



Food is not the enemy

Almost daily, headlines tout the benefits or risks of foods, implying that individual foods or types of foods are the secret to increasing or decreasing risks of cancer, heart disease, diabetes -- or just about any other condition. Don't overreact to such news by making extreme changes in diet. Instead:

Don't be seduced into believing that foods are "good" or "bad." This black/white type of thinking frequently backfires. Health problems can develop when eating only so-called "good" foods. As more and more foods become media villains, the variety of foods being consumed is declining, an approach that can cut out essential nutrients and have a domino effect leading to declining health.

Be an educated health consumer. Seek out reliable, non-biased sources of information. Putting all your faith in one or

two research reports is dangerous. Equally dangerous is relying on a friend who says a food or a dietary supplement "worked" for them.

Be savvy about what goes into your body. Learn to be skeptical of the pyramid marketing of health products. Many people selling them do not have the knowledge to truly evaluate their benefits and risks.

Know your essential nutrients. If the body runs low on one or more of these chemicals, health is compromised initially, and completely lost if the deficiency goes too far for too long. Nutrition scientists have identified about 50 essential nutrients (vitamins, minerals, amino acids, fatty acids, water, etc.). Bottom line: To increase your odds of getting plenty, but not too much, of the good things, eat moderate amounts of a wide variety of foods.

Along with fear of foods

comes a tendency to take supplements of vitamins, minerals and other substances. Too often this is accompanied by an attitude of the more, the better. Like an extreme diet, this may make a person feel better initially, but the toxic effects of excessive nutrients will take a toll. For a list of established upper limits for nutrients, see the University of Hawaii Web site www.nutritionatc.hawaii.edu/UL.htm.

"Natural" does not always mean healthy. Components of soy products are associated with reduced risk of breast cancer, for example, but too high an intake of soy products may suppress thyroid function, among other possible problems.

Just because something makes you feel good doesn't mean it is good for you. Cases in point -- heroin, cocaine and crack.

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