

Updated March 2004

 **Patient Education Handout**

# Healthy Eating Insights

## The “Skinny” on Diets

The weight loss industry in America is a multi-billion dollar endeavor. It is no wonder that there is so much information (and disinformation) available. You can lose weight with almost any diet but the real goal should be long-term weight management and improved health.

The only diet scientifically studied that has been shown to improve health is Dr. Ornish's diet, which is a strict vegetarian diet with less than 10% of total calories from fats. His diet has been shown to reverse blockages in the arteries of the heart. This data is comparable to long-term results from angioplasty. Most persons cannot (or will not) make this type of commitment – and you don't have to in order to be healthy.

All of the other diets that are popular (even for many years) have not proven any health benefits beyond the temporary loss of weight.

These diets also have some questionable emphasis or elimination of basic foods. This elimination makes the diet more difficult to follow and of questionable health benefit for the long-term.

We should not be interested in merely losing weight to fit into clothes for a social function. We should be interested in losing weight permanently and in improving our overall health. Changes from the typical American diet can lead to decreases in stroke, heart attack, heart failure, dementia, some cancers, arthritis and many other diseases. Hopefully, everyone is interested in these benefits.



## Processed & Fast Food

Other than convenience, there is nothing of value in processed and “fast” foods. They typically pack an extraordinary amount of fat and calories in their food.

**They should be avoided at all costs for the sake of your health!**

Research is showing more and more that processed grains are much less nutritional than their unprocessed alternatives. White rice, white flour and other processed grains are readily digested and absorbed by the body. They are immediately turned into glucose (sugar), which the body stores as fat.

The unprocessed alternatives are slowly digested and turned to sugars and other body nutrient requirements at a slower pace.

### Special points of interest:

- Use only olive oil and canola oil in the home.
- Sea creatures (all) are superior to birds, which are in turn superior to land animals.
- Avoid raw coconut and avocados, both are high in saturated fats.
- Do not eat fast food!!!
- Decrease processed grains
- Drink 6–8 glasses of water daily.

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## Fats

There is considerable controversy surrounding the role of fat and even specific types of fat in the diet. What is clear is that saturated fats (animal fats from land creatures and birds) are associated with increases in blood cholesterol (especially bad LDL cholesterol), heart disease, stroke and some cancers (colon, breast, prostate). They should be minimized in the diet to the fullest extent possible.

The unsaturated fats (from plants and fishes)

are known to decrease the risk of many health problems. Not all plants are created equal and olive, canola oils are superior and should be the main oils used in the home with other oils used only sparingly as *flavorings*. Be careful to portion, however, as one teaspoon of olive oil has 140 calories.

Fishes are rich in omega-3 fatty acids which are beneficial. Men who eat one serving of seafood a month can decrease stroke risk.

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Exercise (walk) for 30  
minutes four times a  
week.

Clearly there is no one diet that is ideal for everyone on earth. There is a healthy diet that each of us can find. The benefits of controlling our diet are significant and include:

- Decreased obesity
- Decreased Diabetes
- Decreased heart disease and stroke
- Decreases in some cancers, arthritis

We owe it to ourselves and our family to make healthy choices. The best choice may not be the easiest choice. Fast food should not be a part of our lives except in rare instances.

The health benefits of healthier eating are coupled with increased activity. These changes should not be considered separate but undertaken together. Walking three hours a week decreases arthritis, heart disease stroke, diabetes and other diseases by as much as 30%. Most medications we consider very effective barely approach these benefits.

## Fruits and Vegetables

No matter which expert you talk to, there is one thing on which they all agree – fruits and vegetables are a good thing. Even Dr. Atkins agrees that vegetables are good after the first two weeks on his diet.

Only avocados and coconuts should be avoided due to high saturated fat contents in these items.

The USDA has recommended that all Americans eat at least five (5) fruits and/or vegetables daily. These foods are high in fiber and nutrients. They are generally low in calories and fat as well. Only with diabetes should one be concerned about limitations to the amount of fruit in the diet.

The potato has been a source of controversy in recent years being lumped by many into the category of refined carbohydrates, because your body can easily turn it into sugars. A medium baked potato eaten with the skin has 150 calories and is generally filling. Compared to a snack food you can save 250 or more calories. This is a fair trade-off all things considered. One should not build a diet around potatoes, however. One can substitute them instead of a sweet or salty snack food.

The best fruits are the “hard” one such as apples and pears. They have less sugars and less calories than their “soft” counterparts such as citrus fruits.



Caption describing picture or graphic.