



All essential nutrients needed to stay healthy

If anyone reading this column has not already heard that too much sugar can be detrimental to your health, please raise your hand. Seeing none, we'd like to discuss more important issues related to nutrition and your health. If you are asking yourself what can be more important than eliminating bad foods from the diet, read on.

Question: What nutrition issues should people be focusing on to stay healthy?

Answer: The highest priority of any species, man or beast, is survival. Consequently, all critters have evolved functional strategies to be successful at surviving. Our bodies are constantly seeking "homeostasis," which requires adequate quantities of the right types of food.

Q: What is homeostasis?

A: All cells are in a constant state of change but require a rather stable internal environment to survive. To maintain this dynamic equilibrium, or homeostasis, cells require an energy source and various chemicals for building cell structures and enabling essential chemical reactions. These required chemicals are known as the essential nutrients we obtain from food.

Q: When does nutrition become

important?

A: Poor nutrition at any stage of life can affect health. Even the nutritional status of our parents before conception can affect our lifelong health. This is because the cells of the body require constant nourishment to carry out their normal functions. Missing even one essential nutrient can impair the function of many cell types, including cells of the reproductive organs.

Q: How do people make food choices?

A: Reasons vary, but taste preferences, convenience, appetite and health beliefs often play major roles. However, the concept that ALL essential nutrients must be consumed on a fairly regular basis to maintain health is frequently overlooked. Too often, individuals make food choices based on cutting calories or excluding all seemingly "bad" foods rather than meeting essential nutrient needs.

Q: Why do food choices based on weight loss or excluding "bad foods" lead to nutritional and subsequent health problems?

A: This can overly reduce the variety of foods required to provide all essential nutrients needed to maintain short- or long-term ho-

meostasis. There are roughly 50 essential nutrients. These are food chemicals we can't live without. They include chemicals like vitamins, minerals, protein and amino acids, fats and essential fatty acids and, of course, water. Our bodies need these essential nutrients on a regular basis. To obtain adequate nutrients becomes increasingly difficult if a person limits the variety of their food choices.

Q: What can a person do to assure that they are getting adequate nutrients?

1) Maintain or lose weight with physical activity rather than cutting calories and essential nutrients.

2) Eat a large variety of foods from all food groups. Eliminating even one food group can cut short your supply of one or more essential nutrients.

3) Remember that obtaining all of your essential nutrients is about variety, moderation and balance.

If a person's lifestyle is based on these concepts, they can afford to include more of the supposed "bad" foods, even sugar, without overly limiting essential nutrients.

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