

The Healing Power of

Natural Foods

“Let your food be your medicine and let your medicine be your food.” — Hippocrates

by Karen Kim

As evidenced by this quote from ancient Greece, the belief in the innate powers of food is nothing new. Pharmacopoeias of early Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and China were based on food. The 12th century Jewish physician/philosopher Maimonides recommended chicken soup as a remedy for asthma. Garlic, mustard seed and other herbs and spices collected in herb gardens or collected from the countryside were used medicinally by doctors and medicine women for centuries. And what child hasn't heard that “an apple a day keeps the doctor away?”



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All foods, in their essential, unadulterated form provide nutrients and co-factors that support growth and healing. Food is diminished in value when it is grown on poor soil that has been chemically treated with synthetic herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers. When it is highly processed for extended shelf life, nutrients are lost, preservatives, additives and stabilizers are added. These inorganic compounds are metabolic disrupters of vital nervous, endocrine and immune functions.

“We live in a society that eats so much processed and manufactured food, that I think there’s some genuine confusion about what qualifies as a whole food,” says Tara Gidus, RD, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Even for the health conscious, the phrase gets tangled up with other terms. Natural foods might be organic, or locally grown, or pesticide-free. But they aren’t necessarily. The definition of healthy whole foods is much simpler.

“When you eat whole foods, you’re getting the food in its natural state,” Gidus says. “You’re getting it intact, with all of the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that are in the food.” Basically, it’s the healthy whole food, rather than the bits that remain after refinement and processing. It’s the difference between an apple and an apple flavored energy bar, or a baked potato and a bag of potato chips.

Accordingly, many studies have found that a diet high in natural foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, many types of cancer, and diabetes. Healthy whole foods are loaded with fiber, vitamins, and minerals. They also contain phytochemicals, the general name for natural compounds in plants. While thousands of individual phytochemicals have been identified, countless more remain unknown. They help in different ways. Some are antioxidants, which protect cells against damage. Examples of antioxidant phytochemicals are flavonoids, carotenoids, and lycopene.

One of the major benefits of eating whole grains is that they slow down the digestive process, thereby allowing better absorption of the nutrients. Their fiber content also regulates

blood sugar by slowing down the conversion of starches into glucose. Whole grains make favorable changes in the intestines, allowing healthful bacteria to keep disease-producing bacteria in check; they have strong anti-oxidant properties to help protect the body against free radicals, as well as phyto-estrogens and phytochemicals that break down carcinogenic substances.

So, is your fridge stocked with fresh fruits, vegetables and lean meats or is it full of fatty, overly salted processed convenience foods and abandoned take-out containers? If we truly are what we eat, what do your eating habits say about you?

One thing is clear, the healthier your diet, the healthier your body. Consumption of a variety of fresh, whole, and raw foods aids digestion (the primary factor in health) and absorption of vital nutrients that your body needs to function at optimal levels. A commitment today to a regimen of healthy foods reduces the risks and development of health problems in the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Kim is the Editor of the Healing Arts Guide. In addition to her work for the Guide, her articles have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, Spa Finder Magazine, and The Village Voice.



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Healthy Facts About Organic Foods

Consuming organic foods is one healthy behavior that can greatly impact your health and well-being. Here are some facts from HealthyU that may help convince you to make the shift to organic foods.

🍏 More than 1 million children between the ages of 1 and 5 ingest at least 15 pesticides each day from fruits and vegetables; more than 600,000 of these children eat a dose of insecticides that the federal government considers to be unsafe.

🍏 Americans can be exposed to nearly 70 residues each day from organic pollutants in their diets. These pollutants are not allowed in organic agriculture.

🍏 The most contaminated foods with pesticides include red raspberries, strawberries, and apples and peaches grown in the U.S. and cantaloupe from Mexico. The worst food in terms of contamination is grapes from Chili.

🍏 Farm animals in the U.S. receive 24.6 million pounds of antibiotics each year; this may be fueling the increase of drug-resistant bacteria.

🍏 Organic crops appear to be higher in vitamin C and essential minerals and phytonutrients.

🍏 Public Health authorities have linked greater numbers of people who contract antibiotic-resistant infections to conventionally raised livestock given the same low-level antibiotics.

Foods That Heal

There are many foods that provide excellent health and healing benefits; many of them may already exist in your kitchen. Here are just some that might benefit you.

🍏 **Alfalfa:** extremely rich in vitamins and minerals and contains trace minerals most other plants do not. It acts as a natural diuretic and detoxifier and aids in the prevention and

treatment of urinary tract infections, arthritis, bladder, kidney, and prostate disorders.

🍏 **Apple Cider Vinegar:** aids in digestion and supports healthy liver function. It is also an antioxidant and helps maintain tissue cells; this makes it beneficial for your skin and helps slow the aging process.

🍏 **Cinnamon:** consuming just 1/2 teaspoon per day has been found to help lower blood sugar, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and triglycerides.

🍏 **Curry:** a natural antioxidant

🍏 **Garlic:** an antioxidant that cleanses the body and helps fight germs and aging. It has a great effect in preventing cardiovascular disease by preventing platelets in the blood from clumping together and building up on artery walls, lowering blood pressure, and lowering cholesterol levels. Garlic also helps to promote liver health.

🍏 **Ginger:** adding ginger to a warm bath can help ease sore muscles and joints.

🍏 **Grapefruit:** may slow atherosclerosis due to pectin (a soluble fiber).

🍏 **Lemons:** squeeze the juice of half of a lemon into a glass and dilute the sour taste with about 4 tablespoons of water. Drink this first thing every morning – before you have anything else; it helps to clear your sinuses and helps to detoxify your body.

