

Bits & Bites

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



We continue our series of notes focusing on the holistic approach to medicine—the emphasis on physical, emotional and spiritual health.

Today's topic: Nutrition

Nutrition is defined as the process by which we take in and utilize food substances; it is also described as a science that studies the relationship between diet and health. It is a huge field, with constant research serving to enhance our lives with recommendations for healthier food choices and regimens.

Nutrients: There are five essential nutrients that our bodies need: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals. Add water and fiber to the list and we have the basics to build and maintain health.

Carbohydrates are classified as complex carbohydrates (polysaccharides) because they are high in sugar content, and simple carbohydrates, which are metabolized quickly and thus raise blood sugar level more quickly. Carbohydrates play a major role in maintaining the immune system, and many other processes as well. They are the most common source of energy. Foods high in “carbs” include sugars and starches, such as breads, pastas, beans, potatoes, and cereals.

Protein is composed of amino acids that are the body's structural material, essential for growth. Dietary sources of protein include meats, eggs, grains, dairy products, nuts, and legumes. Our bodies use the protein we eat to produce specialized molecules that have specific jobs. For example, our bodies use protein to make hemoglobin, which carries oxygen throughout the body. Certain proteins are created just for proactive protection from disease! To calculate your protein needs, here is a rule of thumb: plan to eat about .5 gram of protein for every pound of body weight (a gram for every 2 pounds). Read the labels on foods to help estimate the amount of protein you are ingesting.

Fats are essential for digestion; the problem, of course, is that many fats are non-essential and we eat far too many of them! The “omega” fatty acids have been discovered to be crucial for maintaining health. Sources for omega fatty acids: wheat germ, cold water fish such as salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel. Reading labels on products will differentiate between saturated and unsaturated fats (to tell them apart, generally saturated fat is solid at room temperature and unsaturated is a liquid). The idea is to try to include more of the polyunsaturated fats in your diet, and avoid the saturated fats found in beef and pork, and dairy products. (Eat beef and pork that are well trimmed, and low-fat dairy products.)

Vitamins and Minerals are essential in many different ways. Deficiencies in vitamins and/or minerals may cause such things as goiter, scurvy, osteoporosis, weak immune system, disorders of cell metabolism, certain forms of cancer, premature aging eating—and many others! Twelve vitamins and about the same numbers of minerals are categorized as “essential” nutrients. In recent years, literally thousands of phytochemicals (plant-based substances) have been discovered in fresh vegetables. (Your mother was right, *eat your vegetables!*)

Fiber and Water are also essential to digestion and healthy bodies. Dietary fiber consists largely of cellulose that is indigestible, so it moves through the digestive tract as bulk. Fruits and vegetables are rich in dietary fiber, stimulating the muscu-

lar contractions that move the digestive process along. Both soluble and insoluble fiber have specific jobs that are beneficial to us.

Water makes up about 70% of the human body. For most people it is virtually impossible to drink too much water, but it can be dangerous to drink too little, especially in hot weather and while exercising. Sources vary on recommendations of how much water we should drink daily; about 20% of water intake comes with food, and the rest from drinking water and other fluids. Some experts say that 8 to 10 glasses of water daily is the minimum needed to maintain proper hydration.

We have barely cracked the surface of information about nutrition. It's not easy in these days of processed food and drink to maintain the proper levels of all nutrients. Label-reading has become an important part of shopping for the family table. Briefly, here are some “bad guys” to avoid:

High Fructose Corn Syrup: This stuff is in an amazing number of canned, preserved and carbonated items. It comes from corn, rather than cane or beets, and is used by manufacturers because it has a very high sweet taste, and is inexpensive; it gives us absolutely NO food value, and at the same time, changes the way we digest the sweetener, creating a craving for even more sugar.

Aspartame: One of many artificial sweeteners which definitely should be avoided at all costs. Aspartame (used in such sweeteners as Equal and Nutrasweet) is used in many of the carbonated sugar-free sodas, and is highly controversial; while it's been approved by the FDA, it is suspected to be a direct cause of many disorders. Good advice is to discontinue drinking diet drinks which contain aspartame; however, there's a trick: many regular soft drinks contain High Fructose Corn Syrup, which is more bad news! A few manufacturers are now producing beverages with plain old sugar, so if you are a dedicated user of sodas (and many of us are, it seems), look for the ones without either HFCS or Aspartame. Again, read that label.

MSG: Monosodium glutamate is widely used as a preservative, especially in oriental foods. Still under scientific study, but considered a danger to health with quite a list of possible side effects: numbness and tingling in neck and shoulders, chest pain and rapid heart beat, weakness and sweating, even eye damage. This is just a partial list of dangers of MSG, enough to raise a red flag if you are looking for nutritious ways to feed yourself and your family.

There are many more names to add to the “bad” list. If you are into cruising the net, you might want to look up some of these: Copper, hydrogenated fats, artificial colors and flavorings, nitrates, sulfates, aluminum. Hydrogenated fats will raise your “bad” cholesterol and lower the “good”—raising your risk of heart disease; nitrates contain carcinogens; sulfates cause severe allergic reactions in some people; and aluminum is present in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. And the list goes on. Sound serious? It is.

Many thanks to Heather Lewis, local nutrition expert and massage therapist, for her help in bringing this information to us. Heather has taught nutrition classes at the Vernonia Learning Center, and plans to continue to do so in the future (not right away, however, as the Center is now being used for the flood recovery effort. Heather says, “If people desire information during this time, I can offer small classes at my house after the first of January.” Heather's phone: 503-429-4677, email aletheiaceu@yahoo.com.

We welcome comments and questions. You may contact us c/o the Independent, 725 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064. Email: health@the-Independent.net.

This is your chance to become an ombudsman

Volunteer advocates and investigators are needed to serve as ombudsmen for residents of nursing homes, residential care

facilities, assisted living facilities and adult foster care homes. The Office of the Long Term Care Ombudsman will

train volunteers on the aging process, communication skills, problem-solving skills, investigation and other ombudsman skills. The certification training will begin on Thursday, January 10, in Portland.

As Certified Ombudsmen, the volunteers work to improve the quality of residents' lives, by identifying and investigating complaints and concerns on behalf of the residents, then working with the facilities to make changes. The typical concerns ombudsmen address

cover a broad range, and often include resident care; residents' rights, such as privacy, respect and dignity; and quality of life concerns such as appropriate activities and meals. “The volunteers make a tremendous difference in the lives of the residents,” says Kathy Walter, Program Administrator, “They are well prepared and effective.”

For information about the program or to learn how to get involved, contact Kathy Walter at 1-800-522-2602.



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