" and "malabsorption" — with our minds.

If we can be kind and gentle with ourselves, if we can feel calm and peaceful about food and around food, we'll be able to experience food as our first and best medicine.

Keep all of this in mind as you read on. And also know that there are no "shoulds," no rights and wrongs. Be gentle and kind with yourself as you explore all that follows.

~ BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF ~

General Guidelines

The following are general guidelines. However, each and every one of us has unique nutritional needs, and how we respond to specific foods is unique and individualized.

Some of us are more sensitive to food choices than others, and your constitution may be more or less tolerant to some of the suggestions below.

Additionally, while a certain food substance in one individual may be curative, in another it may aggravate symptoms or a condition. In my one-on-one work with people, I provide specific details regarding one's individual constitution and dietary needs, including meal schedule, frequency of meals, and snacks. (If you're interested in connecting with me for personalized guidance, please feel free to reach out to me directly. We can work via phone, Skype or in person.)

Keep in mind that your body has all the wisdom it needs to heal itself, and that there are no "good" foods or "bad" foods. Cravings for foods and/or substances considered "unhealthy" are merely signs that on one or more levels (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually) you are not getting all that you need.

Finally, regarding any change in food habits: make changes gradually, and don't judge your process. It's most important to be gentle with yourself during any process of changing food habits, so that you can not only experience the healing power of food, but also find your meals pleasurable and satisfying.

~ ON DIETS ~

On Specific Diets and Dietary Approaches

A vast arena of information abounds on diets and dietary approaches, ethical and otherwise. And there's so much information that it can feel overwhelming, confusing and even contradictory at times.

Here are some suggestions to help you to get clear: First, while each and every one of us has unique nutritional needs, these needs aren't fixed. They change over time. They'll vary according to time of day, day, month, season, and our state of health and well-being. Understanding this fundamental aspect of our nature, I advocate an openness to working with your individual needs, rather than seeking loyalty to a specific diet or dietary approach.

For example, some of us may benefit from a dairy-free, meat-free diet during a particular period in our lives. But such an approach may not be

beneficial for the long term. In fact, it's very common that health issues can be aggravated by remaining on a particular dietary regime that may not address both our individual constitutional needs and their varying nature.

For those of you who may have ethical and spiritual reasons for a particular dietary approach (e.g. veganism, vegetarianism), I ask you to take pause to reconsider these if your health is compromised as a result.

Finally, I have no hard and fast rules about what one “should” be eating. I’m open to all dietary approaches and seek to support what is best for your individual health and well-being. For one person, I may suggest a vegan approach, for another, a “keto” diet, and yet another, omnivorous one. In my work with individuals, I determine one’s unique needs accordingly.

~ PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ~

Practical Tools: What, When, Where and How to Eat

1. Food choices

- 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 food that is in season whenever possible. Home prepared is optimal.
- Try to avoid frozen food and leftovers. Food that is cooked and then refrigerated or frozen has less nutritional value. When we eat food that is lacking in nutritional value, we may develop cravings, and we may overeat to compensate for inadequate nutrition.
- If I am prescribing animal protein (beef, poultry), try to get organic. Non-organic sources contain HGH (human growth hormone) and antibiotics. HGH can affect endogenous hormone activity, and is best avoided, especially if you are dealing with male or female reproductive organ issues (e.g. breast, uterine, ovarian, prostate). A link between HGH and cancer has been suggested. 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 I am prescribing dairy products, try to get organic. Non-organic sources contain HGH and antibiotics.

- If I am prescribing fish, try to get fresh, not farmed, and local. Farmed fish is often fed growth agents and antibiotics. However, if fresh is not possible, some frozen fish is marked as free from growth agents and antibiotics, and this is more optimal than farmed fish that may have these added agents.
- Optimal 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. Non-organic fruit and vegetables have been exposed to pesticides, which can affect endogenous hormone activity. A link between pesticides and cancer has been suggested. Non-organic produce with skin is okay: e.g. bananas, avocados, citrus.
- Try to eat produce that is in season. Our bodies are sensitive to the change of seasons, and recognize most optimally the nutrition from foods that are seasonal and local.
- Regarding grains, try to avoid all processed white flour and grains. Eat only whole grains, if I'm prescribing them. I can give you specific details regarding grains for your constitution.
- If you eat out at restaurants, and I have prescribed animal protein, try to choose a source that you are certain of, unless the restaurant is reputable and uses organic/"clean" sources. Fresh, unfarmed, local fish would be more optimal than poultry or beef.

~ FOOD PREPARATION & STORAGE ~

2. 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/water, reducing its nutritional value.
- Our bodies can 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 that allow direct contact between the food and the plastic. Plastics are hydrocarbons that can modulate endogenous hormone activity. You can 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 tin 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: e.g. Teflon, and the like.
- 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.

~ HOW TO EAT ~

3. Food combining and portion size:

- If I've prescribed animal protein, eat this first, before complex carbohydrates (e.g. vegetables, grains.) To digest protein, the stomach needs concentrated digestive juices which become diluted as we eat.
- If you are eating animal protein, eat between 2 and 4 ounces at a meal, according to my directions for your constitution.
- Make sure a meal of animal protein has adequate fat. For example, including the skin on the turkey or chicken can be healthier for you than eating only the meat, unless I've suggested otherwise, based on your constitutional evaluation.
- Follow the same approach for any vegetarian protein: eat protein before carbohydrates to allow for adequate digestion.
- 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 fat storing mode, and we may have cravings and overeat to compensate.

- Each of us is unique with regard to portion size and frequency, and I evaluate these individually. Some of us need to eat as frequently as every two hours, other constitutions can space our meals 4 or sometimes even 5 hours apart.
- Each meal should be able to fit into the palms of your two cupped hands — more volume will not be digested.

~ ON SUGAR & SWEETENERS ~

4. About sugars and sweeteners:

- Avoid all artificial sweeteners. These can confuse your body into thinking it is getting sugar. It will respond with an increase in insulin, increasing fat storage and deposition, and increasing sugar cravings.
- Avoid refined sugars: cane sugar, brown sugar, fructose, glucose, corn syrup. When shopping, check labels for these hidden sources of sugar.
If I have suggested honey as a sweetener, raw honey is optimal. This contains all the necessary enzymes for digestion and will minimize the insulin effect.
- Other more friendly types of sweeteners include rice syrup and barley malt syrup depending on your constitution and stevia liquid or powder.

~ ON FATS ~

5. About fats:

- Use high quality fats and oils: unrefined, cold-pressed, and ideally, organic.
- Avoid all hydrogenated oils and partially hydrogenated oils.
- Avoid margarine and any other “fake” butters and oils.
- Avoid “non-fat” and “low-fat” products, unless I have given you other specific instructions for your constitutional needs. These are not necessarily better for you than full fat products, and in fact, can contribute to nutritional deficiencies, overweight, and difficulty losing weight.
- As above, raw butter is best. See www.realmilk.com for sources.

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

~ ON BEVERAGES ~

6. About beverages:

- Try to avoid all iced drinks. Iced drinks inhibit the digestive fire. If you crave these, this is a sign of an imbalance. It will lessen as we work together to balance energies.
- 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 most optimal drink.
- Do not drink with meals because this dilutes digestive juices. At most, 2-3 sips of room temperature water are okay. As above, cold beverages inhibit the digestive process.
- I may suggest stopping caffeinated beverages: coffee, black tea, green tea, "decaf" coffee, "decaf" tea and "decaf" sodas. Green tea has significant caffeine, and is not optimal for some constitutions.
- To ease caffeine withdrawal, try "grain" coffees, and kukicha and bancha teas, but note these teas do contain some caffeine. Drink herbal teas according to your constitution. I can suggest which herbal teas best suit your constitution.
- About alcohol: some constitutions tolerate it more than others. However, it can be toxic to the body for all constitutions. If you find yourself overly enjoying regular drinking, it may be a sign that your body/mind/spirit needs something you're not getting. We can work together to address this.

~ ON DESSERTS ~

7. About 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 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, emotional 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.

~ TASTES & CRAVINGS ~

8. About taste, cravings, spices, and seasonings:

- Sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and spicy are the five principal tastes that we experience. If you have strong cravings for one or more particular tastes, this is a sign of an imbalance. Again, over time, strong taste desires will lessen.
- Cravings for sweets and carbohydrates are very common signs of imbalance. Sometimes the cause is physical. Digestive issues, metabolism issues and fatigue can all cause sweet cravings. Sometimes the cause is on the emotional level: often feelings of 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.
- Salt is a necessary nutrient, and often underused because of beliefs regarding its effects on the cardiovascular system. This effect varies according to constitution. Use sea salt or Ayurvedic mineral salt ("black salt.") Avoid salt with iodide.
- Try not to deprive yourself when you have strong cravings — this can be more harmful than avoiding them.
- In my work with patients, I make suggestions to satisfy taste cravings that will ease the transition into more optimal state of

balance, and specific suggestions regarding spices and seasonings for an individual's constitution.

~ MINDFUL EATING ~

9. How to eat:

- How we eat is just as important as what we eat. The physiologic mechanism of digestion is affected and inhibited by our meal habits. Maldigestion can lead to cravings and overeating because the body's nutritional needs are not being met.
- If you are preparing your meals, be aware that your intention and mood affect your food preparation and thus your digestion.
- If you eat out at restaurants, be aware that the intention and mood of the cook will affect your food and thus your digestion. Similarly, the environment of the restaurant, the attitude, mood and energy of its staff, will affect your food, and thus your digestion.
- Make time for each meal.
- Always eat sitting down.
- Eat mindfully.
- Before your first bite, take time to pause and breathe gently and deeply.
- Eat and only eat (don't read, watch TV, do work, 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 meal time. These will inhibit the digestion and absorption processes.
- Try to eat slowly and chew each bite until it is a mushy liquid consistency. Digestion starts in the mouth, and 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 can be malnourished, may 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 to emotional overeating, try to do deep abdominal breathing before you eat. Also, journaling thoughts and feelings in a stream of consciousness style can be helpful before meals. Pause to get in touch with what you are really

needing, what you are really hungry for. Is it food, or is it something else? I will give you more details if this is a special challenge for you.

~ BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF ~

Most importantly, honor yourself with gentleness and patience. All the suggestions above are just that – suggestions. Don't berate or judge yourself if these feel difficult and hard to follow. And don't worry that you'll might do harm to or compromise your health in any way if you don't follow all of these suggestions. Worrying can be more damaging than not following the guidelines. Peace of mind around it all is most important. As your body/mind/spirit comes more into its natural state of balance, all will come naturally, without effort.

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Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.
TRANSFORMATIONAL MEDICINE™
A Whole Person Approach to Healing, Wellness and Living
www.transformationalmedicine.org
transformationalmedicine@gmail.com
212-946-5700

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