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TAKING CHARGE of your HEALTH & WELLBEING

How Does Food Impact Health?

The food we eat gives our bodies the "information" and materials they need to function properly. If we don't get the right information, our metabolic processes suffer and our health declines.

If we get too much food, or food that gives our bodies the wrong instructions, we can become overweight, undernourished, and at risk for the development of diseases and conditions, such as arthritis, diabetes, and heart disease.

In short, what we eat is central to our health. Consider that in light of Webster's definition of medicine: "*The science and art dealing with the maintenance of health and the prevention, alleviation, or cure of disease.*"

Food acts as medicine--to maintain, prevent, and

Food As Medicine Home (https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/explore-healing-practices/food-medicine)

Impact of food

What to eat

Why nutrition advice changes

What specific foods do

Eat for specific conditions

Mindful eating

Mediterranean diet

treat disease.

Food and the environment

More food resources

What does food do in our bodies?

The nutrients in food enable the cells in our bodies to perform their necessary functions. This quote from a popular textbook describes how the nutrients in food are essential for our physical functioning.

"Nutrients are the nourishing substances in food that are essential for the growth, development and maintenance of body functions. Essential meaning that if a nutrient is not present, aspects of function and therefore human health decline. When nutrient intake does not regularly meet the nutrient needs dictated by the cell activity, the metabolic processes slow down or even stop."

- *Perspectives in Nutrition*, Wardlow and Insel

In other words, **nutrients give our bodies instructions about how to function**. In this sense, food can be seen as a source of "information" for the body.

Get examples of food as information

Thinking about food in this way gives us a view of nutrition that goes beyond calories or grams, good foods or bad foods. This view leads us to **focus on foods we should include** rather than foods to exclude.

Instead of viewing food as the enemy, we look to **food as a way to create health and reduce disease** by helping the body maintain function.

What are some of the issues with our diet?

Our Standard American Diet (SAD) is not contributing to our health. Learn about some of the issues.

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What is the connection between food and disease?

As a society we are facing significant health problems.

- The United States ranks ninth in life expectancy among nations in the developed world.
- We have a workforce plagued with absenteeism and reduced productivity because of chronic health problems, including depression.
- 78 percent of healthcare expenditures are for the treatment of chronic disease.

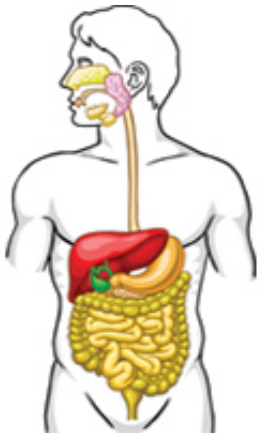
Many researchers now believe that these problems are partly related to diet. While they used to believe that diseases-such as type II diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers - were caused by a single gene mutation, they are now generally attributing these conditions to a network of biological dysfunction. And the **food we eat is an important factor in that dysfunction**, in part because our diets lack the necessary balance of nutrients (*Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 2004).

To prevent the onset of these diseases, we need to know how multiple nutrients in a diet interact and affect the human body's functions, according to the Nutrition Society, Europe's largest nutritional organization. Functional Medicine is a dynamic approach to assessing, preventing, and treating complex and chronic diseases using nutrition. This

area of healthcare also conducts research on the role that nutrition plays in health.

Learn about specific nutrients you need and how to get them

The Functional Medicine Perspective



One component of Functional Medicine focuses on how diet impacts health and function. When Functional Medicine practitioners examine the role of nutrition in chronic disease, they look at multiple systems, such as the digestive system, the immune system, and the detoxification system, because of the interconnections between those systems. For instance, because 80% of the immune system is contained in the gastrointestinal system, a person's issues with immunity could be related to faulty digestion.

Functional Medicine maintains that chronic disease is almost always preceded by a period of declining health in one or more of the body's systems. Thus, these practitioners seek to identify early the symptoms that indicate underlying dysfunction, possibly leading to disease.

One of the ways Functional Medicine seeks to address declining health is to provide the foods and nutrients needed to restore function. This is a cost effective, non-invasive intervention that aims to stop the progression into disease.

Example of Cardiovascular Disease

When taking a nutritional approach to health and disease, it is important to understand that one disease might have multiple causes, and one underlying dysfunction might cause multiple diseases. Cardiovascular disease may be among the clearest examples of this concept.

Researchers have shown that the development of heart disease can be triggered by multiple factors. These factors include insulin resistance, elevated homocysteine, oxidative stress, elevated cholesterol, hypertension, heavy metal toxicity, stress, and inflammation. **Each of these factors can be influenced by nutrition and each, in turn, impact our nutritional needs**. This applies both to the prevention and treatment of these factors (*Textbook of Functional Medicine*).

For example, a 2007 study shows the importance of optimal mineral balance and how a deficiency in mineral balance can contribute to the development of congestive heart failure (*Cardiovascular & Hematological Agents in Medicinal Chemistry*, 2007).

Lynn sees huge health benefits with new approach to food

At her first visit to a nutritionist, Lynn (53), just had one goal: "I need to get healthy!" Her cholesterol was elevated (including triglycerides), and she had taken Lipitor for five years. Her blood pressure had been elevated in the past. She had acid reflux and had been on Zantac for 15 years. Find out what happened.

More

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References

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