

What are Healthy Food Choices?

Article by Charlie Ross DO, DipABLM

I have been an osteopathic physician for about 50 years. I used to believe that I knew what foods were healthy to eat... even though I had no formal training in this area. Fourteen years ago, I changed what I put in my mouth for my fuel. The transformation I experienced was amazing. Fifty years ago, the evidence for healthy nutrition choices was in infancy. Now, there is a much better body of science to help us decide the healthiest food choices. However, cultural tradition, myths, and misinformation have caused much confusion and controversy.

When I ask people: "Are you eating healthy foods?", the answer is frequently: "Yes, I eat healthy foods." But when I follow with, "How have you decided that the food choices you make are actually healthy?", a long pause often ensues. This pause is a reflection of the fact that most of us have not given much thought to why we eat what we eat and what the healthiest choices might be. And just because we have learned to like certain foods does not ensure that those foods are actually promoting our health. In fact, if you look around, you will find that the foods we have been enjoying, as a society, have led to chronic illnesses such as obesity, heart attacks and strokes, diabetes, kidney diseases, stomach problems, arthritis, dementia, and other chronic illnesses. Let me share with you some of the things I have learned about healthy food choices.



Photo by Auriana Koutnik

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If you put diesel gasoline in a car that requires regular gasoline... it just doesn't run as well and might not run at all. Same with our food choices. Let's consider what in our anatomy points us to what fuel sources might be the healthiest. Our world contains food choices from plants or from animals. If we are speculating as to which of these two choices might work best in our body, let us first look to our teeth. Do your teeth resemble those of a lion or tiger or alligator? Or are your teeth mostly like an elephant, giraffe, or gorilla? Next, let's compare the length of our intestinal tract. Our intestinal tract is long...over 30 feet in length. Why is our intestinal tract so long? Let's put this together. Long intestinal tract to handle digestion of plant foods and molars to grind these plant foods. Meat-eating mammals in our world have sharp, long teeth for biting, ripping and tearing meat flesh. These same mammals have short intestinal lengths—unlike our own long intestinal lengths. Looking closely at our anatomy, you might conclude that we are born to eat plant foods.

Now let's look around the world to see which human populations have lived the longest and the healthiest. What do they eat? Dan Buettner searched the world about 20 years ago and reported on the Blue Zones... five cultures that lived the longest and were the healthiest: Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Icaria, Greece; Nicoya, Costa Rica; and the Seventh Day Adventists of Loma Linda, California. These Blue Zone inhabitants were eating 90-95% plant foods and living into their 90s and 100s—not just living, but living healthy and well, for the most part avoiding chronic illnesses in their last decade of life.

Next, let's look at our microbiome. A microbiome is the collection of bacteria and other organisms that live near the end of our intestinal tract. If we feed these bacteria their preferred foods, they give us back chemicals like butyrate (short chain fatty acid) which reduces inflammation in the body, and serotonin (a feel-good, anti-anxiety, anti-depressant hormone). If we starve our microbiome, we get less of these important chemicals. What are the foods our microbiome bacteria thrive on? Fiber from the plant foods we eat. By the way, animal foods contain no fiber.

A myth is circulating in our culture that we are protein deficient. What are the building blocks of all protein? Twenty amino acids, some that we can make on our own and some

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that are essential that we cannot manufacture. The science demonstrates that all plants have all the amino acids, both essential and non-essential that we require for our protein requirements. Other animals eat these plants and make their own protein. We can do the same. If we choose animals for our main protein source, we will miss out on the fiber we need, and all we get is protein and fat. Lack of fiber is not good for our microbiome and not good to reduce chronic illnesses. For every 10 grams of fiber added to the diet, you get about a 10% reduction in cardiovascular disease, a 4-7% reduction in breast cancer and about a 10% reduction in colon cancer. Also, for those who are trying to lose weight, adding 14 grams of fiber to your daily intake will lead you to be just as full and satisfied eating 10% less calories. Let's next explore why....

Back to our anatomy. We have L cells in our body that make our own Ozempic (GLP-1). Yes, that is the current weight loss craze drug. And yes, let me repeat.... we can make our own without spending a bundle for a drug that has side effects and distracts us from choosing healthy foods. These L cells are located low down in our intestinal tract. They need stimulation from carbohydrate, protein, or fat to release the GLP-1. Animal foods do not stimulate the L cells because they are composed of cells that have cell membranes. Plants have cells that have cell walls (these cell walls are fiber). Cell membranes are easily broken down by the hydrochloric acid in our stomach and the pancreatic juices in the upper intestine. When the cell membrane breaks it releases the carbohydrate, protein, and fat high up in the intestine where it is largely absorbed. So, there is no significant L cell stimulation with any animal food. Plant-based whole foods have cell walls that do not get broken by the upper intestinal digestive juices.

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Join Live Lifestyle Medicine's Next Community Walk

Article by Debby Coulthard

About a dozen of us set off in January on Eugene Plant Based Providers inaugural indoor community winter walk at Valley River Center. Honestly, I didn't expect to like walking in a mall, but I was happily surprised to find my bias busted and to truly enjoy the experience. It's a great space to be able to extend our walks beyond the fair weather months. I loved being sheltered from the cold and able to chat and enjoy the camaraderie not only of fellow walkers in our group, but also a variety of other walkers doing the same all over the mall. Bodies moving, smiles and animated conversations happening, coffee available, airy wide



Photo by Trish Kingsbauer

open space to walk unimpeded, not to mention bathrooms available! February's walk was similarly successful. A great way to begin the day!

Please join us for our next walk on Saturday, March 21 at 9 a.m. We meet by the Cafe Aroma coffee shop, between JC Penny and the Verizon Wireless Store. A big thank you to Valley River Center for opening its doors early to support walkers not only in inclement weather, but at all times of the year.

Tamera's Delicious Breakfast Recipes

*Recipes from Food For Life
Instructor Tamera Wilhite*

SCRAMBLED TOFU

INGREDIENTS

1 16-oz package of water-packed tofu
½ cup nutritional yeast
1 tsp indian black salt (kala namak)
1 tablespoon soy sauce or tamari
¼ to ½ teaspoon turmeric
Sprinkle of black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Drain the tofu, then wrap it in a kitchen towel and place something heavy on it so the water is absorbed. After 15 minutes, crumble the tofu into a bowl and stir in the remaining ingredients.
2. You can fry in a non-stick pan without oil or bake in the oven on a cookie sheet at 350 for 15 minutes, flip tofu over and cook for another 10 minutes or until golden brown.

BREAKFAST BAKED POTATOES

Steam any type of potato until fork tender (can be refrigerated at this point and baked later). After the potatoes have cooled, cut them into chunks and put into a bowl. Sprinkle with various seasonings, then spread onto a cookie sheet and bake at 375 F until golden brown (about 20 minutes).

BANANA OATMEAL PANCAKES

INGREDIENTS

1 cup oats (I use Costco's Farmers we Know organic rolled oats)
½ cup plant milk (I use Trader Joe's organic soy milk)
2 Tablespoons maple syrup
1 ripe banana
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth and then let set for a few minutes while a non-stick pan heats.
2. Cook for a couple minutes on each side. Enjoy!

Don't Miss Tamera's Upcoming Cooking Demo!

Interested in learning how to prepare delicious and healthy plant-based dishes? Join us on Tuesday, March 10, from 7-8:30 p.m. for a free, plant-based cooking demonstration with Food For Life Instructor Tamera Wilhite, at the First Christian Church of Springfield. Tamera will show participants how to cook a delicious meal. Tamera also offers cooking classes throughout the year. For more information, contact Tamera at 541-221-3585 or email tamera@powerplatenutrition.com.

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Plant-based whole foods have cell walls that do not get broken by the upper intestinal digestive juices. The fiber in the cell walls of plants needs to be fermented by the bacteria in our microbiome (which is located way down in our intestinal tract by the L cells). So whole plant foods stimulate our L cells and we get the GLP-1 benefits! How cool is that!

It's worth noting that when you highly process a plant food and break apart its cell membranes (think white bread, flour, cookies, oils), much of the nutrients are released before hitting the stomach and upper intestine... so they are rapidly absorbed and do not stimulate the L cells. This is one of the reasons why highly processed foods are not so healthy.

I hope this article piques your interest to further explore what food choices you consider healthy as you continue on your journey on this planet. And if you are still confused, check out www.livelifestylemedicine.com and www.nutritionfacts.org for more information.

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- Charlie Ross



Photo by Auriana Koutnik

Bringing lifestyle medicine to the community, to improve lives, one plant-based kitchen at a time...

www.livelifestylemedicine.com

