

FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PROVIDE OUR BODIES WITH ALL THE SUGAR WE REQUIRE AND ARE THE BEST SOURCES FOR NATURAL SUGARS. THEY ALSO SUPPLY US WITH IMMUNE-BOOSTING CHEMICALS AND ANTIOXIDANTS. IF YOU MUST USE SWEETENERS, USE MAPLE SYRUP, MAPLE CRYSTALS, BROWN RICE SYRUP, DATE SUGAR OR PURÉED FRUITS.

OPTIMUM HEALTH

The barbecues and lawn furniture have been put away. Beautiful russets and yellows color the trees. The air is cool and crisp. Autumn has arrived. As you usher in the change of season, why not also usher in some changes in your eating habits?

To maintain optimum health, it is vital for our bodies to be supplied with the proper nutrients for the support, repair and regeneration of our cells. What we eat has a direct impact on our health. We can maintain our zest for living at any age and feel better at sixty than we did at thirty if we make some healthful changes in our diet now. Here are a few guidelines to help you on your journey to optimum health.

Replace processed food with whole foods.

Whole foods are foods in their unrefined, edible state; they have not been separated, broken down or processed in a factory. Refined foods are highly processed, lacking the vitamins and minerals needed to support full immune function. Whenever possible, buy organic fruits and vegetables—especially strawberries, peaches, apples, cherries, bell peppers, spinach, celery and string beans—as their non-organic counterparts are the most heavily sprayed with pesticides. Eat a variety of whole grains, beans, soy, hormone/antibiotic-free meats and dairy products. By maintaining a well-balanced, whole foods diet, you will even see improvements in your hair, skin and nails.

Increase consumption of omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3 fatty acids play an important role in cell formation and are essential for proper brain function; they also protect the heart from plaque formation. Eating processed foods depletes these fatty acids. Good sources of omega-3s are salmon, herring, sardines, canned albacore white tuna, walnuts and flax seeds.

Increase your intake of raw foods.

As we age, our bodies become less efficient at producing digestive enzymes. Poorly digested food can lead to disorders that may be debilitating to the body. Raw foods naturally provide the enzymes we need as we get older. Try to eat at least 50 percent of your food raw. Foods high in enzymes are avocado, papaya, pineapple, banana, mango, apple, alfalfa, barley grass, cabbage and most green plants.

Omit partially hydrogenated oils (TFAs) from your diet.

Trans fatty acids (TFAs) are a chemically manufactured blend of inexpensive oils, and they can be found in many foods. If products made with TFAs can have a shelf life of two or more years, imagine how long they can sit in your body and cause damage! TFAs have been shown

to compromise the integrity of our cells and have been linked to heart disease, diabetes, weakened immune system response and the liver's inability to detoxify. Their effects are cumulative; over time, they can wreak havoc on our cells and compromise our health. Replace your vegetable oil, shortening and margarine with extra virgin olive oil, flax seed oil, coconut oil, palm oil, unrefined sesame oil and butter.

Supplement with a multivitamin.

The soil in which our fruits and vegetables are grown is often depleted of essential nutrients from overuse and pesticides. Therefore, even with a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, you should take a daily vitamin and mineral supplement. Adequate intake of vitamins A, B1, B3, B6, B12 and C and minerals, calcium and iron will help to prevent the development of degenerative diseases.

Omit preservatives, chemical additives, artificial sweeteners and processed sugars.

Read labels! If you can't pronounce the name of the ingredient, you probably shouldn't be eating it. Look for food items with natural preservatives like vitamin E. The harmful effects of artificial sweeteners and processed sugars are well documented; both deplete our bodies of important nutrients. Fresh fruits and vegetables provide our bodies with all the sugar we require and are the best sources for natural sugars. They also supply us with immune-boosting chemicals and antioxidants. If you must use sweeteners, use maple syrup, maple crystals, brown rice syrup, date sugar or puréed fruits.

Incorporate foods rich in antioxidants into your diet.

Antioxidants are natural compounds that help protect the body from free radicals (atoms that can cause damage to cells, impairing the immune system and leading to infections, various degenerative diseases and cancer). According to the USDA, these are the top 10 antioxidant-rich foods: small red beans (Mexican red beans), blueberries (wild), red kidney beans, pinto beans, blueberries (cultivated), cranberries, artichokes (cooked), blackberries, prunes and raspberries. For optimal health, partake of antioxidant-rich foods daily.

Making significant changes in your diet takes determination and commitment. Try incorporating one change weekly or monthly to make the transition to a more healthful lifestyle more gradual. Over time, you will feel the energy and see the physical results of a healthier, happier and more youthful you.

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