

FOOD FOR THOUGHT, YOUR HEALTH, AND WAISTELINE

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The nutrients you put into your body can have a profound impact on the way you look and feel. Everyday, new studies prove that eating the right foods regularly can positively affect your overall health, and decrease your risk of contracting certain diseases. Your nutritional habits can be a significant contributor to your energy levels, mood, and immunity against the flu and colds. This article aims to focus on the negative impact of food on individual health, with a special focus on sugar and fat.



Nutritional experts firmly believe that the infiltration of many foods with high fat and sugar contents into our grocery stores has undoubtedly contributed to the ongoing obesity epidemic. More and more adults and children are packing on extra pounds that if left unchecked, will surely lead to major health problems later in life. It is not only the extra weight from these foods that is a health concern, but also what these foods do to our bodies once ingested and broken down. Let us take a look at sugar first.

White, refined flour products such as crackers, cakes, cookies, and doughnuts act much like sugar does once in the body. White refined flour and sugar will over-trigger the release of the hormone insulin, secreted by the pancreas. When excessive insulin is secreted because of these particular food choices, the food is stored as fat. With the perpetual intake of refined foods and sugar, the receptors within body tissues become insensitive to the amount of insulin released. The body compensates for this by releasing more insulin. As a general rule of thumb, the more insulin that is released, the more fat storage there will be. A chronic state of insulin insensitivity is the first step toward the development of obesity and Type II diabetes. Sugars also decrease the functioning of our immune systems almost immediately after consumption. A strong immune response is key to fighting off viruses and other illnesses. In addition, sugar has the ability to trigger wild mood swings in people that can range from “mania” or “sugar high”, to fatigue and depression.

Foods that are fried, even vegetables, have the issue of trans-fat as a main concern. Trans-fats are a type of fat formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats such as shortening and hard margarine. Humans are unable to break down trans-fats, causing them to build up in the body. These can clog important arteries that lead to the heart and brain. Common foods that are high in trans-fat include cake and pancake mixes, fast foods, pies, and even salad dressings. Even polyunsaturated fats found in canola, soybean, safflower, corn, and other seed and nut oils can produce large amounts of harmful free radicals in the body, especially when exposed to the heat of cooking. Free radicals damage the DNA in the tissues of our body, which can cause aging, clotting, inflammation, cancer, weight gain, and decreased resistance to bacteria and viruses. In addition to the negative effects within the body and high calories that

these fatty foods yield, intake large or small can result in feelings of chronic fatigue and sluggishness.

Let's look at a few specific examples of common food culprits that offer virtually zero nutritional value, and many unnecessary calories. The average can of soda or "pop" has about 10 teaspoons of sugar, 150 calories, 30 to 55 mg of caffeine, and is loaded with artificial food colours and additives. Studies have linked soda to osteoporosis, obesity, tooth decay and heart disease, yet soda consumption among children has almost doubled in North America over the last decade. Soft drink ingestion should not be a staple in anyone's daily fluid intake, let alone children. Doughnuts are another food with little nutritional value. They are fried, full of sugar and white flour, and contain trans-fat. An average doughnut will give you about 200 to 300 calories. It is unfortunate that doughnuts are viewed as a breakfast food, as eating them is one of the worst ways to start off your day. It will throw off your blood sugar and make you feel hungry again shortly after eating, causing you to reach for more calories. French fries and most commercial chips including corn, potato, and tortilla are high in trans-fat, or other polyunsaturated fats that can be harmful to the body while offering little nutritional value. These foods are only a small sampling of foods commonly ingested that act to sabotage our health.



Last fall, Education Minister Gerard Kennedy launched an all-out battle against junk food in schools, and mandated a requirement to provide 20 minutes a day in physical exercise. The timing of this article is not coincidental, with the start of the school year, Halloween night just around the corner, and the cold and flu season quickly approaching, it is time again to address the merits of healthy eating. Parents are urged to take a more active role in educating their children about the importance of healthy food choices. Of course, leading by example is an excellent way to effectively communicate this message. Avoiding poor food choices can only positively influence our overall health. As the old saying goes, you are what you eat!

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