

Whole Foods for the Whole Family

The frequency of eating out has almost doubled in the last 20 years. The Canadian Heart and Stroke foundation states that the average Canadian household eats out 520 times each year. That's almost 50% of all meals. With two parents working, and our busy family lifestyle, there is little time for food preparation at home. Our modern urban society has become dependent on inexpensive food that is stable, easy and quick to prepare. Technological advancement and economic development have taken us away from more natural eating patterns.

Our fast paced society has encouraged the food industry to produce food that requires little time to prepare, minimum time to eat, no mess and no fuss. As a result of this, the grocery aisles are filled with highly processed refined food with little or no nutritional value. In order to produce foods that are stable for transporting long distances, and appealing to our eyes and taste buds, manufactures include ingredients such as refined sugars, refined flours, hydrogenated oils, sulfates, flavor enhancers, nitrates, artificial sweeteners, artificial color, and artificial flavors.

So what exactly are whole foods? Whole foods are foods in their natural state. They have not been genetically modified. They are not processed, synthesized irradiated and are free of chemicals. Whole foods are "real" foods, complete with all the nutrients, enzymes, and probiotics nature intended. Whole foods are easily digested and provide all the basic nutrients the body needs. They are superior to processed foods because they contain the most natural source for vitamins and minerals.

Processed foods are stripped of most of their nutritional value. In an attempt to increase sales, many manufacturers fortify their products with synthetic nutrients that are much more difficult for the body to break down.

The correlation between the amount of processed food consumed in our modern western culture and the increasingly high incidence of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer is not a coincidence. Our bodies are not designed to effectively break down and eliminate the amount of chemicals we are consuming.

While the occasional meal of highly processed food will do little harm, the majority of your diet should be whole foods. Although it may be tempting to do a complete diet overhaul, a gradual shift to a healthier diet is more effective and more likely to be long lasting. Make small changes at first, slowly changing poor food selections with good ones. Replacing white refine sugar with stevia, honey or agave syrup is a good place to start. Sea salt is preferred over table salt.

Start reading all labels. It may take a little more time at the grocery store, but it can be a real eye opening experience. Choose foods that have fewer items on ingredients list. Start cutting out items that include long chemical names, preservatives, flavorings and color. Gradually increase the amount of fresh produce, meat and whole grains you bring into the house. Meal planning will take a little more time and preparation, but the results will be well worth it. Spending a little extra time in the kitchen on Sunday's pre preparing meals can be a great timesaver during the week.

Some of the changes you are likely to notice as you make these important adjustments in your diet are:

Increased energy

Weight regulation - lose or gain needed weight

Improved skin, hair and nails

Better quality sleep

Improved digestion - less gas, bloating and heartburn

Improved bowel function

Improved concentration

Overall sense of well being

Many grocery stores, restaurants and cookbooks utilize and promote more natural foods. As the general public becomes more educated, and demands more quality food choices, they will become even more readily available. Give your family the gift of health and start 2008 off with a whole foods resolution.