

*We all know that “You are what you eat”
Have you ever considered that you also “Eat what you are?”*

Principles of a Proper Diet

By Howard Woodwind Morningstar, MD

What we eat is the intimate physical and energetic union of our selves with Gaia’s greater whole. We replace our physical bodies about once every four months with the materials in the food that we eat. Food is also the source of energy for everything we do or think.

There’s so much confusing and often conflicting information on what to eat in order to achieve the dream of optimal health. It seems like a new and convincing theory of nutrition is presented every week. With all this information, how do you know what’s really likely to be helpful?

As a student of the history of healing I’ve noticed that much of what is seen as truth is later regarded as a delusion. Many fads come and go in health and medicine. But, there is a body of wisdom passed down through the ages, that has been found true in many cultures for many generations. In my work as a healer using food to help people be as healthy and as vigorous as possible, I find it wise to rely on those truths that have stood the test of time.

This article presents general principles of good eating for healthy people. For advice regarding specific health conditions please consult a qualified health care professional. Also, these guidelines should be modified for athletes, pregnant women, breast feeding mothers, children and people with certain chronic illnesses.

1. Eat a variety of whole, fresh foods that are processed as little as possible after harvest.

This will help you get enough of the over seventy essential nutrients you need to keep creating and energizing your physical and mental self. Eating a variety of whole, fresh foods is much more important than figuring out which vitamins and nutritional supplements you need to take in order to prevent disease.

In general, most foods that are not eaten raw should be gently prepared, to preserve nutritional content. For example, steaming is preferable to prolonged boiling, while baking is preferable to frying.

Choose foods that haven’t been overly processed and that aren’t extensively packaged. This is not only less expensive and better for you, it also benefits the environment. Deepak Chopra, MD teaches that we shouldn’t eat food that has a label. While this may seem like an extreme position, it reminds me that most foods created by Mother Nature are already in a form most suited to our needs.

2. Emphasize foods that are locally produced and are in season. The earth provides

nutritious foods for her children that are appropriate for the season and climate in which they grow. This is the result of millennia of co-evolution between the plants in our environment and us. In the cold winter months we need more fat and calories to stay warm. It's a time for us to be nourished from the concentrated nutrition stored in nuts, roots and tubers. In the spring, a time of energy expansion, the earth provides us with spring tonics such as new greens and asparagus shoots. In the summer, the time of highest vitality and heat, energy rich fruits and cooling melons are abundant.

Eating what the earth provides around you helps increase your physical and spiritual harmony with Gaia's changing energy flow. If you can, plant a garden and grow some of your food yourself. This also helps you contact the life rhythms of the earth, bringing health benefits that are beyond measure.

It's equally important to support local responsible farmers, as a sustainable alternative to the current industrial food production and distribution system. Very often, more fossil fuel energy is wasted on transportation, processing and packaging than is present in the energy content of foods produced in this manner.

3. Choose foods that are organically grown whenever possible. Organic foods grown on vital, living soils are more likely to contain an abundance of the dozens of micro-nutrients we need for optimal health. Even though we require only minute quantities of some of these nutrients, if they are lacking we may find ourselves overly fatigued, with reduced immune function and vitality.

Organic foods are also free of the pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, hormones and antibiotics used in industrial agriculture. These contaminants can inhibit your body's detoxification, hormonal and nervous systems. Your liver in particular needs to be available to do its vital task of purifying your blood. It's best not to overtax your liver by constantly exposing it to toxic residues of chemical agriculture and harmful food additives.

Many of the practices of industrial agriculture harm the soil, water, plant and animal life of our planet. Organically grown foods are often more expensive because the earth's future fertility isn't robbed for the moment's profit. We need to give back more than we take. Farming should be a loving interaction between farmers and the land that benefits both humans and the earth.

"You are what you eat" is a spiritual as well as physical reality. The manner in which the food we eat is produced profoundly affects our being. The energy put into food at every level counts! Don't support harmful agricultural practices; instead support healing and repair of the earth.

4. Food is best when prepared and eaten lovingly, with intention to nourish. Pause as you eat to give thanks and to acknowledge the Infinite Mystery that sustains all life in every moment. This helps bring us harmony with the greater energy flow of which we are part.

It's true that we are what we eat, but how we eat also determines what happens to the potential

energy in food. Eating in a nervous state is different from eating when relaxed. Does one eat greedily, or with intention to give back to the earth?

5. Drink 8 or more glasses of pure water, or other clear liquids a day. It's important to maintain your body's water content so your circulatory system can do its work of nourishing and cleansing every cell in your body. Abundant pure water is essential to support your kidneys, skin and digestive systems' elimination of toxins from your body. For optimal digestion, it's best to drink before or after, but not during meals.

6. Eat 8 or more servings of a variety of whole grains a day. Grains are the heart of a healthy diet, and should be eaten throughout the day. Whole grains such as corn, rice, wheat, oats, barley and rye (among others) are rich in fiber, carbohydrate energy, protein and a variety of essential vitamins, oils and minerals. For an adult, a serving is an average slice of bread, half a bowl of rice or cereal, or a small ear of corn.

Try making bread, "the staff of life", yourself when you have the time. There's nothing more satisfying than baking and eating fresh whole grain bread while the house is filled with its warm and sensual aroma.

7. Eat 8 or more servings of a variety of fruits and vegetables a day. The health benefits of fruits are universally known, as "An apple a day keeps the doctor away". Include both leafy green and orange vegetables, such as carrots, squash and yams. Frozen or gently dried fruits and vegetables retain most of their nutrients, including fiber, vitamins, minerals and complex carbohydrates.

For an adult, a serving is the equivalent of a small apple, an average sized carrot, broccoli spear, peach or plum, half a grapefruit, or a small glass of juice. A standard "side" salad is about two servings. Many people find it best to eat fruits separately from vegetables, and to emphasize fruits earlier, and vegetables later in the day.

Fruits contain the seeds of tomorrow, offered by plants to animals, who then carry these seeds to the corners of the earth. It is a blessing that the earth provides us with such a beautiful variety of delicious and healthful fruits and vegetables.

8. Try to choose vegetarian protein sources, including whole grains, nuts, seeds and beans. It's best to combine grain and bean proteins in order to get a balanced mix of the eight essential amino acids. This principle is found in most cultures' traditional recipes, for example: corn tortillas with pinto beans, or rice with tofu.

Vegetarian proteins are the ecologically sound choices for feeding the world's exploding human population. Soybeans are twenty times more efficient at producing protein per acre of land than beef. Beans are sometimes called "the poor man's meat", but because of their many health benefits should instead be known as "the healthy person's meat".

For those who desire animal proteins, it's best to choose cold water fish, such as ecologically harvested salmon, tuna, herring, and sardines. These contain essential fatty acids that help prevent heart and circulatory disease.

If you have a strong desire to eat dairy products, eggs or meat, it's important to get these from responsible organic growers who treat the animals that they raise with the utmost respect and compassion. When you support those who abuse and exploit animals you are contributing to and validating that abuse.

9. Minimize your intake of foods that are fried or that are high in oils or fats . Excess fat in the diet is associated with increased risk of heart disease and a variety of cancers. If you add oil to your food, cold pressed “virgin” olive oil is your best choice.

10. Minimize your use of highly processed foods , containing refined (“white” or “enriched”) flours and sugars. These are deficient in fiber, essential fatty acids, and are basically empty calories with little nutritional value. Excess intake of refined sugars can also contribute to harmful fluctuations in your blood sugar level and your body's production of insulin.

11. Avoid chemically altered foods , such as hydrogenated oils, artificial preservatives, flavors, colors or other additives. The “trans” fatty acids found in margarine and many prepared foods can interfere with your body's processing of cholesterol and other fats. Other artificially altered foods increase free radical levels and inflammation, and can trigger allergies and even behavioral disturbances in some people.

12. Minimize your use of alcohol, caffeine and other drug-containing foods. These alter metabolism and can stress your liver's ability to purify your blood. Alcohol slows healing and repair, while caffeine raises your heart rate, blood pressure and depletes your body's energy reserves. Using caffeine on an ongoing basis in order to wake up or keep going is similar to charging expenses on a high interest credit card that you can't pay off. You may get the energy fix you need for the moment, but will have to repay a larger debt sooner or later.

13.Keep regular eating habits . This helps you keep your energy level up through the day, and can help you establish regular elimination and sleep cycles. Spread out your eating through the day. If practical, eat a moderate breakfast, a large lunch and a moderate evening meal. Try not to eat close to bedtime. Plan ahead so that when you get hungry between meals you'll have healthy snacks on hand as needed.

Eat mindfully, chewing your food carefully before swallowing. Don't gorge yourself, and don't “wolf” your food down. The manner in which you eat is the first stage of digestion and assimilation of the food's energy into yourself.

Mother Nature has provided us with such an abundant variety of delightful tastes, smells and

textures of foods. If, after reading this, you decide to improve your diet, do so moderately, step by step. This way, the changes you make will become lasting habits that will benefit you for life. You are what you eat, so choose foods that help you become who you want to be.

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

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