

COMMON SENSE NUTRITION

What we eat has an impact on every area of our lives. Good nutrition can increase energy and stamina, help manage weight, balance moods, and improve the look of skin, hair and nails. Many people are overwhelmed by all the information available on nutrition, and think it is just too complicated. But eating well doesn't have to be difficult, and small changes over time can be easier to stick with than a complete dietary overhaul. In my opinion, how you eat is equally important as what you eat. The quality of the food, the pleasure of eating it, the state of mind you're in while eating, and being fully present to the experience of eating will help you consume the correct amount of food and get the maximum benefit from it. When any of those factors is ignored or short-changed, we may eat more than the optimal amount and absorb less nutrients.

Carbohydrates

All carbs are not created equal. Whenever possible, replace the simple carbohydrates from white flour with the complex carbohydrates of whole grains. And beware of the claim of "Whole Grains" on many packages – it just means the product contains SOME quantity of whole grain. Look to be sure the first ingredient listed is a whole grain or that the package says 100% whole grain. The nutritional value of simple carbs results in higher insulin levels, which causes the body to store more fat. Consider changing to brown rice, quinoa, barley, oats, beans, sprouted breads, lentils, millet, and other whole grain products, and be aware of the sweetening agents used.

Protein

Replace processed and commercially produced meats with organic, free range, hormone free, grass-fed meats and eggs. Fresh wild fish and tofu, tempeh, and nuts can also be great sources of protein. If you eliminate meat, some experts say that the easiest way to ensure your body gets the right combination to produce a complete protein is to eat whole grains at the same meal as the alternative protein source.

Fats

Your body actually NEEDS fat to function. Eliminating fat from your diet can lead to moodiness, dry skin and hair, and an overall lack of luster. Like carbs, though, all fats are not good for your body. Whenever possible, avoid hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils, Olestra, margarine and similar spreads, cottonseed oil, and most commercial cooking oils. Instead, try cooking with olive, sesame, or coconut oil, (organic is best); sunflower, flaxseed and other oils are also available. Try to avoid over-processed oils, opting for expertly processed unrefined organic sources when possible. Hormone free, farm-fresh, organic butter replaces margarine, as does a product called "Ghee", which is a clarified butter. Other good sources of healthy fats are avocados, nuts and nut butters, olives, fresh fish, and organic dairy products.

Sweeteners

Replace refined white sugar and artificial sweeteners with whole choices like raw honey, organic maple syrup, barley malt, stevia (all-natural herbal source), or sucanat (true brown sugar from cane juice). When possible, avoid products with fructose, glucose, or corn syrup listed in the ingredients in favor of products sweetened with cane juice, apple juice or one of the above sweeteners. Artificial sweeteners can actually cause weight gain because the body releases insulin to break down what it perceives as sugar. With no real sugar, the insulin is left to perform its only other task, which is to tell the body to store fat.

Mindful Eating

Prepare meals in the most pleasing atmosphere; infuse them with love. Before each meal, take 5 full, deep belly breaths to center and relax. Eliminate any outside distractions like reading or TV, giving your full attention to eating and your companions, keeping the conversation light and pleasant. Observe the colors and aromas of your food, the tastes and textures. Be completely present. If you find your thoughts drifting, gently come back to the moment, using your senses to bring you back (sight, sound, smell, taste, and feel). Take quick breaks from eating to breathe fully and deeply, to notice what's around you. Being fully present helps your body better absorb the nutrients, helps you realize when you're full, and helps you metabolize the fuel most efficiently. Breathing provides the oxygen your body needs to create the fire to burn the fuel. Deep breathing also helps you maintain a sense of calm that ensures optimal absorption, nutrition, metabolism, and satisfaction.

