

Article 1

Most people today understand that proper nutrition is one of the essential components of good health. For some reason, however, few of us adequately implement this simple strategy. There are a variety of reasons for this, but it essentially comes down to the fact that the consequences of poor eating habits, like the consequences of all poor health habits, are delayed.

My mother tried to quit smoking for years. She failed over and over again. One day she had a health crisis and she fully realized for the first time the consequences of her habit. She quit the next day and hasn't smoked since. The craving to smoke was just as strong after her health crisis as it was before. The difference was that after her illness, the health consequences were real and before they were just possibilities.

It is difficult for many of us to justify ignoring our desires for convenient foods with great taste, but little nutritional value, when the consequences of doing so might be years away. If we felt pain every time we ate a poor quality food, we would quickly improve our diets.

The fact is – the consequences are real. A high percentage of the diseases U.S. citizens suffer from are related to our nutritional choices. In order to improve them, it is essential that we come to grips with this simple fact. I am going to make a statement that I have never heard anyone make before: All diseases are related to nutrition. That doesn't mean that all diseases are caused by our nutritional choices, because they are not. I will talk about the other causes of disease in future columns.

All disease is a byproduct of some type of abnormal function. All functions in the body, from the creation of a thought to the movement of a muscle, involve chemical reactions. In order for these reactions to occur, the appropriate chemicals must be present in the body.

All food is composed of chemicals. Proteins, vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants, and even water are all chemicals. There are some chemicals that are necessary for healthy function and there are many chemicals that interfere with normal function.

Good nutrition is nothing more than consuming the chemicals that the body needs for its various functions. Ideally these nutrients would come from the food that we eat. Unfortunately, most of us eat foods that do not have the appropriate quality and quantity of these vital nutrients. Much of the processed foods that we eat have had the nutrients stripped from them as a consequence of the manufacturing process. Additionally, most of the produce that we eat has been grown on megafarms in soil that is itself depleted of nutrients. Modern fertilizers can make food grow even in depleted soils, but they don't make them grow nutrient dense.

To ensure good health, we need to include organic foods in our diet as well as take nutritional supplements. Next week I will discuss some of the supplements that I recommend.

Article 2

It wasn't too many years ago when the prevailing belief among most medical doctors was that diet had nothing to do with the development of disease. Today that is hard to imagine. Proper nutrition is a fundamental component of all body functions and lack of proper nutrition can influence the development and course of any disease.

In my last article I discussed why adequate nutrition is difficult to obtain eating the average American diet. To compensate, it is necessary to take supplemental nutrients. There are hundreds of nutritional supplements on the market. There are just as many people willing to give advice regarding what nutrients should be taken. Unfortunately few of these advisors have had adequate training to provide accurate advice.

Other than identical twins, no two people are genetically alike and no two people eat the exact same foods and are exposed to the exact same environmental stresses. As a result, no two people need exactly the same supplemental nutrients. While it is not possible to provide customized advice in a column such as this, I will provide some general advice that can benefit most people.

The first supplement that the average person should take is a good quality multivitamin. It is not easy to identify good quality from poor quality, but a good rule of thumb is that you get what you pay for. Bargain priced multivitamins are made with inexpensive raw materials that may not be converted as easily into usable nutrients within the body. Bargain vitamins also are designed to provide the daily RDA (recommended daily allowance). Unfortunately many experts believe that the RDA is based on antiquated science that was originated to prevent vitamin deficiency diseases such as rickets and scurvy. There is a difference between what the body needs to prevent these diseases and providing what the body needs to be optimally healthy.

The second nutrient that I recommend is purified fish oil. Fish oil contains high concentrations of omega 3 fatty acids. Omega 3 fatty acids are essential nutrients that help brain function, cardiovascular function and immune function. Omega 3 fatty acids are not found in adequate concentrations in the average diet. Make sure that your fish oil supplements are purified to remove PCB's and mercury. It may also be wise to make sure that they are coated to dissolve in the intestines rather than the stomach to prevent a fishy after-taste.

The third nutrient I recommend is a broad spectrum anti-oxidant. Anti-oxidants are chemical compounds that help rid the body of metabolic pollution. When our cells burn energy, free radicals are released. These ions bounce around and can damage our cells including our DNA. It is believed that much of the aging process is the direct by-product of free radical damage. Cancer has also been linked to free radical damage.

Normally these free radicals are absorbed by anti-oxidants. The most plentiful sources of anti-oxidants are richly colored fruits and vegetables. Most Americans do not eat enough fruits and vegetables, so most of us are not adequately protected from free-radicals. My favorite anti-oxidant supplement is a product that consists of a wide range of nutrient dense vegetables that are condensed into a powder drink mix. There are other anti-oxidant supplements available and all can help, but the more broad the range of nutrient sources, the better the body will be protected.

These three types of supplements can provide a good nutritional foundation. Next week I will review some additional nutrients that might be beneficial for individuals with specific health needs. If you would like customized advice, you are welcome to call our office for a consultation or you may discuss your concerns with your health care provider. Be aware however, that many health care providers have had only minimal training in current nutritional theory.