

How Food Determines Your Quality of Life

The state of our body is a very practical undertaking. The body naturally, needs food to grow and live. It is with our own hands that we starve and poison our bodies. Food is so important to quality of life, but our relationship with food is often complicated. Many mental illnesses begin with food. There are those addicted to food, extremely picky eaters, those who starve and binge, and much more who unwittingly eat food with no value to the body. It is saddening how so many people punish their own bodies by withholding food or stuffing themselves to oblivion. A distorted relationship with food is an actual mental illness!

The foundation of a good life starts with good health. And to achieve this, starting from the most fundamental aspect of health, which is what you put into your mouth. The body is a simple creature, it gives back what you put into it. Eat rubbish and get rubbish in return.

Many aspects of the body's nutrition is not complicated at all. There's no mysterious way to lose weight or gain weight. Our physicality is very straightforward. You get what you put into it. Eat less to lose weight, eat more to gain weight. Eat more protein for muscle, more carbohydrates for energy or fat storage. Your body immediately tells you what it wants and does not want. Eat this, and get an allergic reaction. Eat the wrong thing, and you immediately get diarrhea. Eat this and you'll feel great, eat too much of that and you feel sluggish. Your body is telling you what it needs all the time. All you need to do is listen.



Return to the Fundamentals of Life

In psychology, there is a theory by Abraham Maslow called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow studied the motivations of humans and categorized these motivations into five main themes: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and lastly, self-actualization. Physiological needs are air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing and reproduction. Physiological needs of the body are at the foundation of this hierarchy. It is the first needs that have to be satisfied before a person can move up to the next level, which is safety needs. Safety meets the human need for security, having personal security, secure job, resources, and stable health.

After physiological and safety needs are met, then a person can find love and belonging, in the form of friendship, family, and community. After becoming satisfied with our need for connection, a person will pursue esteem needs such as respect, self-esteem, and status. The final level of need for humans is self-actualization, the ability to satisfy the need of one's best self. Self-actualization is subjective, and can be pursued in different ways such as spirituality, art, culture, education and the like. This would be the pinnacle definition of enjoying the good life.

Maslow's five level model is a theory that was proposed in 1943, it is very outdated and has been challenged many times. But it is still used in the study of human motivations, and the model has expanded over the years. The main point is, everything starts with meeting physiological needs of the body. And among the different physiological needs, I dare to argue, other than air that is all around us, water and food is the most essential and basic.

Let's breakdown Maslow's definition of physiological needs: air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction. The least essential is obviously reproduction, nobody needs to pursue reproduction all the time. A person can live in the wilderness with just the clothes on their back and a tarp over their head, eliminating clothing and shelter as the most essential bodily need. Sleep is a need, but nobody has to work for good sleep unless they have a sleep disorder, all animals sleep. Air is in the atmosphere, unless you are in a place that is hopelessly polluted, there is no need to think to breath. The last remaining items are food and water.

Before seeking out such high flying ambitions like self-actualization and esteem, even before seeking to build financial security or throwing yourself into a romance, you need to prioritize your body's physical health first. Otherwise, everything will collapse. How are you going to survive long work hours if the body is poorly nourished and weak. The most unattractive people are those who look unhealthy, so forget that hot date, they won't look twice!

Reexamine Food Beliefs and Assumptions

To have a healthy body, it starts with a reexamination of the food and liquid we put into our bodies. This is an aspect of life we need to see clearly. Media, trends, traditions, and false beliefs distort our perception of what is good food and bad food. Many hold on to wrong assumptions about what is good to eat and good to drink, which in reality harm our bodies. It is very difficult to dislodge these harmful myths and practices. For some, it may even shake their core beliefs.

What we currently know about human health, nutrition and food is constantly improving. Beliefs from ten years ago may not be credible today. It's important to keep learning, adjusting, and to do our best to change eating habits according to the latest knowledge. Nutrition science is always advancing, and our habits need to adjust with the best science available. Old beliefs are shattered everyday with good science. For instance, do you remember the time it was "bad" to starve yourself to lose weight? Guess what. That's not true anymore, according to the new science!

Fasting is now good for you! Fast for three days, and science says you'll reset your immune system. Skip meals and eat once a day, also called intermittent fasting, and dodge that diabetes bullet. Science now says skipping meals for adults is completely safe, and very effective for weight loss. Forget the old fashioned notion that "you should never skip a meal because you'll get ulcers" or that "only poor people skip meals". Times have changed, eating once a day is now a lifestyle for many healthy people.

Beware of Food Manufacturers

One of the main reasons a home cooked meal always tastes better, is because you know the cook is not trying to make a profit out of you. Whenever you eat out at a restaurant, buy bottled beverage or prepackaged meals, realize that the people who make this food want to make as much money out of you as they can. They don't care about your health, and will cut corners as far as the law allows. You'll be eating french fries from fake potatoes, chicken nuggets that are mostly made of filler, and bread baked with a little something added to prolong shelf life.

Most food manufacturers are just focused on their profits. They increase profits by selling more food while reducing their costs. The net result is that the majority of people are overfed and undernourished. Food manufacturers create marketing campaigns to upsell food with lower value. They include addictive ingredients that are designed to get people to eat far more food than they really require. Of course there are laws that protect the health of the general public, but it is very easy to push out a food product that is very much within the limits of the law, but has zero nutritional value.

Aside from optimal nutrition, there's a few other reasons to eat food you cook yourself. Eating at home makes it easier to be environmentally friendly. You avoid disposable packaging. Eating at home creates so much less waste. Because you picked out all the ingredients, you know exactly

what you're eating. You control the amount of sugar, fat and salt that goes into the meal. You can choose to abstain from butter, cheese and monosodium glutamate, which most restaurants use as flavor enhancers.

Cooking and eating at home can also be a great bonding social activity. Because you make the food yourself, there's a feeling of accomplishment and service towards those you are feeding. Cooking and food preparation is also a great life skill that touches on creativity. For some, it can be a way to relieve stress. Make meals with your own hands or try out something new. In so many ways, cooking is an art you can practice in your everyday life.

Cooking at home while avoiding restaurants and manufactured food is a lot more economical. It saves a lot of money! It just takes a bit more effort to do, since you also have to prepare the food and clean-up afterwards. But it's work that gets easier the more you get used to it.

Build an Amazing Life by Changing Your Relationship With Food

The Word Diet Means "Way of Life"

Eating well is not difficult, and it should not be something you have to think about all the time. When you get into good eating habits, and establish food choices that benefit you the most, you don't even have to think about it anymore. A great example would be switching to drinking plain water if you only drink sodas. After your taste buds adjust to plain water, you'll stop craving for sodas. If you're trying to dislodge some bad diets that have been around for years and years, it's natural to suffer difficulty in the beginning. As with anything worth pursuing in life, if you persist, you'll get there.

Don't think of your diet as a punishment, but rather as you creating a new and improved "way of life" for yourself. Envision yourself waking up in the morning, eating what you should be eating without a second thought. This is easier said than done, but an optimistic outlook does increase your chances for success by at least 10%.

So many people deal with lifestyle diseases like obesity and type 2 diabetes precisely because of unhealthy habits they cannot change. There are many reasons why a person has a poor relationship with food, to the extent their habits harm their health. The reason may be personal and societal. The diet in the United States has been criticized countless times for increasing rates of obesity, to the point that some places have an "obesity epidemic". You may have a bad relationship with food because your entire culture has a bad relationship with food.

The reasons may also be personal. You could be making bad food choices because you're bored, eating helps relieve stress and anxiety. Sometimes people say a full stomach feels like love, so it's not too far to assume that there are people who eat to fill a void of emotional

emptiness. Clearly there are issues to work out within yourself to get at the root of your own relationship with food. Behaviour change starts with recognizing bad habits. Once you've identified all these habits, it's easier to change. Changing your relationship with food, while difficult and time consuming, is very much a worthwhile task with benefits that will last you a lifetime. Since food habits directly affect your quality of life and your lifespan, consider the quest for better food habits as an investment you'll reap returns in the form of years of living well.

Eat to Live Not Live to Eat

While eating is enjoyable, it is possible to take this enjoyment and turn it into an addiction. One has to "eat to live", but at the other extreme there are those who also "live to eat", to eat beyond sustenance. Frequent binge eating or food addiction is an actual medical condition. The brains of compulsive eaters are very much different from normal, non-addicted people. The pleasure and reward part of the brain is stimulated by highly addictive drugs like nicotine, cocaine and heroin. Since the brain is rewarded with pleasure, it continues to seek the source of pleasure, eventually forming an addiction.

Very palatable foods are also addictive, foods high in sugar, fat and salt stimulates pleasure in the brain. Just like addictive drugs, the brain is rewarded when we eat high fat and high sugar foods. It wants you to eat more of these type of food. Back when humanity was living hand to mouth, and famine was a very real danger, those who survived were those who ate more high fat and high sugar foods. The brain is telling us, "eat this stuff and you'll survive the next famine!" Unfortunately in the modern day, the famine never comes. There is always food and people hardly get as much exercise as their ancestors. So all the sugar and fat we eat gets stored in the body, never burned or used. Modern people are now overweight and struggle with lifestyle diseases at a scale never seen before in human history.

What used to be a survival strategy is now killing our bodies, and turning into a mental illness. A food binge is excessive eating beyond feeling hungry. The person is triggered by a situation or emotion, then compulsively eats even when they are not hungry. After eating, some feel guilt and disgust, negative emotions that cause them to purposely throw up the food with laxatives or purging. This completed cycle is an eating disorder called bulimia. Eating addiction and bulimia are not the same disorder, but they are related behaviour.

Eating addiction is a kind of behaviour compulsion, the same as shopping addiction or gambling. The only difference is that eating is essential for life. We eat everyday so the eating addict has to face their triggers at every meal time. Those who overeat regularly are not fully food addicts. Eating too much every now and then is common. To overeat every time you have a meal or snack could just mean you have developed a tolerance for food, and the brain signals telling you "you're full" is no longer working right. These people often say, "I hardly eat anything, but I put on weight easily." or "My metabolism is slow so I gained weight, (nothing wrong with my eating habits)". Chances are, people who say that are just eating more calories than they need without knowing it.

Recalibrating your appetite is not difficult. Start by reducing negative emotions. Feeling bad after bingeing on food is not doing you any favours, if anything, the negative emotions is pushing you towards an eating disorder. Stop the negative talk. Take a realistic view of your diet, by writing down everything you eat. List down the quantity and quality of the foods you eat. Note your emotional state and your possible triggers for bingeing. By recording the quantity of food you normally eat, a scale is useful for this, you'll be able to calculate the actual amount of calories you consume.

Weight gain and weight loss is a simple mathematical formula. Eat too much calories and you store fat, too little and you lose weight. Calculate your daily caloric need, with reference to your age, sex and daily physical activity level. There are formulas and calculators for this on the internet, just make a quick search. If you exceed your daily caloric need, then you're gaining weight. If you meet your daily caloric needs, then you're maintaining your current weight. The average woman with average physical activity needs 2000 calories a day to maintain weight. The average man needs 2,500 calories a day to maintain weight. These figures are averages, the numbers can be different for you.

How Food Impacts All Aspects of Life

In the simplest terms, we are what we eat. Food has a huge impact on our energy levels, mood, concentration, skin, sleep quality, hair and so much more than we realize. There are few people who notice any small changes in their health. People like athletes sense small changes in the way their bodies feel from day to day. They can track the progress of their body and improvements in athletic performance. Not everybody has this kind of sensitivity, but with careful practice it is possible to teach yourself to observe minute changes your activity and food intake affects your physical, mental and emotional health.

The ways in which food affects emotional well being is well established. Breakfast can set your mood for the day. Your energy levels, ability to concentrate and sleep quality are all affected by your last meal. These effects can be subtle, or you just don't notice the difference because you don't know there's a connection. It's only when we suffer indigestion that we directly blame our last meal as the culprit. Food is very important to subconscious mood, it's the reason people take big clients out to a meal before negotiating a deal - to set a favorable mood. Suitors feed the object of their affection, offering food treats like chocolates and dinner dates so they'll be liked. Food can bribe and make people feel good.

What you eat before going to bed can affect sleep quality. For instance, eating too much acidic food can mean a restless night suffering acid reflux. Students pocket candies for long exams because small doses of sugar boosts concentration. The brain needs a lot of instant fuel when it's working hard.

The amount of water we drink affects the appearance of the skin. People who are dehydrated and don't drink enough water, they get dry skin, dry eyes, and dark urine. Not a good look! These are the kind of small changes that many people don't notice or think about. When we

have dry skin, we buy lotions. Dry eyes, we buy eye drops. We never think that the body is dehydrated and it just needs more water.

A Breakdown of Essential Foods

There isn't one optimal and perfect diet. Everybody is different and lives in a culture and location that provides unique food. There are people with allergies, special needs, specific illnesses, and different energy level needs. Your occupation and everyday activities will also determine your food needs. There are however basic food groups that need to be met, and principles that can help guide you create the perfect diet for you.

Healthiest Options

Water - The Most Affordable Option

Drink water, it's the healthiest habit you can do for yourself. Drinking enough plain water has many health benefits. If you live off soda, coffee, alcoholic beverages, energy drinks, fruit drinks, other sugary drinks, rarely touching a glass of water, you're missing out on a big thing! Other drinks will get you hydrated, but only water can be drunk in quantities that sufficiently hydrate the body without harmful effects. It's not acidic like coffee and fruit juices, it has no salt that causes water retention, no calories, and no potential for allergic reaction.

If your urine is too dark, it's a sign of dehydration. Dry skin is another sign you need to drink more water. The feeling of thirst is sometimes confused with feelings of hunger, just making sure you drink water regularly ensures you don't eat when you're not really hungry. The first thing to do when losing weight is to make sure your hydration is perfect, the recommended amount is two liters a day. Drink more on hot days and active days.

Fruit for Desert

Most fruits are sweet, and one of the few foods you can safely eat raw most of the time. They are an easy source of vitamin C, folate and potassium. Eaten raw, you get the full dose of vitamins without the nutrient loss that happens during cooking. Rich in dietary fiber, and low in fat and calories, you can't really lose from eating some fruit everyday. Fruit has been shown to reduce risks for heart disease, type-2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. The daily recommended amount is two and a half cups of fruit a day. Remember, fruits and vegetables do not cure disease, but the lack of wholesome nutrition in our diet can lead to disease.

Leafy Greens Beyond Lettuce

Picky eaters avoid dark leafy vegetables because they are very sensitive to bitter tastes found in green vegetables. This is especially true with children, as children grow up they get used to the bitter taste and hopefully develop an acquired taste for healthy greens. Leafy greens provide

fibre, nutrients and antioxidants. Diets high in leafy greens tend to be healthier all across the board.

If you struggle with adding leafy vegetables to your diet, there are so many ways to sneak in greens, aside from the boring salad. Try juicing, adding spinach to your smoothies, roasted and fried vegetables taste better to some. Look for vegetable recipes and new ways to prepare leafy vegetables in a way that you enjoy. Raw and steamed vegetables retain the most nutrition, but if you don't enjoy eating there are other ways to eat. The joy of eating is very important, so don't give up on seeking ways to enjoy your greens!

Root Vegetables

Root vegetables or root crops are an important staple food for many cuisines, think of the sweet potato, yacon, and taro. These are starchy vegetables that have saved civilizations countless times of famine. Grain staples tend to fail during droughts or fall to pests, but root crops are more vigorous and survive when grains fail. Root crops provide carbohydrates and vitamins. For instance, sweet potato is high in vitamin A, vitamin B6, potassium, magnesium and reduces LDL cholesterol by adding fiber to the diet. It's a fantastic source of energy, without creating a high insulin spike you can get from sugar.

Sea Vegetables, Even If You're Landlocked

Sea Vegetable or seaweed, is possibly the best whole food available. It contains plenty of vitamins, minerals and trace minerals, amino acids, polysaccharides, phytonutrients, enzymes, flavoids, and antioxidant. Most importantly, seaweed and seasalt contain iodine, a deficiency in iodine leads to an illness called goiter. Cultures that live close to the sea naturally eat food from the sea. It is no coincidence that the longest lived populations in the world, like Okinawans of Japan and the Mediterraneanians, are located close to the sea and eat plenty of seafood. However, landlocked people will have to consciously seek out and import seafood if they want to add sea vegetables to their regular diet.

Nuts for the Healthy Fat

Adding nuts to the diet is optional, as some people are deathly allergic to nuts. But if you can eat it, there are plenty of health benefits to regularly eating this stuff. You can try peanuts, almonds, walnuts, and more. Nuts often add fantastic flavor to a meal. They're very filling, and a healthy source for a fat called MCTs, which are easily absorbed by the body. Most nuts are high in omega-3 fatty acids, that boosts body energy. Omega-3 is also anti-inflammatory.

Best Meat You Can Afford

The highest quality meat is wild meat (bison, venison, moose, etc.), of course this is not available to everybody. Second best choice would be free range animals, livestock not raised in cages. Animals allowed outside to pasture are fed on grass and not just grains. Free range and

wild meat tends to be more lean, with red flesh and less fat. The muscles and bones develop naturally, they also eat better than caged livestock, eating according to their nutritional needs rather than being fed processed food that forces them to grow bigger in the shortest amount of time. Consider that the cage raised chicken is a special breed that is only 45 days old at harvest. It lives in a cage its whole life, it never moves, it can't even clean itself. To counter high risks of illness and bacteria in crowded cages, the chicken is treated with antibiotics which is then passed on to you, the final consumer.

Wild Fish

Wild fish versus cultured or farmed fish, is the best for your health and the environment. Fish contains healthy fat, this is not the same fat from junk food that will give you heart disease and clog up your arteries. Fish fat or fish oil has omega 3 fatty acids, these are essential fatty acids that you need to eat because the human body cannot naturally make its own. The western diet is severely lacking in omega 3s. Nutritionists have also known for a long time that essential fatty acids from fish oil reduces inflammation, and decreases the risk for heart disease. Fish oil may remedy certain mental illnesses like dementia and depression. The recommended serving is two servings of seafood a day.

Free Range Eggs Save More Money

If you have the option, choose free range eggs over regular eggs. Free range chickens are happier and produce eggs with richer yolk and thicker eggwhite. You'll quickly see the difference once you try it for yourself. Free range eggs have five times the amount of omega 3 fatty acid than regular eggs. If you eat eggs for nutrition, then you're really saving money with the free range option. Eggs contain both omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acid. Free range farming also practices a more ethical treatment of animals.

Raw Honey

Choose raw honey over regular honey, check the label when buying honey. Look out for words like 'raw', 'wild', and 'pure' on the label. Because honey is expensive to produce, most store sold honey is mixed with fillers that may include water, cane sugar, artificial flavor, and corn syrup. To get the most benefit, buy the purest product. If you can't live with a bit of sweetness in your life, honey is a great alternative to sugar! Honey adds a richer flavor to your teas. In the same quantities, honey is actually sweeter and more flavorful than other sweeteners like sugar, corn syrup, molasses and maple syrup. So if you want something sweet, go for the best!

Coconut Products

Coconut water and coconut flesh is incredibly healthy and cleansing, but it's not always easily available unless you live in a tropical country. If you get the chance, load up on fresh coconut water and coconut flesh whenever you can. If you can't get it fresh, coconut oil, canned coconut

milk and dried coconut flesh, or coconut flakes is more available. In whatever form you eat your coconut, you'll benefit from the medium chain fatty acids plentiful in the giant palm nut.

Coconut boosts brain health, reducing risk for Alzheimer's disease. It reduces yeast and candida. Boosts testosterone levels and balances hormones in men and women. It improves heart health, by balancing HDL and LDL cholesterol. For weight loss, coconut decreases fat within one to three months. It reduces cellulite under the skin and heals scars when coconut oil is directly applied to the skin.

Acceptable Options

Brown is Better Than White (Rice)

Brown rice and wild rice are preferable over plain white rice. A darker variety of rice has more fiber and more nutrition. If you are used to eating white rice, transition slowly to eating brown rice. Whenever possible mix up your plain white rice with other varieties. Brown rice has a low glycemic index for those who are watching their sugar levels. If you need help with your digestive system brown rice is also preferable as it has more fiber and creates a fuller feeling.

Best Potatoes are Sweet

Sweet potato is a special mention, as this root crop has the added benefit of being both sweet and full of vitamins. It is a diverse item to have in the kitchen, it can be baked, roasted, or boiled. The sweet potato is not a genuine potato nor a yam, it is a plant that belongs to the morning glory family. Sweet potatoes come in several color varieties from white, pink, yellow, orange to violet, a wonderful visual collection for the dining table!

Avocado

Avocados are wonderful when in season, load up on the fruit when available to benefit in all of it's healthy goodness. This is a nutrient dense fruit, rich in monounsaturated fatty acids. The fruit reduces the risk of diabetes and heart disease, improves skin and hair, and helps reduce obesity. Avocados is one of the few fruits that is mostly fat, this is the main reason you want to eat it! The brain needs fat, your energy levels are also boosted by fat, but you need healthy fat not junk fat. Avocados have something called beta-sitosterol, that helps the body maintain its cholesterol levels. So not only are you eating lots of good fat and plenty bioavailable nutrients, you also get extra protection for your cholesterol levels!

Almond and Hemp Milk

Almond milk and hemp milk are the sort of items you might only find in health food stores, or occasionally in regular groceries, depending on where you live. If it's available to you, why not give it a try! If you like the taste, it could even be made a regular part of your diet. High in vitamin D and vitamin E, enriched with calcium -- almond and hemp milk are realistic

alternatives to dairy. They are lower in calories and you may soon want to give up on dairy once you try it.

Natural Salts

Choose natural salt over regular table salt, a small difference that can add so much more value to your food. Pure salt is plain sodium chloride (NaCl), a chemical compound and crystalline mineral essential for life. For most people, all salt taste the same, only some salts are more “salty” than others. Natural salt is harvested either from the sea or mined from the ground. It retains plenty of its trace minerals that are beneficial to our bodies.

Regular table salt is processed and refined, to remove impurities so that only sodium chloride remains. Some table salt has iodine added in after refining, because iodine is needed for the healthy function of the thyroid. Table salt may also have other additives to improve taste, such as monosodium glutamate. It is also not uncommon to have table salt treated with bleaching compounds, to create that sparkling white appearance. So, whenever you can, choose natural salt over table salt, the price is often comparable. The most common natural salt is sea salt.

Occasional Food Options

Nightshade Vegetables

Have you ever seen a health warning on tomatoes? There definitely should be a health warning for this ubiquitous red fruit! Because it's dangerous for some people. Tomatoes are very cheap when they're in season. They add a zest of acidity to the taste of food. Tomatoes make the base flavour for pizza and spaghetti. It is nutrition rich and affordable, but there are certain people who are unable to properly digest tomatoes. Not just tomatoes, add potatoes, bell peppers, other peppers, and eggplants to that list. These vegetable group belongs to the nightshade family of plants. They are all botanically related.

The nightshade vegetables are related to toxic plants like the deadly nightshade, tobacco and the belladonna plant. While tomatoes and peppers are NOT harmful to most people, to specific groups it can cause inflammation, inflammatory bowel disease, and affect some autoimmune diseases. Individuals already suffering from an autoimmune disease need to give up nightshade vegetables all together.

Those who are prone to Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) find that nightshade vegetables only contribute to the problem. IBD occurs when the intestine lining becomes irritated, it does not function properly and accumulates bacteria that may even infect the bloodstream. If you've been told you have “leaky gut”, or you feel you have a sensitive stomach, often get diarrhea or bad digestion, take out nightshade vegetables from your diet and see if your condition improves.

Toxic Squash

The last group of vegetables to reexamine, is squash, zucchini, cucumbers and other common vegetables within the same botanical cucurbitaceae family. Seemingly bland and plentiful cucurbitaceae family, hides a deadly secret. These vegetables are wonderful fillers, especially if you want to lose weight. With lots of fiber and water, they fill the stomach while adding on very little calories. Plain boiled squash is the go-to remedy for those who need to get their bowels moving ASAP. Yellow and orange squash is a dietary source of vitamin A, vitamin B6 and vitamin C, folate, and magnesium. Squash has a low glycemic index, which is great news for diabetics. The vegetable is often added to the diet of those with high blood pressure, as it helps regulate blood pressure.

What most people don't know is that vegetables in the cucurbitaceae family - this includes pumpkin, all kinds of squash, zucchini, melons and cucumbers, contain a substance called cucurbitacin. This substance has a bitter taste, and the most common varieties cultivated by farmers contains the least amount of cucurbitacin. But it's very easy to cross pollinate when it comes to squash, wild cultivars can cross with any squash flower. You'll also get the random bitter fruit in a basket of perfectly bland squash, a mutated squash fruit, just because that's how nature and genetic diversity works. Heritage vegetable varieties have also become a popular hobby among home gardeners, increasing the likelihood for growing potentially poisonous vegetables.

Cucurbitacin, the bitter taste found in these vegetables, can lead to cucurbit poisoning, also called Toxic Squash Syndrome, or toxic anagen effluvium. This kind of poisoning is very rare, the first reported case was published in 2018 by the Journal of the American Medical Association. It was an incidence of two women in Paris. The first woman experienced symptoms of food poisoning, including dizziness, vomiting and diarrhea, a few hours after eating some pumpkin soup. The same woman presented with hair loss a week after. The second case, was another woman who had the same symptoms of food poisoning, then hair loss a week after.

After the discovery of this rare toxic syndrome, doctors have reviewed previous medical records and have found similar cases of food poisoning linked to squash. A French Poisons Center has published in the Journal of Clinical Toxicology, reports 350 cases of bitter squash related poisoning, from the years 2012 to 2016. These are only suspected cases as these incidents have already past, and the patients cannot be reexamined or tested when they were sick. It's only that the reported symptoms are similar.

While Toxic Squash Syndrome is still considered a rare illness, it's best to be aware of its existence. And if you love squash vegetables, remember to always remove the bitter skins or avoid squash completely if you find it bitter to the taste. If your kids don't like the bitter taste of the skins of cucumbers and zucchini, don't force them to eat it! There is no recommended therapy for toxic squash syndrome. The two French women in the case report let the illness run its course, and regrew their hair in the next few months.

Rarely on the Table

The Lesser Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates or carbs are essential to the body, it's really painful to see keto dieters take out this major food group from their diet. When you don't eat enough carbs, the body has no ready energy source. A no-carb diet can make you feel sluggish, energy levels drop and the mind slows down. Carbohydrates come from starch, sugars and fiber. Fiber is a kind of complex carbohydrate.

When carbs are digested it is delivered as glucose to the body. There are two kinds of carbohydrates, simple and complex. Sugar is a simple carb. Complex carbs contain dietary fiber and starch, and takes longer to digest.

The average adult sources around half their daily calories needed to live from carbohydrates. Other sources of calories are the two macronutrients -- protein and fat. Those working manual labor will eat more carbs to burn through the day. Carbohydrates are not bad, as long as it's used up and converted into energy. For an adult whose daily maintaining caloric needs are 2,000 calories, 50% of calories from carbs would be around 300 grams of carbohydrate foods. This can be carbohydrates from grains, fruit and vegetables. Anything sweet or starchy contains carbohydrates.

Not all carbohydrate sources are the same. Ideally, you'll want to eat complex carbohydrates as much as possible. Complex carbohydrates are longer chain molecules. Simple carbs are easy for the body to absorb, most people love the taste of it because it's sweet. Simple carbs are sugar and syrups. Simple carbs are not bad, they are the most immediate source of energy you can take into the body when the body is low in glucose.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no "sugar rush" after eating a large amount of sugar. But there is definitely a "sugar crash" half an hour after eating sugar. A recent 2019 study, with more than a thousand participants, find no evidence for increased alertness or mood boost after eating sugar. Instead, mood goes down, people report fatigue and slow response half an hour to an hour after eating sugar.

Complex carbohydrates, which digests slowly, raises blood glucose level at a slower rate and for longer. It raises energy slowly, for a longer period of time. This slow burn can be considered more effective, as you are able to maintain a steady energy level throughout your day. Food with complex carbohydrates also usually contain more nutritional value. While food that contain simple carbohydrates are usually nutritionally empty, such as refined sugar.

The Case for White Rice

A prime example of complex carbohydrate versus simple carbohydrate is white polished rice, compared to brown unpolished rice. Brown and white rice are not different varieties of rice, they

are the same rice that goes through different processes. The price difference between the two should be comparable, however some health food stores are known to increase the prices for brown rice because it's less common in the market.

Buy brown rice over white rice because brown rice has more fiber and nutrition. White rice is polished, removing the seed coat, bran, and germ. It is stripped of many nutrients, more importantly dietary fiber is removed. After processing, white rice is mostly starch and sugar, a simple carbohydrate. Rice is polished because white rice is softer and easier to chew. It is also easier to cook.

Most rice eating cultures prefer white rice, and only eat other variety rice as a special dish. If you eat rice everyday at every meal, it can be difficult for the stomach and your chewing mouth, to eat that amount of rice if you switch to completely eating brown rice. While brown rice is the better complex carbohydrate, it is possible to consume too much fiber, causing constipation.

For some people, there is an adjustment period for switching to brown rice. Mixing brown rice or wild rice with white rice, is a gentle way to transition and add more variety to your diet. A stunning combination is a mixture of white rice with red rice, red rice stains the white rice when cooked together. The result is a visually interesting dish on the table. For those who only eat rice occasionally and it is not a staple source of carbohydrates in your diet, then choose brown rice or wild rice for the rare occasion you do eat rice.

Suspicious Potatoes

In the United States, and some other countries, the potato is the most widely eaten vegetable crop. In volume, it is the most consumed vegetable in the world, and the fourth most consumed crop in the world, only behind the three leading crops -- rice, wheat and corn. Needless to say, the potato is difficult to avoid, it's not something you want to keep out of your diet. But I don't recommend the potato as healthy because of its high association with diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Consider popular ways potatoes are cooked. Nobody eats plain potatoes anymore, and even less people eat potato varieties other than the usual light yellow flesh. Potatoes are popularly deep fried, in the form of chips or french fries, dipped in catsup, mayonnaise or ranch dressing. As a side dish, it is mashed and mixed with butter and gravy. Considering portion sizes, it's very hard to eat just one french fry or one chip, one has to eat the whole bag. It's not surprising there's a study that suggest eating two portions of french fries a week will kill you. This is a serious eight year long study on fried potato consumption. The study was published in the American Journal of Clinical Study, in 2017. The sample size included 4,440 middle aged and elderly participants, from the ages of 45 to 79. The study assessed the participants consumption of fried potatoes - fries, fried potato, hash browns, and the consumption of non-fried potatoes - boiled, baked, mashed and potato salad. The data on potato consumption was contrasted against the death rate of the participants, to see if there is any correlation between potatoes and death. This variable was an "all-cause mortality", all causes of death were accepted.

The finding of the study showed that those who ate potatoes three or more times a week were older, white males, they had the highest incidence of comorbidity or suffering from two or more chronic diseases. Eating a lot of unfried potatoes has no correlation with death, it was unrelated to any health risk. On the other extreme, eating three or more servings of fried potato a week increases your chances of death by two fold.

When plain boiled or baked, eaten on its own, potato is harmless. But consider potato's nutritional value, and that there are better options out there! Eat other carbohydrate staples other than potato. If potato is your main staple, introduce other carb rich sources into your diet, such as corn, brown rice, sweet potato, quinoa, lentil, navy beans, banana and plantain. Potatoes are rich in starch, but low on fiber. It has a high glycemic index, which makes it untouchable for diabetics. It increases the risk for diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. Compared to other food high in carbohydrates, potato has a low energy density, it has a lot of water so you eat more potato but get much less energy from the volume of potato you eat. The micronutrient profile of potatoes is quite good, and there are benefits from eating the root crop. But the benefits have to be weighed against the disadvantages.

Potatoes is also a member of the nightshade botanical family, a group of plants that are potentially toxic. Potatoes can increase inflammation in some people, it may increase arthritic pain and discomfort. Potatoes and other nightshade vegetables, are restricted for those suffering from autoimmune diseases. While studies on any relation between potato consumption and inflammatory diseases are not conclusive, it's better to avoid a potential culprit if you can.

Why Oats Are Not the Best Breakfast

Oats are generally healthful and safe for most people. It helps balance cholesterol and blood sugar levels, because it creates a fullness feeling and controls appetite. Oat bran is believed to block absorption in the stomach and intestines, so you absorb a lot less calories from the food you actually eat. This would be great if you are trying to control for high cholesterol and heart disease. Oats are high in fiber, it acts like a mop within the gut, absorbing oils and other high cholesterol food, then goes through the body. Oats contain a soluble fiber called beta glucan, the daily recommended amount for beta glucan is just three grams, to get the most benefit from oats all you need is three grams of beta glucan. Each gram of beta glucan reduces cholesterol by 1.4 mg/dL. Three grams is a low amount, much less than one bowl serving of oatmeal at the breakfast table. So even if oats are healthful, there's no need to eat that much of it to get benefits.

Whole oats and rolled oats can be difficult to chew and digest for people with missing teeth, throat and mouth problems, the elderly and very young. Because of its high fiber, which can expand within the gut, oats that are not properly digested can potentially block the intestines. If you don't eat oats, if you don't like how it makes your stomach feel, then don't abuse yourself to eat it.

Syrups Not to Buy

All syrups are simple sugars, the only difference between syrups is the origin and subtle different flavours. Maple syrup is from the sap of the maple tree, native to North America. It is mostly sucrose and water, with smaller amounts of glucose and fructose, low in micronutrients, with small amounts of manganese, riboflavin, zinc and calcium. The syrup is loved for its unique flavor, described as caramel and toffee. The many unique flavors that can be produced from maple syrup makes it ideal for confectionery and baking. While it is not unhealthy to enjoy maple syrup on occasion, there are better sweeteners out there, like raw honey. Enjoy maple syrup on occasion but don't let it become your main sweetener at home.

Another American syrup, agave syrup is one you might not even know you're drinking! It's usually used as a sweetener in mixed alcoholic drinks and cold drinks. Agave syrup is extracted from blue agave plant, the same origin of tequila liquor. Agave syrup from blue agave is around 50 to 60% fructose and 20% glucose. Agave syrup from *A.salmiana* agave is mostly sucrose. While both are marketed as "agave syrup", these two kinds of syrups have completely different compositions. Blue agave syrup is 1.5 times sweeter than regular cane sugar. The darker varieties have more flavor, preferred for drinks and baking. Blue agave syrup is comparable to corn syrup in sweetness. Dark agave syrup has a higher mineral content, and moderate amounts of vitamin C.

Because of the high fructose content, agave syrup and corn syrup is not recommended for those with fructose malabsorption. Those with this malabsorption disorder have similar symptoms to those suffering irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Symptoms of the disorder include pain, bloating, flatulence, and diarrhea. Fructose is not properly digested in the gut, it stays longer than it should, ferments, produces gas and feeds bacteria, which creates many uncomfortable symptoms. The digestive disorder is also related to celiac disease, as it can cause intestinal damage. If you have a sensitive stomach, your condition could be aggravated by eating agave syrup.

The Vegan Reinvention of Rice Milk

Rice milk is just rice water, rice grain mixed with water, usually unsweetened and drank as a substitute for cow's milk. Rice water is common in Asian cuisine, sometimes mixed with soy milk or tea. Traditionally it's fed to children unable to drink milk, used therapeutically for those with sensitive stomachs, and used to add shine to the hair and skin. In recent years, the vegan movement has adopted rice milk as a substitute for animal sourced milk. Rice is one of many vegan substitutes, including oat milk, almond milk, soy milk, coconut milk other nut and grain milks.

Just like rice, rice milk is mostly just carbohydrates, it is hardly a substitute for the calcium and protein found in animal milk. Rice milk however is great for those who are lactose intolerant, who cannot digest animal milk. Of all the different milk alternatives, unsweetened rice milk has the highest caloric count and highest amount of carbohydrates, even higher than cows milk. It is

not suitable for diabetics, and there are better milk alternatives if you are using rice milk as a substitute.

Put Down That Alcohol

Everything in moderation is fine, especially when it comes to alcohol. Long term drinking increases risks for heart disease, oral cancers, breast cancer, stroke, and cirrhosis of the liver. It harms mental health, intelligence, and fertility. There are numerous studies that link alcohol with cancer. Liver cancer and liver damage is the most well known, but other cancers are also linked to alcohol consumption.

There is the argument that some light drinking is harmless, but that depends on the individual's health. For women, little amounts of alcohol affects fertility. Small amounts of alcohol can also potentially damage fetal health. For men, fertility drops with large consumption of alcohol. Avoid the drink if you want to conceive. Alcohol can also depress the immune system. If your immune system is already down making you prone to small infections and illnesses, decide to not take that extra drink.

Alcohol beverages contain ethanol or ethyl alcohol, created from fermentation of food starches. It also contains something called acetaldehyde, which is toxic to the body and is known to damage DNA. Acetaldehyde is so toxic that a single session of binge drinking by a pregnant woman can cause permanent damage to the DNA of a fetus. Foetal alcohol syndrome causes children to be born with physical disabilities, especially on the face and head, and mental disabilities. In adults, DNA damage can increase risk for cancers. As a health risk, and the damage it does to individuals and the community, alcohol can be considered more dangerous than hard drugs like heroin.

Many individuals of East Asian descent have a degree of alcohol intolerance, an allergy to alcohol. Those who have other allergies, like hay fever, asthma symptoms, and food allergies, especially grain allergies are likely to also be allergic to alcoholic drinks. People with Hodgkin's lymphoma, are susceptible to allergic reaction to alcohol. An allergic reaction happens because the body does not have the enzyme that breaks down the toxins present in alcohol. This is a genetic trait, there is no cure. The body reacts like it is being attacked, it releases histamines that leads to flushed skin, headaches, hives and rashes, and sometimes a severe allergic reaction leading to anaphylactic shock where the airways close up. Severe allergic reactions need emergency treatment.

Never on The Table or in The Pantry

Don't Even Mention Processed Food

Food to completely avoid can be summed up in one word: processed. Processed food tend to have more refined sugar, artificial sweeteners, artificial flavours, food coloring and other chemical additives. Everybody has their own list of foods to avoid, according to their own health

needs. But one to completely agree on avoiding has to be processed food, there are just too many culprits hidden in the ingredient list of these canned and shrink packaged conveniences. When you can, cook food from fresh ingredients. Avoid processed flavor enhancers, the most common of which is monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Processed food is food that has been changed to last longer or taste better. Food processing includes freezing, baking, canning and drying. Food is also treated to make it look more palatable, such as the process of bleaching to make sugar look white. The most common flavour enhancers - fat, sugar and salt, is liberally added to processed food, so you the consumer ends up eating more fat and sugar without even knowing it. Easy and convenient packaged food is linked to increased obesity rates. We eat more junk because it's inexpensive and readily available. It's easier than cooking your own healthy meals from scratch.

Food Allergens

Avoid your own food allergies and potential food allergies. Many people are allergic or intolerant to dairy products. They react to dairy with indigestion, bloating, and mild inflammation. Many overlook these small symptoms, because they aren't that serious or they're unaware that their mild discomfort is caused by dairy products.

Other sneaky, popular food allergens are peanuts and wheat. Peanut allergy is prevalent in many western countries, particularly in childhood. More than 15% of parents report their children have peanut allergy, in the United Kingdom. It is the most common food allergy in very young children in the UK, US, and Australia. In Asian countries, wheat is the most common food allergy in under-age-5 children, after egg and milk. If one has a good tolerance, then there really is no need to avoid wheat or peanut. But if you're often feeling unwell, and can't find the cause, eliminating processed food and allergenic food should be the first step to building your own perfect diet.

Food Stimulants: Caffeine

When overhauling your diet for the better, consider removing caffeine. If you don't drink coffee, check the labels of your packaged drinks. Many energy drinks, sugary drinks, and sodas contain caffeine. In some people, caffeine can spike blood pressure. Caffeine is a psychoactive substance, naturally found in the coffee plant, tea and chocolate. It is a stimulant that can affect the brain. In moderate amounts, caffeine lowers the risk of liver cancer, according to a 2019 review of studies by the Center of Public Health Sciences in Japan. The main reason we drink caffeine is its psychoactive properties. Caffeine directly stimulates the central nervous system, causing that caffeine buzz.

The problem with caffeine is that it is legal and easily available. It is very easy to abuse. Caffeine doses in energy drinks and pre-work out drinks are much higher than can be found in a regular cup of coffee. There are also exorbitant amounts of caffeine in diet pills, as caffeine can overstimulate the nervous system to the point that one loses appetite. It becomes increasingly

easy to accidentally intake more caffeine than the body can tolerate. Caffeine overdose lead to death, although rare.

It is more common to experience caffeine withdrawal, with real withdrawal symptoms when coming off a caffeine habit. Withdrawal is an undeniable reminder of how dependent the body can become on an outside substance, as common as caffeine. Caffeine has an individual affect on people. Some get heart palpitations, some don't. Many don't like the added stimulation, and wakefulness brought about by caffeine, and others can't live without it. Too much caffeine can cause dehydration, which brings it own set of health problems.

Long term problems from abusing caffeine include stomach ulcers, difficulty getting regular sleep, and emotional problems including anxiety and depression. This happens very rarely, and only in instances of high doses of caffeine. The effects of caffeine on the body is also very dependent on your own genetic traits, some people are more susceptible, others remain unaffected. Caffeine is not recommended for pregnant women, children and adolescents at all, as it can affect sleep and appetite, interfering with optimal growth and development. It is particularly dangerous psychologically for adolescents, prone to abuse caffeine and take up addictions.

Danger of Dairy Products

If you're not lactose intolerant, it's still not alright to eat a lot of dairy products. Many sensitive stomachs naturally avoid cheese, yogurt, butter, milk and other dairy products. If you remember that milk mustache ad campaign in the early 2000, you now know that campaign was full of lies. The new science is out, dairy is not the best food. Firstly, cows put a heavy burden on the ecology. Secondly, the health disadvantages of dairy outweigh the advantages. There are many nutrient source alternatives to drinking milk and eating dairy products. Although it is admittedly difficult to make an alternative for the flavor of cheese and butter. But nutrition-wise, you can do much better than dairy products.

It's not true that milk will protect the elderly from fractures, calcium has not have bone-protective properties. Vitamin D protects bones, but not calcium. Most of the world's adults, 75% of human beings cannot properly digest milk. And 99% of East Asians are to some degree lactose intolerant. This is a genetic trait, most adults just don't have the enzymes needed to digest milk. Most of the milk you drink just sits in the digestive track, the body simply cannot absorb nutrition from it. The stagnant milk ferments, produces gas, causes inflammation and diarrhea as the body tries to expel it. So if you see an ad or "health" reminder to drink at least three glasses of milk a day, don't forget that milk can often do more harm than good.

Dairy can also aggravate some health problems, including sinus infections, allergies, ear infections, type 1 diabetes, constipation and anemia in children. So consider getting your calcium from other sources, other than dairy. Fish, greens, and sea vegetables are reliable sources of calcium. If you insist on dairy, choose the fermented options - yogurt and kefir, on occasion.

Milk for infants and children is beneficial for infants and children. Human children still have the enzymes all mammals have, that enable them to safely digest milk. The ability to digest milk fades away as a child gets older.

GMO Food Controversy

Genetically modified crops or genetically modified organisms (GMO) is a recent technology put into large scale application, fields and fields of crops now grow plants that have been genetically modified to grow faster, resist pests and ultimately yield more food with less time and effort. This is good news for world hunger! So why the controversy over GMOs? When commercial sale of GMOs first started in 1994, there was very little study on the effects of these plants on ecology and long term implications on human health. That was 25 years ago, and times have changed. Numerous studies and reviews have convinced the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association that GMOs are safe for human consumption. As for the ecological impact of GMOs, the full implications are yet to be seen.

Different countries have different regulations on GMOs. Countries with bans on GMOs include Bulgaria, France, Germany, Northern Ireland, Romania, Switzerland and Scotland. Most countries ban specific GMO crops, rather than implementing a full ban. Countries like France, want a more "GMO Free" national diet. The concerns for the ban are unknown effects on human health and environment. If you live in a country that allows the consumption of GMOs, you'll need to read a lot of labels and do plenty of research to take out GMO crops from your grocery cart. GMOs are cheaper, and cash crops like tomatoes and peppers are more often GMOs. Staples you find in everything - corn and soybeans, are some of the most controversial GMO crops out there.

Deep Fried Food

It's true, fried food can kill you, and science can prove it. Eating fried food everyday increases your chances for early death by 8%. Your precious fried chicken and fried fish is strongly linked to death, more so than other fried treats. Not only is too much oil unhealthy, restaurants also tend to reuse oil, increasing the amount of dangerous byproducts in the cooking medium. French fries - another fried favorite is linked to cancer and increased general mortality.

Not that it's necessary to completely avoid fried food. In Spain, there is no link between fried food consumption and early death. That's because Spanish people are more likely to eat at home, rather than restaurants, avoiding that reused old oil. They also use olive oil, a much healthier oil, over other common frying oils. Olive oil has a low smoke point, which means you can't fry at very high temperatures for very long. But if you find it extremely unreasonable to fry in expensive olive oil, there are other alternatives to deep frying, such as baking, and the new alternative, air-frying.

The Best Diet is...

Your diet is a part of your life that is very flexible. Some diets are only helpful for a short amount of time. And there are diets that can be sustained for decades or even longer. Everybody is different, with different limitations and capabilities. It is true that there are some stomachs out there that are made of iron, they can eat everything. Most of us, mere mortals have to eat healthy to live longer. First principle to building your own perfect diet is to make sure that everything you eat is packed with nutrition. An efficient menu collects the best of all the food groups, so each meal is beneficial to the body and nothing is wasted on empty calories.

Another health indicator to watch out for is blood sugar and insulin levels. Insulin is a hormone that signals your body to store fat, but this hormone can fluctuate according to your diet. Too much sugar can trigger spikes in insulin levels and eventually resistance to insulin. It is important to balance your blood sugar, adults at risk of diabetes and those who are overweight can get their blood sugar regularly tested. Insulin imbalance happens when we eat too much carbohydrates and not enough protein and fat.

Finally, the ideal diet is affordable and ethical. It won't break your bank and you can eat healthy for a lifetime. You want your food choices to be ethical in the way that your food sources are sustainable. Also consider the social aspect of food. Everybody socializes around food and drink; you don't want to be isolated. Food is a joy of life, so have fun every now and then.

