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Good Nutrition

The importance of good nutrition is nothing new. Ayurveda, ancient Indian medicine, gives preference to dietary prevention of disease rather than treatment. Back in 400 B.C., Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."

Obesity:

Today, good nutrition is more important than ever throughout the world. In rich countries like the USA, 50% of the population is malnourished, while in Africa and India undernourishment is a major problem. Nearly half of California adults who ate out on an average day in 1997 chose a fast-food restaurant, up from 33 percent in 1989, according to a study released on September 21 by the State Department of Health Services. Healthcare costs for obese adults in the US, who constitute 22% of the population, have risen to \$238 billion this year, according to a study released last week at the American Obesity Association conference in Washington, DC.

Jane E. Brody reports in New York Times that in a frenzy to cut back on fats (yet to be accomplished lofty goal), Americans have turned to sugar with a vengeance as their feel-good food. Their consumption of fructose alone has risen tenfold since 1975. Growing evidence says an ever-louder no to sugars. A high-sugar diet may be making an important contribution to health problems like osteoporosis, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, not to mention the time-honored association between sugary foods and tooth decay. The sugars naturally present in fruit and milk, for example, come in a package laden with essential nutrients. The sugar added to canned

fruit or frozen yogurt brings in nothing but calories. To make matters worse, most heavily sweetened foods are also high-fat foods.

With approximately 39 million Americans meeting the criteria for obesity, the American Obesity Association's Morgan Downey states in an association release that obesity "is the ticking time-bomb in the healthcare system." There is a saying in Telugu that roughly translates as: "Rich man's disease is excess food, while poor man's disease is lack of food."

Balanced Diet:

Four of the top leading causes of death in the U.S., are heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. These are directly related to the way Americans eat; and diet has been also implicated in scores of other conditions. Eating right is the key to health, while the wrong diet can be deadly, e.g., Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) can begin in early childhood, but the process can be halted and even reversed, if healthy changes in diet and lifestyle are made. Osteoporosis may be prevented if enough calcium from dairy products and other vegetable sources is consumed and weight-bearing exercises are practiced throughout life. Even if you are genetically predisposed to diabetes, if you keep your weight within a healthy range through diet and exercise the disease may never strike you. The keys to good nutrition are balance, variety and moderation.

Whole Grains:

Women who consume two to three servings of whole grains per day by eating foods such as whole wheat bread, oatmeal, or popcorn,

reduce their risk of heart disease by almost 30%, report researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts.

Onions:

Osteoporosis is a disease that afflicts women after menopause. There may be a preventive medicine lurking in your kitchen! Swiss Scientists reported in the September 23 issue of Nature that the intake of certain vegetables by laboratory rats can alter bone metabolism. In particular, rats fed 1 gram per day of dried onion for four weeks exhibited augmented bone mass. Let us hope similar affect will be observed in humans as well.

Breast Milk:

Diet affects not only adults, but also infants. Growth of middle class and increase in the number of working women has an avoidable side effect, the infant malnutrition due to formula feeding. A nutritional study, being published in the October edition of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, finds that 60 percent of the IQ gain seen in breast-fed infants comes from the mother's milk. Maternal bonding accounts for the remaining 40 percent. On the average, breast-fed infants have IQs that are five points higher than babies who were fed formula, according to researchers at the University of Kentucky who examined results of 20 other studies on infant brain development. The researchers say intelligence benefits occur from up to six months of breast-feeding, and that infants who breast feed for eight weeks or less do not show any IQ gain.

According to Australian researchers, feeding breast milk exclusively until babies are at least 4 months old may protect against the child's developing respiratory problems. According to the report, which is published in the September 25 issue of the British Medical Journal, the length of time breastfeeding was used exclusively was more significant than the overall length of time that the child was breastfed. "Formula is not the same as breast milk," said lead researcher Wendy Oddy, senior research officer at the University of Western Australia in Perth.

Berries and Grapes:

Fruits are good for you. Elderly rats fed the human equivalent of at least half a cup of blueberries a day improved in balance, coordination and short-term memory, according to a study published this month in The Journal of Neuroscience.

Flavonoids, compounds found in purple grape juice, help arteries respond to increased blood flow, a team at the University of Wisconsin reports in the September 7th issue of Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association. Boston, Massachusetts.

Eat more fruits and vegetables to defy aging and feed your babies with breast milk to improve their IQ.

Sreenivasarao Vepachedu, 09/29/99

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