

Saving for a Rainy Day



There is an oft quoted saying, "if you have your health...you have everything", but I suppose it is human nature to take health for granted until there comes a wake up call.

My husband was ill and in hospital recently and it has put a strain on every aspect of our lives. Had you asked me before this happened if I was prepared for additional stress I would have said "yes" but for a good while I still felt overwhelmed. We are back to normal now and our good history of diet and exercise has played a significant role.

Perhaps it would be helpful to discuss some of the ways diet and exercise can help smooth the inevitable rough spots in life? One thing to consider is that evolution has prepared us for lean and stressful times. The body is able to store many essential vitamin and mineral nutrients as well as protein, fats and carbohydrates to fill in the gaps when we are not eating, sleeping or exercising properly. The key is the quality and variety of what you give your body to take care of today and build for tomorrow.

The best opportunity to build up your reserves is when things are going well and you have the time and energy to take care of yourself in the best possible way. When you are under stress, all systems are challenged and you may just be playing "catch-up" instead of reaching your potential. It is better to supplement for a rainy day rather than wait for a problem to give you some incentive.

Prepared or unprepared, here are a few simple ideas to consider:

1. Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay well hydrated. If you are not a water drinker, add extra water to what you normally drink.
2. Eat small, frequent meals with complex carbohydrates, fibre and protein to maintain constant blood sugar levels and promote good digestion and bowel function.
3. Avoid caffeine, sugar and alcohol because they may add to stress, digestive upset and mood swings.
4. Maintain an exercise program but of more moderate length and pace than when you are at your best. Listen to your body and save some energy for healing and recovering.
5. Making abrupt changes in diet or supplementation during trying times is not the best idea. By all means, strive for improvements but avoid changes or programmes that throw you off balance or are impractical over the long term. Diet should be as much about the future as about today so make changes you can maintain.

Life has its ups and downs, and I'd wager there have been times when most of us have resolved to make some real changes for better health and promptly slipped back into the old routine when the crisis passed. Next time you feel full of energy and have the world by the tail, make some positive lifestyle changes for your future. It's the best form of life insurance you will ever have.

Greetings...

A part of the brain automatically regulates many functions that keep us alive and well. You don't have to think about your breathing or heartbeat or digestion for them to operate efficiently. We must also eat and drink to live but here there are opportunities for thoughtful choices that can make a real difference.

When was the last time you reached for food or a beverage out of a desire for self-improvement or to boost your nutritional reserves? The fact is many of us eat or drink for reasons other than nutritional such as escape or pleasure or reward, and follow habits developed in childhood. When to say enough is also learned behaviour and can be as responsible for digestive upset and obesity as the foods you choose each day.

If you were to believe much of the advertising, it would be easy to think the major concern about diet is the fat content but there is much more to it than that. It's often the mindless eating and drinking that lands us in trouble, but you can learn to be more mindful by asking yourself a few appropriate questions:

Am I eating now because I am truly hungry or to re-route

(continued overleaf)

NUTRITION NOTES

A Weighty Issue

I recently visited Australia and saw a report claiming 25% of Australian kids are overweight. Healthy lunches and "walk to school" campaigns create awareness that ideal weight is a function of food intake and exercise. Not demanding that kids eat everything on their plate and limiting after school snacking in front of the TV or computer are further recommendations to promote optimum body weight. Many studies show childhood obesity leads to adult obesity. RefWin01/1

Read the Fine Print

Recommended dietary allowances for various nutrients vary according to age, sex, weight and pregnancy status. When choosing a supplement for your children always check the label indicates safe dosages for their age group. Do not assume half the adult dosage is appropriate for your child. RefWin01/2

Strong Teeth and Bones

Periodontal bone loss and osteoporosis are manifestations of the same disorder. If your dentist mentions periodontal disease during your next visit and you are in the peri-menopausal age bracket, seek advice about fine tuning the calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and Vitamin D levels in your diet. RefWin01/3

Organics

Just because you purchased organic vegetables doesn't mean you should eat them without paying attention to basic food safety. Natural fertilisers used on organic fruits and vegetables may contain harmful bacteria. Always wash your produce before eating. RefWin01/4

Good Job

It is common to use food treats to reward children, possibly establishing a life long pattern. Find new ways to build their self-esteem without bringing food into the equation. If need be, try the capitalist approach and offer money or join them in a favourite game involving physical activity, then everyone benefits. RefWin01/5

Shake That Thing

If your blood pressure is high add less salt when cooking or at the table. No more than six grams of salt daily is recommended for people with hypertension. A great deal of dietary salt comes from processed foods so cut down wherever possible. Studies indicate, most people will tolerate a 30 to 50% reduction in their salt intake without complaint. RefWin01/6

Smiles All Around

Having a problem with cavities in your children's teeth? Try popcorn as a snack instead of cookies, chips or crackers. Most kids love popcorn, a high fibre food with little fermentable carbohydrate that is much less likely to promote tooth decay. Hold the salt. For even better smiles, substitute milk for sugary drinks. RefWin01/7

Dining Out on Soy

A good diet for graceful ageing would include several servings a week of soy products. An easy way to make dips and thick luscious sauces is to use soft silken tofu. A variety of tofu dishes are available at most Asian restaurants. Tofu is high in protein and full of soy isoflavones, useful for hot flashes and lowering cholesterol. RefWin01/8

Greetings cont.

blood from my overactive brain to my stomach so I can relax or sleep? Am I eating all this sugar today to create an energy boost or is it a PMT craving? Have I ordered a double espresso to be alert for a meeting or to stay awake now because I'm not sleeping well? Am I eating this because fast food was used as a reward for good behaviour or to cheer me up when I was a child? I'm sure you could add many more to this list from your own experience.

It's not just about weight-gain either but also about helping to create positive mood and energy with natural, healthy foods. It would be a shame to miss out on the benefits of a thoughtful diet because of old habits or lack of attention. Understanding your behaviour empowers you to make choices that can prevent dietary problems instead of wasting valuable time and energy to solve them. Think about it.

Dr. Kathrine Davis

