



# Food Choices & YOUR HEALTH

What makes for healthy people? For starters... **Eating healthy food.**

**T**he chances are good that much of what you know about nutrition has been shaped, in one way or another, by people from the dairy or meat marketing boards or some other industry representative. Canadian milk producers, for example, spend more than \$40 million a year on advertising. The question you really need to ask yourself at this point is: ***Do they really have my best interest at heart?***

## Consider these realities...

- People eating no meat have 24% less heart disease than people who eat meat.  
People eating no meat and dairy have 57% less heart disease.
- Physicians may be able to reverse existing heart disease in more than 70% of patients who follow a prescribed low-fat vegetarian diet.
- A study of more than 11,000 people found that those eating a vegetarian diet have 40% less chance of contracting cancer than people who eat meat.
- Roughly half of all antibiotics used in the US are fed to livestock. Only about one in every 18,500 slaughtered animals is tested for antibiotic residues.
- Milk products are responsible for more than 70 percent of all allergies.

The BC Heart Health Coalition has reported that diet is a contributing factor in both cardiovascular disease and cancer which accounted for 64% of deaths in BC in 1995. Statistics Canada reports that across Canada in 1995, 37% of all deaths were from cardiovascular disease. This has come about because most Canadians eat large quantities of meat, poultry and dairy products—a regimen that our bodies are not designed to handle. These foods contain excessive cholesterol, saturated fat and protein while containing almost no fibre. Let's take a look at what these can do to our health...

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## Cholesterol

Everyone knows that Canadians are consuming too much cholesterol but few people know what to do about it. It's important to know that the body naturally makes all of the cholesterol it will ever require. We do not need to eat cholesterol. In fact, when we do eat cholesterol it has a tendency to stick to the walls of our arteries. If we eat too much, it can completely block off an artery causing a heart attack or stroke.

In rural Asia, Africa and Latin America, where three-fifths of the world's population live, people eat little or no cholesterol and heart disease is extremely rare. However, in the industrialized countries of Europe and North America where people consume large quantities of cholesterol, heart disease is the number one cause of death, killing more people than all other causes combined. From a health standpoint, the optimum amount of cholesterol in our diet is zero.

So how do you go about reducing the cholesterol in your diet? Easy. Just eat more plant foods and less animal foods. Cholesterol is found only in animal products, which include beef, chicken, pork, turkey, fish, eggs, butter, cheese, yogurt, milk, and ice cream. There is no cholesterol in any fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts or seeds.

## Saturated Fat

Foods that have cholesterol also tend to be loaded with saturated fat, another substance most people know they should eat less of. So, when we eat less animal derived food, we also eat less saturated fat.

Most plant foods are naturally free from saturated fat. However, some tropical fats like palm and coconut oil are high in natural saturated fat, and some vegetable oils have been artificially saturated or "hydrogenated," as the process is often called. These saturated vegetable fats are most often used in processed and junk food and are good ones to reduce or eliminate.

By reducing or eliminating our consumption of animal products—and thus, our consumption of cholesterol and saturated fat—we dramatically reduce our risk of contracting heart disease. We also greatly cut our risk of contracting many other diet-related diseases such as stroke, breast cancer, colon cancer, diabetes, impotency and high blood pressure.

# Calcium & Milk

Milk and dairy products are high-fat, high-protein, low-fibre foods that are perfect for rapidly growing baby calves. However, they are not perfect for humans. Many people mistakenly think that if they don't drink milk they will suffer from calcium deficiency. It's really quite understandable considering that for decades the Dairy Council has been in the schools, on TV and on billboards everywhere telling us how important milk is as a source of calcium.

Once again we find that the body's needs are considerably less than the dairy industry would like us to believe. In fact, calcium deficiency caused by insufficient calcium in the diet is not known to occur among humans. Nature has taken good care of us. Humans, like cows, can get all of the calcium they need from plant foods. In fact, many plant foods are much higher in calcium than milk. That's right, fresh vegetables and nuts are loaded with calcium.

The only people in danger of calcium deficiency are those who eat unnaturally large amounts of protein. This is so because the body uses a great deal of calcium in the process of excreting excess protein. When the calcium concentration in the blood is lowered, the body begins to draw it from the bones. A lifetime of stealing calcium from the bones to metabolize excess protein leaves one's bones shrunken and brittle. Have you ever noticed older people who walk around all hunched over, or heard of a great aunt who sneezed and broke her rib? These are not natural consequences of aging, they are a result of a lifetime of a high-protein diet.

**If you're worried about calcium, don't drink more milk,** just eat less high-protein animal products and replace them with a diet rich in fresh vegetables.

# Iron

As with calcium, iron is abundant from plant sources. Ample iron is obtained when we eat a well balanced diet containing plenty of grains and vegetables. And when there is sufficient Vitamin C in our diet, the iron we eat is even better absorbed by the body.

# Protein

Everyone knows we need to eat protein, but if we don't eat meat how do we get enough protein? This is a question that millions of people have spent a great deal of time needlessly worrying about.

**The biological reality is that humans need very little protein in their diets** (less than 5% of total caloric intake according to the World Health Organization) and that consuming excess protein doesn't improve our health in any way. Most North Americans eat **four to six** times the amount of protein required for good health. The body uses only what it needs and discards the rest. In fact millions of Canadians who eat too

much animal products suffer from osteoporosis (weakening of the bones) and kidney failure—diseases caused by the excretion of excessive dietary protein. The clearest illustration of our protein needs is that mother's milk (which meets our nutritional requirements during infancy, when our growth rate and protein needs are greater than any other time in our lives), is composed of just 5% protein.

Much of what Canadians learn about protein and nutrition has been taught with educational materials supplied free to schools by organizations like the Dairy and Agriculture Boards which represent industries selling high protein foods. (This is like having Exxon and Texaco teach you about energy conservation.) As a result, many people have come to believe that animal protein is of higher quality than plant protein, and that good health is dependent upon getting enough animal protein in one's diet. Fortunately, this simply isn't the case.

**Our biological needs for protein are as easily met by plant foods as they are by animal foods.** The once popular belief that one must carefully combine plant proteins in order for them to be as useful to the body as animal proteins has since been found untrue. **Any varied diet that adequately meets the caloric needs of a person also meets their protein needs.** Many people (including some world class athletes) choose to eat no animal protein whatsoever and enjoy excellent health. If you want to ensure that your nutrition is top notch, eat a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

# Your Health

By reducing or eliminating our consumption of animal products—and thus, our consumption of cholesterol, saturated fat and protein—we dramatically reduce our risk of contracting heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, colon cancer, diabetes, obesity and a number of other chronic diseases of our time.

You may be wondering why if consuming meat, poultry and dairy products is so hard on our bodies, we go on eating them in such large quantities? Well, we have years of conditioning, habit, and popular belief to overcome.

The North American meat and dairy industries have been allowed for years to freely promote their products not only in the media, but also in our schools by providing materials to teachers. The tobacco and alcohol industries, by contrast, are limited in the ways that they can advertise their products and are often required to place messages on their labels warning about the dangers of consuming them. Can you imagine them providing educational materials to the schools to encourage students to consume their products? Maybe if the meat, poultry and dairy industries (whose products contribute to well over half of all deaths in Canada) were restricted in the same way as the alcohol and tobacco industries, things would be a little different.