

Some Good, Simple, Common-Sense Nutritional Advice

It is impossible to talk about healthy ways of being without mentioning food and nutrition. What goes into the body has a huge effect on wellness. Food as medicine has become a popular phrase, for good reason.

But the messages we get about food aren't always helpful and clear. It is easy to get confused and to feel caught between conflicting recommendations from what seem like official sources about what we should be eating, which is not only frustrating, but overwhelming, and can cause a lot of folks to just give up worrying and trying.

But there is good advice out there, simple and easy nutrition advice for regular people, who also hope for a long life of health and happiness.

Michael Pollan, an author known for his writing and reporting on food, nutrition and our food culture has come up with a great rule of thumb, a simple statement that sums up pretty much all of the good science regarding nutrition: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

Small clarification on the "eat food," part: According to Pollan, a lot of what is on the shelves at grocery stores and what goes into our mouths may not be food, actually. It may be a *food product*, but isn't, in reality "real" food. Natural food, from real and natural sources that would be recognized by our grandparents is what he's talking about. (He cautions against eating things that don't rot, like Twinkies, and also ones that have more than 5 ingredients, some of which are unpronounceable).

Expanding on this common sense rule of thumb, in a presentation on achieving resiliency through nutrition, Alice Burron, an exercise physiologist, explained that when it comes to eating, there are three variables that are within our ability to tweak to our overall healing and health: 1.) Quality of food, 2.) Quantity of food, and 3.) Timing of food

The first variable is food quality, which refers to the things you eat. Pollan's statement provides a great guide: Basically, it is best to choose natural, rather than processed foods, and mostly fiber-rich plant foods (the 5 servings of fruits and vegetables we hear about, and whole grains). Avoiding a lot of refined sugar foods is a good way to up the quality of food, as well. Making the best food choices about 80% of the time will set a pretty good nutritional stage. It is also good to note that for healthier blood-sugar levels, each eating situation should include a carbohydrate, a protein and a fat.

Many counsel shopping the outer part of the grocery store, avoiding the middle where the processed foods are commonly located.

An issue in quality of the food consumed may be convenience—some people don't like to, or know how to cook. Burron's response to this obstacle is, "Too bad." Not only is food made from scratch and real ingredients much more healthful (and closer to Pollan's "real food"), the process of cooking has been found to be therapeutic and health-promoting. It is her belief that we are not meant to have our food served to us in a bag, or without any effort on our part, and cautions against getting into the habit of eating out frequently. Part of the issue with going out is unnaturally high flavor—many restaurants manipulate foods to enhance flavor beyond what is natural and normal, utilizing additives, which not only trains us to crave these high flavors, but also the additives generally aren't very good for our bodies. For anyone looking to improve their nutrition, but finding that cooking isn't in their skillset, there

are basic cooking classes offered through UW Extension's Centsible Nutrition, and BOCES often has class offerings connected to cooking.

Be cautious of omitting entire food groups, says Burrton. "I'm never into omitting, unless there is a disease process that mandates an omission. Life is too short to omit."

The second variable is the quantity of the food. It is well-documented that size of the waste line directly correlates to risk of developing diabetes, and that lighter people live longer. While there are a lot of variables that contribute to weight, it is pretty undisputable that food quantity plays a big role. This may be one of the easier variables to manipulate, actually, because rather than cutting something out completely, one can reduce the amount. The guidelines from MyPlate.gov are helpful in determining appropriate portion sizes.

The third variable is the timing of food. According to Burrton, ideal food timing would include 3 meals and 2 small snacks every day, and each consumption of food would include the combination of carbohydrate, protein and fat. Having snacks may seem to be at odds with variable #2—the quantity of food—but actually reducing the quantity eaten in meals a little and moving those calories to snacks actually helps with weight loss.

Eating for healing and well-being isn't very complicated or even very hard, even though initial changes may be challenging. "Being healthy is a lifestyle that you can maintain forever without pills, diets, or crazy fitness programs." Food can be both delicious and good for the body. Food can be fuel, medicine, social connectedness and one of the great pleasures of life. It doesn't have to be an enemy. The holiday season is a great time to be mindful of this and bring all of those components together.

For help getting on a good nutritional track, contact Uinta County Public Health for more information!