Eating Well: Clearing up the myths and misconceptions about food

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Food and water are vital components in our overall health. Yet with the proliferation of diets such as the Paleo diet and the Mediterranean diet, celebrity-endorsed cleanses and media coverage about superfoods, it is difficult to clear up these myths and misconceptions and determine what we should be eating. In this session of The Commons, we asked Dr. Natalie McCulloch, H.BKin, ND, of the Durham Natural Health Centre and Registered Dietician Lisa Ireland, B.A. Sc., RD questions about making healthy food choices and what the optimum foods are for our bodies. We hope their responses to our questions will help clear up the confusion about what we should eat. Take a look.

Questions:

1. I’m not sure that I can lose weight on my own but there are so many local diet places to choose from and it gets confusing – Weight Watchers, Dr. Poon’s Metabolic Diet, Dr. Bernstein Diet Program, Herbal Magic, etc. Are all of these diet programs useful? What should I look for in a diet plan if I want to lose weight?

   • These businesses do help people but it often isn’t sustainable. People gain the weight back.
   • To lose weight, focus on eating real food – not packaged food or shakes. You need whole foods – fruits, vegetables – food you can prepare at home to keep the weight off for good.
   • Diets don’t work. Yo-yo dieting is bad. 95% of diets fail and they can be expensive. You need to change your lifestyle and this is not a quick fix. Change the behaviours that you see and recognize that are causing you to eat – emotional stress, lack of sleep, large portions.
   • Watch portions – restaurant meals are too large. This distorts our thinking about portion size.
   • BMI (body mass) is not fully related to longevity. It is okay to have a bit of extra weight. Not everyone is meant to be a BMI of 20. Just don’t be obese.
   • Dieters are three times more likely to gain weight than non-dieters. Weight cycling isn’t good for you. This leads to eating disorders and stress. Focus on eating better instead.
   • Be mindful of what you are eating. Try to notice if you are not hungry or full - pay attention to your body. Don’t multi-task when you are eating, such as eating in front of the television. You will overeat.
   • Diabetes means that you must stick to an eating plan.
   • Eat a little bit every 3 to 5 hours. You don’t need to eat a lot. If you don’t eat, the cortisol in your body increases and this causes you to gain weight.
• Women gain weight with menopause around abdominal area. Weight training exercise is helpful to combat this gain.

Websites of Interest:

http://eatrightontario.ca contains a checklist for choosing a weight loss diet

www.webmd.com/women/rapid-weight-loss rapid weight loss promises…

http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/82/1/222S.long article on long-term weight maintenance

www.sizediversityandhealth.org/images/uploaded/ASDAH%20HAES%20Principles.pdf talks about being healthy at different weights – a more encouraging approach to weight

2. There are a lot of protein bars on the market. I heard that they help you control your hunger between meals but they seem high in calories. Would you recommend one? Should I make my own?

• Protein bars are good in a pinch when you are on the go.
• They help you stay full longer. Plan to get regular intervals of protein at every meal, this helps you feel full.
• When you make it, you can control what goes into your protein bars.
• http://www.eattracker.ca/recipe_analyzer.aspx enables you to identify the nutrition in your home made bars.
• Protein can be useful after an activity - relates to amount of activity.
• Watch for sugar content and carbohydrates levels and other ingredients that you don’t need. Some protein bars are meal replacements and others are for snacks only.
• Examine nutrition labels facts and look at the amount per serving to know what you are eating.
• In terms of protein, 5% or less is a little; 5-15% is daily value; 15% and up is a lot on a nutrition facts label.
• Look for more fiber, vitamin A, calcium, iron and less fat, saturated, trans fat and sodium.
• Every 4 grams of sugar, equals a teaspoon of sugar.
• Stevia is zero sugar.
• Tip - eat the fruit instead of drinking the fruit. Fiber helps fill you up; it's healthier with less sugar.
• Loblaws has a Guiding Stars program – more stars, then it is healthier product, stars are on the price tag. No stars means the product is unhealthy.
3. There are a lot of gluten free products on the market today. If you have Celiac disease or a gluten allergy, this is helpful. Are these products beneficial to everyone else?

- Many gluten free products have less fiber, more sugar and fat.
- Gluten free is a trend in the diet industry but not necessarily the best product unless you are gluten sensitive or celiac.
- There are whole grains instead of wheat that are good for you.
- Wheat is not genetically modified in Canada.
- Genetically modified food change the DNA of the fruit. Get more information on Health Canada website. [www.healthcanada.gc.ca](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca)
- Zucchini strips, squash spaghetti strings are good alternatives to pasta.

Websites of Interest:

[http://Rosieschwartz.com/2015/04/17/4](http://Rosieschwartz.com/2015/04/17/4) 4 scientific facts you want to know about gluten

4. Eating organic should help us to avoid chemical additives, preservatives, artificial colors or flavors. Is paying for organic products worth the cost? If something is labelled organic, does it automatically mean that the product is healthier?

- Yes and no. There are organic baked goods that aren’t healthy.
- Organic products are not genetically modified, have no preservatives, additives or chemicals so this is good.
- Good apps to show what products are sprayed the most is “Dirty Dozen” and what is healthier is “Clean 15”. These apps are updated annually.
- The nutrients don’t vary but avoiding herbicides and pesticides is a good thing.
- You can control the food that you put into your body.
- Be careful with meat. Organic meat is more expensive. If you eat less meat and have more vegetarian meals this can offset the cost.
- Local farms provide fresh food which is good.
- Organic food delivery services are useful.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in one part vinegar and one part water to clean, if it isn’t organic.
- As more people buy organic, then the cost might drop.
More than 99% of Canadian fruits and vegetables were well below Canada’s residue limits.

This is really a personal choice. No proof to date that there is a health risk from eating conventionally grown food according to Health Canada.

If you have the $, eat organic; if it costs the same as regular products, eat organic.

Organic is often limited in availability.

If organic costs too much and this causes you to eat less than you need, eat non-organic.

There are no growth hormones in pork or chicken in Canada. Beef does have growth hormones.

Websites of Interest:

Click on this link to discover the fruits and vegetables that are the most and least covered in pesticides for this growing season.

http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/?gclid=CjwKEAjwkcWrBRDq5u6SuPS11C0SJAChLLAHrV9OU66zBoYYU3qZFWr0wbkuEcNETCv5-QwYUlxvRoC6Ofw_wcB

5. I keep hearing about the Mediterranean diet as the healthiest way to eat. What makes this particular diet healthy? Is it easy to follow?

- Yes it is a good way to eat - plant based, rich in beans, legumes and nuts, fish and chicken.
- Whole food based, no processed foods.
- Uses olive oil.
- Fish is anti-inflammatory.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, grains (whole grain), olive oil, beans, nuts, legumes, seeds, herbs and spices.
- Eat Pacific Sockeye salmon because it comes from clean Alaskan waterways, no toxins.
- Don’t eat Atlantic salmon.
- Tuna is high in mercury so avoid eating it.

Websites of Interest:


http://patient.info/health/health-benefits-of-the-mediterranean-diet
6. Movie stars keep going on cleanses. Talk show hosts promote them (Dr. Oz promotes the 48 hour weekend cleanse) and the NY Times bestseller list included this book in 2014: 10-Day Green Smoothie Cleanse: Lose Up to 15 Pounds in 10 Days! Beyond losing weight another premise "of a true elimination diet or cleanse program (both types of detoxification diets, or "detox diets" for short) is to facilitate the removal of toxins and pollutants from your body. By cutting out your intake of contaminants, so you'll gradually eliminate unhealthy substances like pesticides, smog and pollution, alcohol, and caffeine from your body.” Should we go on a cleanse? Is this healthy?

- A cleanse that isn’t radical is okay.
- It eliminate toxins, sugar and caffeine.
- Focus on whole foods, focus on the basics.
- Do it in spring and fall.
- Liver and kidney cleanses the body naturally.
- Can’t eat crap and then cleanse in two days a year.
- Celebrity wisdom trumps science and this is a problem.
- There is no quick fix. Clean eating most of the time is the solution.
- Your diet should be 70% whole foods and rest can be less healthy.

Websites of Interest:

www.webmd.com/diet/detox-diets


www.ctvnews.ca/leslie-beck-on-detox-diets-do-they-help-or-harm-1.493177

7. There is a kale craze going on right now. What makes this vegetable so special?

- Low in calories.
- 2 grams of fiber, so pretty good.
- Rinse and wrap in paper towel, wash and store it when you bring it home because it is dirty.
- Baby kale is soft.
- Massage leaves with oil to soften leaves if the kale is older.
• Lots of recipes for kale.
• It is the dressing the toppings in the packaged kale kits that are a problem. Can cook kale too www.pc.ca has recipes.
• Can put kale into a smoothie. It changes the colour but not the flavor and makes it healthier.
• Throw kale in a stir fry to bump up nutrient content.
• Bake it in the oven with oil to make kale chips – healthy snack for kids.
• Easy to make kale chops at home. Add oil, add salt and pepper and bake it and it will crisp up.
• Kale will last about a week in the fridge.
• Chop it up and put into your freezer.

Websites of Interest:
www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/270435.php

8. There is a lot of hype around coconut oil right now. Is this a healthy product that we should be cooking with? How do we avoid getting sucked into the next great product cycle?

• Love coconut oil, good for high temperature when cooking
• Should use it for your stir-frys.
• Coconut oil also makes a good moisturizer and will take off your makeup.
• Different strengths in coconut scent so test out the available products.
• Grapeseed oil can work at high temps too.
• Olive oil isn’t good for cooking– use it for salad dressing.
• Avocado oil is good at high temperatures too.
• Coconut oil melts at 24 degrees, so it will melt in the summer in the jar. It is still okay if it moves between a solid and a liquid.
• It is a saturated fat but it’s good for you. It is not an animal fat.
• Need more research on health benefits of coconut oil to meet the claims that are being made. It doesn’t cure cancer.
• Avoid getting sucked into the next diet trend – do your research and talk to the experts.

Websites of Interest:
https://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Fat/I-ve-heard-that-coconut-oil-is-the-best-oil-to-use.aspx
9. “Superfoods are a special category of foods found in nature. By definition they are calorie sparse and nutrient dense meaning they pack a lot of punch for their weight as far as goodness goes. They are superior sources of anti-oxidants and essential nutrients - nutrients we need but cannot make ourselves.”

Superfoods include greens, honey, seaweed, berries and herbs. Are superfoods critical to ensure a healthy body? Are there really superfoods?

- The food industry is always trying to find a new food label.
- However, there are superfoods that are calorically low and a good bang for the buck.
- Anything that came from the earth would be a superfood. All our whole foods are superfoods. They should be found in nature and do not need an ingredient label. They contain the bio-chemicals that make our body work well.
- Lots of people making a lot of money by promoting specific food, like goji berries.
- Lot of different anti-oxidants in plants and information on nutrition is changing quickly.
- Use reliable sources on the Internet and watch out for biased information.
- Quinoa is a good grain.
- Apple cider vinegar – dilute with water and drink a bit. It helps the digestive system for those who get gas.
- Calories are just one tool. Eat unprocessed food to decrease your glycemic load.
- To learn more read Unmasking Superfoods: the Truth and Hype about Acai, Quinoa, Chia and More.

Websites of Interest:

Check out Jennifer Sygo’s book Unmasking Superfoods and her website http://www.jennifersygo.com

A special thanks to Lisa Ireland, the In-Store Dietician at Loblaws in Pickering for the websites of interest listed above.