

EATING TO HELP YOURSELF TO DO WELL

ON THE BANKS, ON BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER,  
THERE WILL GROW ALL KINDS OF TREES FOR FOOD...  
THEIR FRUIT WILL BE FOR FOOD,  
AND THEIR LEAVES FOR HEALING.

EZEKIEL 47:12

Ethel has been one of my best friends for thirty-five years. She graduated from college with a degree in home economics during World War II, got married, and immediately put her knowledge into practice. Ethel's fourth child, Mark, was sickly as a toddler. Despite repeated visits to doctors, he lost weight, developed a bloated stomach, and did not thrive as her other children had done.

Ethel researched possible nutritional causes for his problems and came to suspect that he had celiac disease. When this diagnosis was confirmed by medical testing, Ethel treated Mark with a gluten-free diet. He gained pounds and a healthy glow, and has grown into a 6'2" Iron Man competitor who loves the outdoors and all things physical.

When I met Ethel I was a young wife with very little experience in cooking. She taught me about nutrition, brown rice, fresh vegetables, stir-frying, and the joy of making food for others. My family and friends still enjoy "Ethel's Chicken", "Ethel's Bread", and "Ethel's Angel Pie", among other recipes she shared with us. But we are also thankful to her for my extra years and quality of life that I believe are due to her tutoring in good nutrition.

Eating well will help our bodies to heal themselves and to thrive in the difficult environment we know as chronic illness. These include feeding ourselves the best foods for healing that God provides.

## THE BASICS OF EATING WELL

Reading the headlines from monthly magazines can be confusing: fat is good for you, fat is terrible for you, carbohydrates will make you fat, carbohydrates are the key to weight loss, high fiber diets will help your digestion, high fiber diets are bad for your digestive system. But some basic principles have not changed with these seasonal fads.

### *BREAKFAST IS GOOD FOR YOU*

The first principle to review is one our mothers taught us: we should eat a good breakfast to start our day right. My grandfather never missed a day of his bacon, eggs, and toast with real butter. Today, the average American completely skips breakfast about one day per week. We no longer need a "farmer's breakfast" because most of us are much more sedentary than our forefathers and work more with our brains than with our bodies. However, recent studies in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* have found that eating breakfast is correlated with clearer thinking and increased ability to learn as well as creativity, so this meal should be very important in today's daily routine. Our brains have been on a fast in the morning, and they require glucose, which is derived from carbohydrates, to run effectively.

Our bodies also need protein and fiber in the morning. Both slow the movement of food through the intestines, helping us to feel full until lunch, and regulating the blood sugar spikes that can result from eating carbohydrates alone. Ideally, we will have about 5 grams of fiber, 10 grams of protein, and less than 15 grams of fat included in our breakfast. Easy breakfast options include: oatmeal with milk and raisins, a smoothie made with yogurt, milk, and fruit, any fresh fruit and nuts added to yogurt. A breakfast containing whole grain, high-fiber cereal, yogurt, milk, or an egg, and a high fiber fruit will naturally feed our brains and bodies all morning so that we can work to our highest potential.

### *BALANCING PROTEIN, FAT, CARBOHYDRATE, AND FIBER*

We all know that eating spinach is better for us than eating chocolate chip cookies, but we don't necessarily understand exactly why this is true. Our bodies were made to run on a variety of fuels and to use them in proportion to our needs. If we are alerted to the amounts of each of these nutrients we require, and watch our intake of them carefully for a short time, it will become second nature to us to "count" our intake and adjust it on a daily basis.

#### *PROTEIN*

**Protein** builds and repairs our body tissues: muscle, brain, blood, enzymes, hormones, and antibodies. Our immune systems will not work in a protein-starved environment. Protein helps to rebuild muscle tissue injured in exercise. Protein also helps us to maintain a healthy weight by suppressing hunger better than fat or carbohydrates and being an integral ingredient in the burning of fat in the body. In modern society, most people have no trouble consuming the .40 grams per pound of body weight RDA for the average adult, or about 50 grams a day for a 140 pound person. The average amounts of milk, meat, fish, chicken, whole grains, beans, eggs, and nuts consumed by the average American provide more than the amount of protein we need.

#### *FAT*

**Fats** are the most concentrated source of energy in our diets and should make up 25-35 percent of our daily calories, or 500-700 calories per day on a 2,000 calorie diet. Without fat your body cannot absorb the "fat-soluble" vitamins, Vitamin A, D, E, and K, which help you maintain health. Fat also keeps your skin and hair from being dry, helps to produce hormones, and provides fatty acids which are vital to heart health. To accomplish the goal of a low but good fat diet, you should eat low fat or non-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, and fish, and monounsaturated or polyunsaturated oils.

The kind of fat you eat matters much more than the amount. *Saturated fats*, found in meat and full-fat dairy products, and *trans fats*, found in fried foods and baked goods designed to have a long shelf life, both clog your blood vessels and

lead to storing fat tissue in the abdomen, a situation also shown to lead to heart problems. *Unsaturated fats*, found in oils such as safflower, olive, and peanut, may actually reduce the amount of “bad” cholesterol, or LDL, in your body and help you to lose weight.

Most medical practitioners now recommend that you limit your saturated fat intake to less than 7 percent of your calories and avoid trans fats completely. Trans fats raise your LDL, similarly to saturated fats, but, in addition, they lower your “good” cholesterol, or HDL, which helps your body to clear away the LDL. In fact, some cities now outlaw the use of trans fats in restaurants, leading to a trend toward this in national restaurants.

Obviously, we should avoid food containing hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fat (trans fats). Toward this end the FDA now requires labeling of packages indicating the amount of trans fat in a product. Due to this, some manufacturers have begun to substitute tropical oils such as palm and coconut oil for oils which have trans fats. These substitutions could raise the level of *saturated* fats in our foods and margarines. The healthiest choice is to avoid trans fats and tropical oils completely.

Use heart friendly oils for salad dressings, baking, and frying which are low in trans and saturated fats such as olive oil, canola oil, and peanut oil. You may have to fry at a lower temperature with these oils to avoid burning. Recent research indicates that “virgin” oils have the highest levels of both antioxidants which fight disease and aging processes in your body, and phenols, which help your body to avoid forming blood clots. Paying the extra premium for virgin oils probably makes sense for those facing chronic illnesses.

Fortunately the food industry is developing many new margarines which are free of trans fats. Many of these are even high in omega-3 fatty acids which are heart protective. Several of the new products, such as Smart Balance, may be used in baking your favorite recipes with no appreciable change in the baked goods. Another option is softening real butter and mixing it with an oil which will reduce LDL to make your own spread.

Fatty fish such as salmon are often high in the omega-3 fatty acids which lower blood pressure and other heart disease risk factors as well as fighting inflammation throughout your body. They should be included in your diet as an excellent source of protein and healthy fat. Also consider getting your fat in nuts. Almonds and walnuts appear to be especially heart-friendly sources. Research, in fact, shows that eating walnuts at the same time you eat a food containing cholesterol aids in keeping the cholesterol from forming plaques in your bloodstream.

## FIBER

As a child, I remember wondering about the meaning of the slogan on the box of prunes in our cupboard: "Eat your daily fiber". I loved to eat prunes, but had no idea what they had to do with fiber or why I should care about it. Now in my sixties, I understand more clearly. As we age, and often with chronic illness, our digestive systems becomes less efficient and need more fiber to help them function. Prune juice is very popular in retirement community dining rooms.

Recent research clearly shows that eating sufficient fiber not only promotes regularity but also decreases the risk of some diseases such as diverticulosis and colon cancer, as well as lowering cholesterol and blood sugar. Knowing this, why don't more Americans eat the 20-40 grams of fiber suggested by the National Cancer Institute and the Food and Drug Administration?

Many of us eat on the run, and most fast food, including almost everything that we buy in wrappers, relies on white flour and other processed foods. We must search out good sources of fiber, for example fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grains, and beans of various sorts. Most of us would drastically increase our fiber intake if we simply ate the recommended five servings of fruits and/or vegetables every day.

Various fiber supplements, such as Metamucil and Citrucel, are also available for those who cannot do this, and they work quite well. Adding extra water while increasing fiber intake gradually will forestall problems you might have increasing fiber too quickly or without enough hydration. Increasing your fiber intake may have the added advantage of helping in weight control, partly because it makes you feel full for longer than low fiber food alternatives.

## CARBOHYDRATES

The advent in the 1990s of the Atkins Diet and others similar to it made carbohydrate a word not spoken in polite company. Devotees of the diet ate entire meals consisting only of meat. Fortunately we have returned to a more balanced view of the various food groups, and most practitioners agree that we need some carbohydrates to provide energy for our bodies and minds to function properly. The key is choosing the right ones.

What do carbohydrates do for us? For one thing, our muscles run on the glucose our bodies produce from carbohydrates in combination with protein. Carbohydrates aid in keeping our minds alert. Carbohydrates also increase the production of serotonin in our bodies, linked to improved moods, more energy, and greater pain tolerance. Why wouldn't we like foods with so many positive attributes?

Adults consuming 2000 calories per day should choose about 300 grams of that food in the carbohydrate group. Clearly we could accomplish this with one Big Mac Combo. However, the carbohydrates which produce long-term positive change in our bodies are those in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. If these groups sound familiar it is because they are the same ones which provide us with the fiber we need.

Most of us consume too many carbs in the form of white sugar and white flour. While tasty, these foods have virtually no nutritional value and add to our risks of many diseases, including all of those associated with obesity such as heart disease and joint problems. These “simple carbohydrates” or “bad carbs” digest almost immediately and cause spikes in our blood sugar whenever we eat them. Such spikes repeated over time can lead to diabetes, a disease which is reaching almost epidemic proportions in the United States today.

Because of these severe drawbacks, many experts today suggest their patients eat nothing white: no white flour, no sugar, and no white rice. Instead, they suggest adding “complex” or “good carbs”. Complex carbohydrates take longer to digest and do not cause the sugar spikes associated with white sugar and flour, thus not adding to diabetes risk. These carbs not only produce the positive benefits we’ve just discussed but provide most of the vitamins and minerals our bodies need to function and fight disease. This is especially important for those of us who are fighting illness daily.

Changing your eating patterns to exclude the bad and include the good carbs will take time and energy, but the benefits are undoubtedly worth it. Substituting whole wheat flour for part of the white flour you usually bake with would be one step in the right direction. However, if you make only one change in your diet it should be this: add more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes. When you have accomplished this, the protein, fat, and fiber will have fallen into acceptable ranges.

## USING SUPPLEMENTS

On the first cold day in the winter of 1952, our furnace came on and the entire house was filled with a horrible smell. Unbeknownst to my mother, my little brother, aged 5, had been dropping his vitamin capsules into the hot air vent next to his chair all summer long because he didn’t like their taste. The heat had turned them into a gooey cod liver mess with a smell which the entire family remembers, much to my brother’s chagrin.

Since most of us do not eat as well as we should every day, we often look to supplements to balance our dietary needs. This is not a new practice, as my brother’s story shows. Much more has been learned in the past few decades about the need for and efficacy of certain nutrients. However, the vast majority of physicians still know very little about nutrition in general, since nutrition is not

usually a required course during medical school. Since good nutrition in general, and supplementation in specific, might be helpful to us in fighting our daily battle with chronic illness, we should research this area ourselves and, if we consider it helpful, check out our findings with experts in this field.

## WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS SUPPLEMENTS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

Today you can buy “supplements” of an alarming number and variety of substances, from shark cartilage to monkey pod extract. What are the basics? Our bodies convert our food into two basic nutrients: vitamins, both fat-soluble and water-soluble, and minerals. Both of these nutrients are necessary to life and health.

### *FAT-SOLUBLE VITAMINS*

Vitamins A, D, E, and K are stored in your liver and other fatty tissues. Because they are stored, they can build up in the body, sometimes to unhealthy levels. They are, however, very important for various body functions, and we should be careful to get enough of them, either in our diets or through supplements.

### *WATER-SOLUBLE VITAMINS*

The water-soluble vitamins, C, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4 (Pantothenic Acid), B-6, B-9 (Folate), and B-12, are excreted by our bodies every day, so we don't have to worry about having too much of them stored in our systems. They are digested and absorbed into the body through the blood system. For the best health, we should ingest some of these every day.

### *MINERALS*

Most of our mineral needs can be met through a good diet, since minerals such as magnesium, zinc, and iron are found in the soil and come to us through our grains, vegetables, and fruit. However, research now shows the value of supplementing our mineral intake in some cases. For example, most people benefit from additional calcium and Vitamin D, especially in later years and in climates with little sunshine during winter months. Regular calcium intake is clearly shown to promote weight loss as well as lower blood pressure. Calcium is also important in preventing osteoporosis, a major cause of falls and hip fractures in later years. Bone is built up during our younger years, so calcium supplementation is important for all ages, especially for women who are a greater risk for osteoporosis.

Adequate intake of Vitamin D is required for calcium to be absorbed in the body. Because of this connection, many calcium supplements include Vitamin D.

Research also looks promising on the use of Vitamin D to prevent breast, colon, prostate, and lung cancers as well as to fight these cancers once they strike.

Nutritionists are studying the effects of many minerals on the bodies of healthy people and those with illness. Magnesium, zinc, and chromium are among those which show promise in aiding the body's healing processes.

### *OMEGA THREE FATTY ACIDS*

Although not usually classified among the vitamins and minerals, omega-3 fatty acids have recently been shown to have so many positive effects on the body that I mention them here. Research clearly indicates that supplementing your diet with EPA and DHA, the two main omega-3 acids, reduces the risk of death from heart disease for patients with diagnosed heart disease. These fish oils also lower triglyceride levels in heart patients.

More recent research indicates that these acids may be useful in other diseases in which inflammation is a factor. For example, people with osteo-arthritis of the knee have shown reduction of inflammation and increase in flexibility when using omega-3 supplementation. Omega-3s also show promise in treating other forms of arthritis and rheumatological disease such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. I have personally had great success in supplementing my diet with omega-3s and encourage you to explore this possibility with your medical team.

### DO YOU REALLY NEED SUPPLEMENTS?

This is a question to explore with your medical team, but the answer is generally "yes". Most of us do not eat as well as we know we should, even though more fresh foods are available to us than ever before in history. Our lives are busy, and we often choose a restaurant instead of the kitchen counter as the place to stoke our bodies' engines.

Those of us who face chronic illnesses may have another reason to use supplements. Many of the medicines which we take to fight our diseases can cause deficiencies in vitamins and minerals. For instance, we now know that people who regularly take statin drugs such as Lipitor to counteract high cholesterol or triglyceride levels are probably depleting their bodies of Coenzyme Q-10. They would do well to take a supplement of this nutrient in order to keep their musculature healthy, including their heart muscle.

Even people without illness to cope with often opt to at least take a multivitamin to cover gross deficiencies. In evaluating multivitamins, look for one that provides at least 100% of the Daily Value (DV) of most of the essential vitamins and minerals and has the US Pharmacopeia label (USP), indicating it has passed tests for absorption, purity, and strength. Be aware that the body cannot absorb more than 600 mg of calcium at once, so you will not be able to get all of the



DV of that nutrient in one tablet. Women who are pregnant or could become pregnant should have a multivitamin with added folic acid, iron, zinc, and calcium which will help to assure the healthy development of their babies. Strict vegetarians might need additional vitamin B-12. People over age fifty should probably have additional vitamins D, B-12, and 1,200 mg of calcium.

Good information on supplements can be found at NIH, Nutrition.gov, MedLinePlus, the FDA website, the PubMed database, and the International Bibliographic Information on Dietary Supplements (IBIDS) database. Several of these sites provide a list of questions to ask yourself before you decide to take supplements. All of them provide excellent bases for your own personal study.

I also encourage you to buy a guide to all nutrients and to use it regularly until knowing what your body needs and what foods provide those nutrients becomes second nature to you. One which is well-respected is Staying Healthy with Nutrition by Elson Haas. The popular book The RealAge Diet: Make Yourself Younger with What You Eat by Michael Roizen is also an excellent resource. (You can go online to take the RealAge test for no charge and learn more about this approach to wellness.) A good guide book could be one of the best and cheapest investments you ever make.

Supplements can be expensive, and almost none are covered by insurance, so choosing to use them is a decision of import. Because of recent research showing the importance of good nutrition in fighting disease, more physicians are taking this into account in treatment. Often the first step is blood or urine testing to determine your current vitamin and mineral levels. Such testing is not always covered by medical insurance, but could be important for you. Research this yourself, talk with your medical team, and decide together whether testing would be appropriate in your case. Remember, however, that nobody knows your body and its reactions like you, and do what seems right to you.

## CHART

### BASIC VITAMIN AND MINERAL INFORMATION

NAME	DOSAGE	SOURCES	USES
VIT A	2,000-3,000 IU	leafy greens and orange and yellow fruits and veggies	vision, immune system, skin, lungs, bones, may protect against cancer and heart disease
VIT B-1 (Thiamine)	1.1 MG	yeast, nuts, fish, whole grains, soy, beans	helps convert carbs into energy, improves function of arteries
VIT B-2 (Riboflavin)	1.1 mg	organ meats, eggs, milk, fortified cereals, green leafies	helps produce red blood cells and maintain good eyesight and skin
VIT B-3 (Niacin)	14-16 mg	meat, fish, poultry, peanuts, grains, yeast	converts glucose into energy, helps lower LDL, maintains skin, nerves, and digestive system
VIT B-5 (Pantothenic Acid)	5 mg	eggs, fish, dairy, whole grains, potatoes, legumes, broccoli	used in synthesis of hormones and cholesterol, helpful for allergies
VIT B-6 (Pyridoxine)	1.3-1.5 mg	meat, poultry, fish, nuts, beans, eggs, potatoes	brain function, red blood cells, immune system, metabolism of protein and carbohydrates
VIT B-9 (Folate or Folic acid)	400 mcg	liver, beans, citrus, whole grains, green leafy vegetables	forms DNA and blood cells, helps use proteins, protects heart
VIT B-12 (Cobalmin)	2.4 mcg	meat, poultry, helps milk products, eggs, fortified foods	form red blood cells and maintain the central nervous system

VIT C	75-90 mg	citrus, strawberries, broccoli, papaya, peppers	fights infections, heals wounds, helps produce collagen, helps iron absorption
VIT D	200-800 mcg	fortified milk, eggs, tuna, salmon, butter	aids calcium absorption for strong teeth and bones, improves lipid levels, aids immune system
VIT E	15 mg	nuts, seeds, oils, wheat germ	acts as antioxidant to clear free radicals from body, protects heart
VIT K	90-120 mcg	leafy green vegetables	increases blood-clotting time and aids in bone formation
CALCIUM	1,000-1,200 mg	milk products, molasses, spinach	builds bones and teeth, regulates muscle contraction, heartbeat, blood clotting
CHROMIUM	20-35 mcg	pepper, yeast, mushrooms, whole grains	aids in use of protein, carbs, fat
COPPER	900 mcg	seafood, cashews, mushrooms, peanut butter	builds red blood cells, makes connective tissue, aids immune system, reduces blood clots
IRON	8-18 mg	beef, poultry, tuna, raisins, peas, oatmeal, figs, fortified grains	helps hemoglobin to carry oxygen to cells, strengthens immune system
MAGNESIUM	320 mcg	nuts, meat, milk, potatoes, beans	bone development, muscle and nerve function, energy production, heart health
SELENIUM	55 mcg	fish, poultry, meat, pasta, sunflower seeds, oatmeal,	antioxidant, immune system and thyroid system support

		eggs, soy nuts	
SODIUM	1.3-1.5 mg	salt, soy sauce	helps to regulate body fluids and blood pressure
ZINC	8 mg	seafood, meat, milk products, peanuts, beans	wound healing, energy metabolism, immune system, prostate health

## WHAT IS THE NEW FOOD PYRAMID?

The United States Department of Agriculture recently revised the food pyramid we have known for fifty years. The basic categories remain unchanged, but the guidelines include more whole grains and vegetables. Today's suggestions include:

Whole grains (bread, cereal, rice, and pasta)	6-11 servings
Vegetables	3 -5 servings
Fruit	2- 4 servings
Milk, yogurt, cheese	2 -3 servings
Meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, nuts	2-3 servings
Fats, oils, and sweets	Use sparingly

The revised pyramid reflects new understanding that whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and milk products build our bodies' defense systems, keep our digestive systems working optimally, and protect our cardiovascular systems. Furthermore the new research about the effects of bad fats show clearly that limiting these will lengthen our lives and bring higher quality to those lives. Like any other tool, the pyramid should be used to keep us mindful of healthy living styles rather than to restrict our lives.

## **ADD FOOD PYRAMID HERE**

## WHAT ARE THE SUPER FOODS?

We have learned in recent years that some foods are "super" in terms of their ability to fight disease and keep the body healthy. These foods are generally high in anti-oxidants and sterols which aid in healing. The best of the super foods appear to be those which are brightly colored plant foods. These foods can be eaten raw, cooked, or even juiced, with similar benefits. Although medical practitioners differ somewhat in those foods they recommend most highly, the following are generally agreed upon to be superior to others at fighting disease and supporting healthy lifestyles.

## *FRUITS*

Blackberries  
Blueberries  
Cranberries  
Grapes (especially Concord)  
Oranges  
Pink Grapefruit  
Strawberries

## *VEGETABLES*

Broccoli  
Brussels sprouts  
Carrots  
Eggplant  
Peanuts  
Red and Yellow Peppers  
Spinach  
Tomatoes  
Winter squashes

While these fruits and vegetables are especially good at enabling our bodies to work well and heal, don't forget that whole grains and protein are vital in keeping our balance as well.

## IS BUYING ORGANIC FOOD WORTH THE COST?

When I was growing up, farmers would come through our neighborhood about once a week and offer their produce for sale from the backs of their trucks. Since few of them used any artificial fertilizers or pesticides in those days, the food we bought would probably be labeled organic today. We just thought it was convenient and delicious.

More organic foods are now available than ever before even in normal grocery stores. Gone are the days of having to find "the organic store" in town and put up with its limited supply of foods. The question now becomes, "Is it worth the premium you pay for organic foods?" And the answer appears to be: it depends. Some foods, for instance, require more pesticides to be grown in today's climates and might be safer in organic form. Organic foods in general evidence only one-third the amount of pesticide residue of non-organic foods. Although research in this area remains thin, many people believe that lack of pesticides in food could be a more important factor for those already struggling with chronic illness.

Proponents of organic foods also point out what they consider health risks from the hormones, steroids, and antibiotics which are often used in producing non-organic meats and dairy products. No definitive research exists in this area as yet.

We know now that flavonoids, a type of plant pigment, are important in restoring the body and preventing illness, especially cancers. Recent research does indicate that organic foods have higher levels of flavonoids than non-organic.

In addition, most organic food producers have long banned trans fats from their recipes, and their products are thus much healthier for hearts than their

hydrogenated counterparts. Consumers will also find no artificial colors or flavors or genetically engineered ingredients in organic foods, although the significance of this in general health has yet to be determined.

In general, experts currently recommend that we consider buying organic beef, chicken, and dairy products due to their lack of hormones and antibiotics and organic soft-skinned fruits and vegetables, such as peaches and lettuce, because they have much lower levels of pesticide residue than their non-organic counterparts. With the cost of organic foods roughly 25-40 percent above traditional groceries, each of us must decide whether the added benefits of going organic are worth the financial cost.

### IN SUMMARY

1. We should eat well in order to keep our bodies as healthy as possible for as long as possible.
2. Eating well entails keeping protein, fat, carbohydrates, and fiber in the proper balance.
3. Buying organic foods can make sense in some circumstances.
4. Supplementing a good diet with manufactured vitamins and minerals can be a good option, especially for persons with chronic illness and many medications.