

# Why you should follow nutrition

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## Introduction

Of the many things one can do to enhance one's state of health, none is more important than maintaining proper nutrition. The mind and body cannot function optimally without the proper supply of nutrients and energy obtained from food.

A key tenet of the holistic approach to health is that each person must take responsibility for his or her own health. Making intelligent decisions about nutrition—about what and how much to eat—is an important part of this responsibility, because the diet one chooses and follows can keep one healthy. In the words of Philip Lee (1977) professor of social medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine:

As a nation we have come to believe that our medicine and medical technology can solve all our major health problems... But the problems can never be solved merely by more and more medical care. The health of individuals and the health of the population is determined by a variety of biological (host), behavioral, sociocultural, environmental factors. None of these is more important than the food we eat (Burkitt et al. 1974).

## Good nutrition: Striking the Right Balance

What is the best argument for following a good nutrition in one's life instead of eating all the junk food one can consume. Every person's body has a unique chemical and physical composition that corresponds to a state of optimal wellness, because the human body is constructed of atoms and molecules that are arranged in particular combinations and proportions that are unique to each person. One's body contains few of the same atoms and

molecules it had even a few weeks ago, because its chemical constituents are continually replaced by different atoms and molecules acquired from the food one eats.

There are about forty known essential nutrients and perhaps others are not yet identified, that must be continually resupplied to the body (Ricciuto). Failure to obtain enough of one or more of the essential nutrients can result in a nutritional deficiency disease, such as goiter (enlarged thyroid gland), which may be caused by too little iodine, beri-beri, a disease characterized by weakness and wasting away that is caused by too little thiamine (vitamin B1), anemia (too few red blood cells) from insufficient iron; and blindness from vitamin A deficiency, the most common cause of blindness in children, world-wide. Since all nutrients act in concert, a deficiency of one may impair the utilization of others even if the others are acquired in adequate amounts. Thus, a proper nutritional state is a matter of maintaining a complex balance of the essential nutrients.

One can argue that one eats a little of everything in the proper amounts just to keep fit. But still it does not work that way. This is because poor health can result in eating too much of certain kinds of food, or from eating too much in general. For example, overeating is the principal cause of obesity, which contributes to the development of such serious diseases as high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and some forms of cancer. Cancer of the colon may be related to eating too much meat and processed foods and not getting enough fiber or roughage that may be essential to maintain a healthy colon. High salt intake is related to high blood pressure and high sugar intake is related to tooth decay (the most prevalent disease in the

industrialized world). Much of the tooth decay could be prevented if people followed very simple nutrition rules (Breslow & Enstrom 1980).

### Physiological Benefits of Body Work

Our industrial society depends on an enormous variety of machines that free people from an equally enormous number of physical tasks. Some of these tasks, such as heavy construction work or large-scale farming, would be well-nigh impossible without the help of machines. Others, such as traveling to work or school, getting to the seventh floor of a building, or washing clothes, could be accomplished without the aid of machines (and some people argue they ought to be), but few of us are likely to give up the use of cars, elevators, and washers. They simply make the task of daily living easier. As a result, few people do much moving around under their own muscular power. That is, many of us get little exercise.

According to William B. Kannel and Paul Sorlie (1979) who have studied the effects of lifestyle on the occurrence of heart disease: “ Over the past quarter of a century, there has evolved a growing suspicion that the transformation of man by modern technology from a physically active agrarian creature to a sedentary industrial one has exacted a toll in ill health. The evidence on which this is based comes from epidemiological studies, clinical observations, and the work physiologist. Most of the attention has been focused on the possible contribution of physical indolence to the development of cardiovascular disease, the chief health hazard of affluent societies and their leading cause of death.”

In addition to the physiological benefits, regular physical activity has psychological and spiritual benefits as well. For example, a study of middle-aged university professors found that regular exercise made them more self-sufficient, more persevering, less likely to experience mood swings, and more imaginative (Ismail and Trachtman, 1973). In another study, both men and women university students who engaged in regular physical activity were found to have greater self-control, to have increased self-awareness, and to be more self-directed. They also demonstrated a positive self-image (Jeffers, 1977).

One of the principal psychological benefits that can come from regular body work is experiencing periods of relaxed concentration, characterized by reduction in physical and psychic tensions, regular breathing rhythms, and increased self-awareness. This experience is often compared to meditation. Tennis instructor Tim Gallwey (1976) describes four stages for obtaining a state of relaxed concentration through body work. The first stage, “paying attention,” occurs at the beginning of a body work session and involves riveting your concentration on your body work and excluding all other thoughts. The stage of paying attention requires a certain degree of self-discipline—the desire and ability to say “no” to other demands on your time and energies and to say “yes” to yourself.

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