

Food that is Healing

By Howard Woodwind Morningstar, MD

*“For the earth who grew these seeds for us,
for the wind, for the water, for the sun,
for the seeds whose life we are releasing:*

We are grateful.

May we be nourished.

May we grow wise with these gifts.”

Mother nature has blessed us with such an incredible variety of delicious and nutritious foods. We literally “are what we eat”, as we transform our food’s energy into thoughts, actions and our physical selves. But our diet is more than just vitamins, minerals and calories for the moment’s metabolism. When we consume healthy foods with a sense of gratitude, they become a flowing stream of gifts that materially connects us with Gaia’s timeless energy flow.

During the 20 th century, many became convinced that science’s ability to create new drugs would ultimately resolve humanity’s quest for optimal health. As a result, the quick fix of allopathic drugs became popular as substitutes for Mother nature’s healing wisdom. Even in natural medicine the most exotic substances are often preferred simply because they are novel and mysterious.

But many familiar foods have powerful healing properties and have been used as medicines throughout the world since before the dawn of history. Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz returning home to find that she didn’t need to go further than her own backyard to find her heart’s desire, we may discover that the simple medicines we need to stay vital and healthy are already in our gardens, refrigerators, pantries and root cellars.

Good eating for healthy people

Eat a wide variety of whole, fresh foods that are locally produced and are in season. Organic foods often cost more, but they don’t deplete the earth’s future fertility for this moment’s profit. It’s best to grow and prepare food lovingly, with intention to nourish and give back to the earth. When you are gardening, shopping for or cooking food, remember that the energy put into food at every level counts! Whatever one’s religious beliefs, it’s a good idea to be grateful for the abundance that sustains us in every moment.

Choose foods that are processed as little as possible after harvest. Mother nature designed them for us without labels or lists of ingredients. Try to keep regular eating habits and drink at least six glasses of pure water a day, preferably between meals.

Include plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables in your diet. Emphasize vegetarian protein sources, including grains, nuts, seeds, mushrooms and beans. These are always cholesterol free and are the ecological choice, as they produce up to twenty times more protein per acre than beef.

It's best to minimize your intake of foods that are fried or high in fats, especially saturated fats. Avoid chemically altered or highly processed foods, such as those containing refined "white" or "enriched" flours and sugars. When you pay attention to your body's inner wisdom you'll learn to eat what's best for you. When you do eat something that you know isn't good for you, don't let guilt consume you. Feeling guilty about dietary indiscretions can be more harmful than the actual chemical effects of sugars, fats or artificial additives.

Healing qualities of some familiar foods

Apples have long been used for "acidosis, gout, rheumatism, all liver and gallbladder trouble, and nervous and skin diseases caused by sluggish liver", according to ancient medical texts. Since the liver works to detoxify and purify the blood, including apples in your diet can correct the liver congestion that is often at the root of many medical illnesses. It's best to eat them whole and raw, but you can also bake, stew, sauce, or juice them.

Apples contain cancer inhibitors, such as chlorogenic acid, and are rich in antioxidants that protect cells from free radical damage. They also contain active virus fighting and immune stimulating compounds. A recent study showed that university students that eat the proverbial "apple a day" really do keep the doctor away. These students needed medical care for colds and other infections 33% less often than their classmates.

Apples are excellent tonics for the heart and circulation. Like most fruits, they contain soluble fibers such as pectin that reduce blood pressure and harmful LDL cholesterol levels, while increasing beneficial HDL.

Whole apples, like all high fiber foods help regulate blood sugar by providing a slow and sustained release of carbohydrates as they are digested. This moderates insulin fluctuations, especially helpful for diabetics and for individuals trying to lose weight.

Soybeans and other legumes are especially good for heart and circulation, as they help lower blood pressure while reducing LDL and raising HDL cholesterol levels. They can prevent and actually help reverse atherosclerosis, the artery clogging plaques that are responsible for heart attacks and many strokes.

The fiber in beans is helpful for promoting regular bowel movements, especially important since chronic constipation increases risk of colon and other digestive cancers. Beans help encourage growth of beneficial bacteria in the intestines, which in turn supports optimal digestive function. Fermented soy products such as tempe and miso also contain protease inhibitors which directly

inhibit digestive cancers.

Soybeans are rich in phytoestrogens, helpful in relieving symptoms of menopause. They also may reduce a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

All legumes are high in pectin and other water soluble fibers, which help regulate glucose levels, especially helpful for those with impaired glucose tolerance and diabetes. Legume proteins are deficient in the essential amino acids tryptophan and methionine, so combine them with whole grains to make "complete" protein dishes.

Those who regularly eat cabbage, as well as olive oil and yogurt may enjoy an increased life span.

For longevity, eat **Cabbage** and its relatives broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale and bok choy. They all are rich in antioxidants and bioflavonoids that protect against cancer while helping the liver metabolize toxins. These vegetables are a great source of immune boosting selenium and sulfur compounds, and folate, important in the prevention of heart disease and birth defects.

Carrots are nature's best source of beta-carotene, a antioxidant needed for healing and cancer prevention. Carotenes are especially protective against nicotine damage and lung cancer. Carrots also are rich in immune stimulants that can slow the growth of existing tumors. The vitamin A in carrots help maintain vision, and as we all know, they are Bugs Bunny's favorite food.

A variety of **Mushrooms**, including shitake, maitake, oyster and wood ears have long been used in the Far East as longevity tonics. Our region is especially blessed with an abundance of edible and medicinal wild mushrooms. If you do venture out to gather them, always be certain of species identification, as a mistake can be deadly.

Mushrooms are low calorie, low fat foods high in complete proteins and trace minerals such as iron and selenium. The varieties listed above also have immune stimulant properties, increasing the body's production of virus and cancer fighting interferon. They're used to treat chronic viral infections such as hepatitis C and HIV, and have shown benefits in leukemia and breast cancer treatment trials.

Mushrooms also have important cardiovascular benefits, helping to lowering harmful LDL cholesterol levels. Wood ears are especially potent for preventing heart attacks and pathologic blood clots because of their blood thinning properties.

Nuts are high in balanced proteins and minerals such as iron, calcium, magnesium and manganese. Nuts have a perfect combination of fats, carbohydrates and protein that promotes a slow, steady release of sugar into the blood, excellent for people with diabetes or hypoglycemia. Their polyunsaturated oils can lower LDL levels.

Nuts contain protease inhibitors and other compounds that inhibit cancer formation and propagation. Almonds are especially high in cancer- preventing amygdalin, also known as laetrile.

Oats and other whole grains are excellent heart and circulatory tonics. They are high in fiber, B vitamins and many trace minerals. Eating a bowl of oatmeal daily can lower your LDL and raise your HDL levels by about 20%. In combination with other high fiber foods and garlic, they can be as effective as prescription cholesterol lowering drugs, without risk of side effects or liver toxicity. Oats, like all whole grains, also help stabilize blood sugar and insulin levels.

Oats have unique anti-inflammatory qualities and can be applied topically to soothe eczema, psoriasis, poison oak and other skin inflammations. They're taken internally as medicines to help relieve digestive inflammations such as peptic ulcers and colitis.

Oat straw, harvested before the grain is ripe, is the premier nerve tonic, nourishing to all aspects of the nervous system. It's used to treat fatigue, neuropathy, chronic stress and a variety of mental illnesses. Its beneficial effect on overall energy is recognized in the expression "He's feeling his (or her) oats".

Olives have been known as longevity and vitality tonics since ancient Egyptian times. Modern research shows that those who consume olive oil as their major source of fat enjoy an increased life span. Use four or five tablespoons a day for maximal benefit, but as little as one tablespoon a day is helpful. Olives are excellent sources of many trace minerals, plus vitamins E, A and B complex. They also contain antioxidants that protect cells from damage by free radicals.

Olive oil is high in mono-unsaturated fat, which favorably changes lipid balance. It reduces the tendency to form pathologic blood clots, lowering blood pressure and the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Yogurt is the health food of dairy products, with a long history of use as a digestive tonic. The "active cultures" in yogurt are actually beneficial bacteria such as lactobacillus. These help balance the gut's ecology, especially important if you have weak digestion or when you are taking antibiotic drugs. Lactobacilli suppress harmful yeast such as Candida and contain natural antibiotics that can kill botulism, staphylococcus and salmonella.

Immune boosting substances found in yogurt stimulate the immune system's antibody production and natural killer cell activity. These increase resistance to viruses that cause infectious diarrhea, and may also help to prevent digestive cancers.

Yogurt retains the protein and calcium benefits found in all dairy products, so important for preventing osteoporosis. It's best to buy yogurt made from organic milk, as conventionally produced dairy products are often tainted with liver-stressing hormones and antibiotics. Or better

yet, it's easy to make it yourself.

Food that is healing encourages spiritual balance with Mother Earth, which in itself contributes to lasting well-being. All foods nourish us best if we open ourselves to receive their gifts. You create yourself out of whatever you eat, so choose well!

This overview is presented for educational purposes only. For advice regarding any specific health condition consult a qualified health care professional.

This article originally appeared in ***Sentient Times***.

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