Homemade Method™

Week 8: Mindset - What to Eat for Optimum Health & Weight

Overview

As you know by now, you only need to follow the 3 Homemade Principles to make eating for nourishment & satisfaction simple and easy:

1. **COOK** your own food so you know what goes into it
2. **EAT** a balanced diet of whole foods as close as possible to their natural state
3. **LISTEN** to your body and practice mindful, intuitive eating.

Last week, we discussed why Principle 1, COOK your own food, is so important. Namely, because cooking is the only way to really control what you put into your body and to experience the joy of food in all of its aspects.

This week we delve deeper into Principle 2: EAT a balanced diet of whole foods as close as possible to their natural state.

Specifically, what does this mean in practice & why is it important? Isn't it just a matter of balancing calories? (or 'energy in vs. energy out'?) Why does the the quality of the foods we eat matter? We will share with you the eating philosophies we endorse, and provide you with a simple guide to help you with future food and grocery shopping choices. You will not be required to diet or deprive yourself of particular foods. Instead, you will be empowered with a simple, liberating & delicious way you can eat for life.

What happens when you eat a poor diet?

Short term effects: 'A calorie is ***not*** a calorie'

For a long time, we were told that if we wanted to lose weight, we should restrict calories, or go on a diet (aka energy in is less than energy out). They used to say '*a calorie is a calorie is a calorie*' - meaning, if you wanted to lose weight, you just needed to eat less calories. This was the leading approach propagated by the weight loss and

medical industries for decades. It also encouraged people to continue to eat a poor diet - and just restrict portion sizes, or cycle between bad eating choices and food restrictions. Unfortunately, new research shows that this approach is totally wrong. The main reason is that humans are not perfect calorie burning machines like the scientists' equipment.

The calories approach fails to factor in that the human body actually processes, uses and responds to calories from different sources in different ways. In other words, a calorie is not a calorie.

Let us take just one example to illustrate the point:

1. **You consume 200 calories in the form of an apple and a spoon of almond butter:** This is a high protein, low glycaemic index, and high fibre snack which additionally contains many beneficial micro-nutrients to nourish and satisfy the body. When you consume 200 calories of this healthy snack, the protein, fibre and fats will leave you feeling full and satisfied for hours and the natural sugars in the apple and energy in the peanut butter are slowly released.

2. **You consume 200 calories in the form of a candy bar:** The refined sugars in the candy bar are released quickly in the bloodstream leading to an blood glucose spike and then an energy plunge as the body's insulin takes urgent action to restore blood glucose to normal levels. You feel drained and hungry again surprisingly quickly, causing you to crave another high sugar, high carb 'pick-me-up'. The candy bar also contains few of the nutrients contained in the healthy snack, which is why it is often referred to as 'empty calories'.

When you eat processed, sugary foods and refined carbohydrates, you get hungry again quickly and crave more of these high-calorie foods. This leads to cravings for unhealthy foods, a preoccupation with food, and a feeling of never being full or satisfied.

As the above example shows, there are immediate, short-term differences in the body depending on the source from which you ate your 200 calorie snack. Furthermore, those differences feed directly into your mood, energy levels, perceived hunger, satiety… and even your likelihood of making a good meal choice the next time you eat.

Long term effects: Inability to regulate appetite & chronic disease risks

But that's not all. It's the long term effects, that make the real difference not only to your waistline, but also to your likelihood of developing many chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol & heart disease. Let's take a look at those long term differences now.

Your body has complex systems for regulating your energy and nutrient intake, including hunger and satiety control. These systems work in tandem with each other sending mechanical signals (saliva, stomach), and chemical signals (such as insulin and the so-called 'hunger hormones', leptin and grelin). These signals tell you when and what to eat, how much and when to stop.

When you follow a poor diet high in processed, refined foods, you strain, weaken and eventually debilitate your body's complex systems of hunger and satiety control. In simple terms, this means you feel hungry all the time and crave more of the 'bad stuff'. In the long term, this leads to weight gain and eventually chronic disease.

For example, leptin is the hormone that tells you when you are full and to stop eating. When your fat cells exceed a certain level, you start to develop leptin resistance, meaning you become more prone to overeat. Another example is provided by grelin, the hunger hormone which makes us feel hungry. Grelin levels are increased after dieting, explaining why it is hard to keep weight off, because our body is literally telling us we are hungry and to eat more. Some studies also suggest nutrient deficiencies can cause your body to send constant cues to eat because you are literally 'starved' of the nutrients your body needs to function, even as you put on weight.

The benefits of eating whole foods close to their natural state

The great news is that you can reverse the damage that following a poor diet in the past has done to your body systems, simply by eating a balanced diet of whole, natural foods close to their natural state.

Over time, your body will reset its hunger regulation systems back to their optimum. You will naturally begin to feel less hungry, have reduced cravings and feel more satisfied, and you will begin to drop excess pounds, without dieting or restricting your eating. In so doing, you will not only look better and feel better, but you will free yourself from yoyo dieting and reverse or manage your risks for many chronic diseases.

When you eat a balanced diet of whole, natural foods, your body's hunger regulation systems re-calibrate over time & do their job, enabling you to maintain optimum health and weight without dieting.

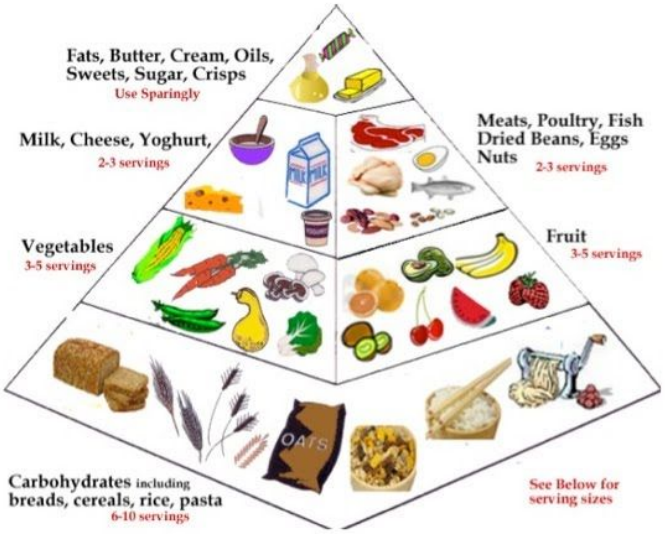
What is a balanced diet of whole natural foods?

A balanced diet is simply one which regularly includes all the macronutrients and micronutrients your body needs in balanced ratios. There are 3 macronutrients: Fats, Carbohydrates and Protein. Yes, that's right! Both fats and carbohydrates are nutrients that your body needs to function optimally and we encourage you to enjoy them both so you can feel your best. Micronutrients are things like vitamins and minerals which you get from fruit, vegetables and other whole foods.

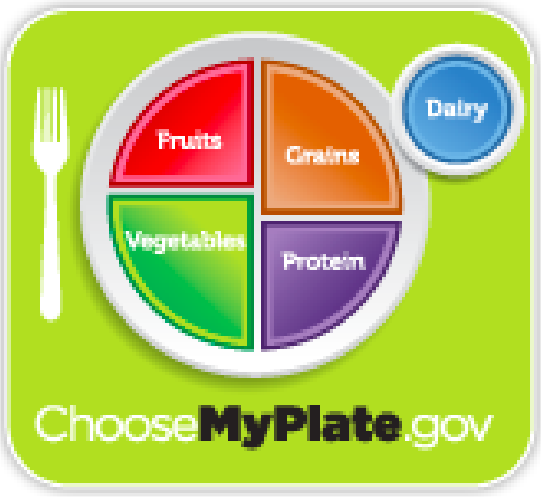
There are many practical & common sense guides to help you get the right ratios of macronutrients and micronutrients in your diet. We love Michael Pollan's simple advice: "***Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.***"[5]

Here are 3 other models that we endorse - choose the one that works best for you!

The Food Pyramid: Eat the recommended servings of each food type per day.



The Plate Method: Your plate at each meal should contain half fruits and vegetables, one quarter whole grains and one quarter healthy proteins and dairy:



'Eat a Rainbow' Method: Eat fruits, vegetables and other foods from a 'rainbow of colors' for optimum nutrition and disease prevention[1]:

[1] http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/national/resource/eat-rainbow; http://www.prevention.com/food/food-remedies/eat-rainbow-colors-optimum-health

Eat whole ingredients in their 'natural state'

We also recommend enjoying whole foods in their natural state. This simply means enjoying ingredients as close as possible to the state they were in when they came from the earth.

Ingredients prepared and enjoyed in their natural state, are almost always nutritionally superior and often more delicious. Here's some examples and principles to guide you:

1. **Eat fruits & vegetables raw and in season**: Vitamins and minerals are at their peak in fresh, seasonal fruit, eaten raw. What is not as well known, is that these nutrients start to break down shortly after chopping and especially after exposure to heat. So when you buy fruit or vegetables which are pre-cut or pre-cooked you are not getting the full benefits. Processed fruit and vegetable snacks offer little nutritional value and should be regarded as occasional treats not health food.
   1 large raw apple has 9 times the fiber content of a cup of apple juice

2. **Heat and processing destroys nutrients:** As a general rule, the application of heat or other processing destroys the nutrients in most ingredients, including healthy fats (ie. nuts), omega fatty acids (ie. flax or salmon), many whole grains, as well as fruits and vegetables. The more heat, the more damage - so frying is the worst, then baking or pan cooking, and finally boiling or steaming is the most acceptable. In addition, the more processed a meal, the less fiber it generally contains, as fiber is not shelf stable, leaving food manufacturers to leave it out.

   1 whole wheat tortilla with red kidney beans, 1 cup mixed vegetables and 1 oz cheese has 8 times the fiber content of a Big Mac (and the Big Mac has 160% of the calories).

3. **Many fried, processed foods contain artificial trans fats:** Artificial trans fats are cheap and stable, but they also increase your bad cholesterol levels and increase your risk of heart disease and stroke. Trans fats are common in foods like doughnuts, and baked goods including cakes, pie crusts, biscuits, frozen pizza, cookies, crackers, and stick margarines and other spreads. You can avoid artificial trans fats by making these items from scratch at home (and enjoying as a special treat).

4. **If it comes in a package, has more than 5 ingredients or you can't pronounce the ingredients:** Then it probably doesn't qualify as being in the "natural state". Examples: flavored yogurts, vegetable chips, store bought granolas or granola bars, protein bars, frozen dinners. Try instead: Yoghurt with honey and fresh fruit, roasted vegetables; homemade granola and bars, fresh marinated meat or fish cooked at home.

As a general rule, if you buy individual ingredients and cook what you eat at home most of the time, then you will be enjoying foods in their natural state.

In conclusion, eating whole, natural foods close to their natural state is key to achieving and maintaining optimum health & weight for life because these foods optimize your body's natural mechanisms of hunger control & satiety, keeping you full & satisfied, and making it easier to make the right food choices! The end result, ironically, is that you do eat less calories - without the struggle or the diet mentality.