



Well-Being Highlight: Nutrition, Back to Basics

"Eat food, not too much, mostly plants" - Michael Pollan

'Eating too many eggs will raise your cholesterol.' 'It's safe to consume eggs everyday.'
'Saturated fat causes heart disease.' 'There is no evidence that saturated fats increase one's risk of heart disease.'
'Carbohydrates are fattening.' 'Maintaining a diet high in complex carbohydrates may be protective against weight gain.'
'Organic foods are healthier.' 'There is no difference in the nutrient content of organic and conventionally grown food.' And on and on and on.....

Phew....it's no wonder that many of us are confused about what to eat! We are bombarded by messaging about food everywhere we turn, and it seems that these messages often conflict. We go to the grocery store with the intention of choosing healthy foods and we end up with decision fatigue. We don't even know what to put in our cart, so we end up with highly processed, high sugar, high salt, high fat foods that are not doing us any favors.

If we look at the rates of obesity and chronic disease in the United States, much of it started with the rise in popularity of processed food in the 1970s. It was around this time that diets "began to shift toward increased reliance upon processed foods, increased away from home intake and greater use of edible oils and sugar-sweetened beverages" (1). Processed foods, a mainstay of the Standard American Diet (SAD), have been associated with obesity, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disease (2), depression, ADHD (3), Alzheimer's and cognitive aging (4). Consuming a healthy diet is one of three behaviors (along with regular physical activity and not smoking) that can prevent diabetes, cancer, heart disease and lung disease - diseases directly responsible for fifty percent of all deaths in Vermont (5).

When it comes to eating a healthy diet and promoting lifelong health, perhaps we should simplify and go back to the basics. In his book "In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto" author Michael Pollan suggests that we should "eat food, not too much, mostly plants" (6). That means, as much as possible, choosing single ingredient foods that don't come with an ingredients label. Eggs, sugar free dairy products, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, meat, poultry and fish should make up about 80% of our diet and "fun", treat foods the other 20%.

I challenge you to take a look at what foods you're eating. Are you eating a healthy diet? Where might you be able to make some changes to improve the quality of what you're eating?



Start small. Perhaps with just one food or one meal. Drop me a line and let me know how it goes. You can reach me at rebecca.schubert@gmhec.org.

Curious what other simple rules Michael Pollan suggests? Check out, "Food Rules: An Eater's Manual" (7). If you'd like some support cleaning up your diet, a health coach can help. Cigna beneficiaries can access free health coaching by logging on to www.mycigna.com. Click on "manage my health" and select "my health assistant online coaching" from the drop down menu. Small action today will yield you great future benefits.

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- 6) Pollan, M. (2008). *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- 7) Pollan, M. (2009). *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*. New York, NY: Penguin.

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