

## **Suggestions for Optimizing the Nutrient Value of Your Diet**

**By Thomas A Kruzel, ND**

Under ideal conditions, we should be able to obtain all of the nutrients we need from dietary sources. However, as we do not live in a perfect world, I try to encourage my patients to follow a few helpful suggestions for the selection and preparation of food to enhance ones digestion in order to increase vitamin and mineral uptake.

1. Fruits and vegetables should be as fresh as possible, with organically grown and pesticide and Xenobiotic free products being preferable. Vegetable and fruit juices which are freshly prepared, are optimal as they have higher levels of nutrients and enzymes. However, if refrigerated, those prepared in advance are good up to 24 hours before they begin to loose their vitamin and mineral and antioxidant content.

2. Utilize a blender or food processor to help chop fruits and vegetables to help make digestion easier. Nuts and seeds can also be chopped or ground and taken with raw milk or rice milk, or in powder form. This is especially useful for elderly persons who have a decreased ability to digest or those who are unable to fully chew their food.

3. A vegetable or fruit juicer provides you with an excellent means of optimizing vitamin and mineral intake, as juices are much more easily digested and absorbed. When juicing, do not forget to include the pulp, seeds and leafy parts, as they are also high in fiber, enzymes, vitamins and minerals.

4. Fruits and vegetables, in addition to being high in vitamins and minerals, also provide roughage to maximize bowel function. This decreases the need for laxatives, excessive use of which can lead to an atonic bowel condition and chronic constipation.

5. If taking commercial supplements which are in a tablet form, they will be better absorbed if crushed before ingestion. Liquid or capsulated forms are more easily absorbed as less digestion is required. Any vitamin and mineral is better absorbed if taken with food.

6. Refined carbohydrates, such as white and brown sugar and white flour, will decrease immune function, put a stress on the pancreas, and possibly predispose one to diabetes, if eaten frequently and in large amounts. They also result in calcium, magnesium and other nutrient loss, which in turn leads to malnutrition and loss of calcium from the bones. This contributes to a higher incidence of osteoporosis and fractures in the elderly.

7. Protein from fish, chicken, turkey, rabbit, nuts, legumes, brown rice, tofu and tempe are generally recommended over red meat sources as they generally contain less fat. In addition, ground beef from fast food establishments is also very high in salt as well as fat despite what their advertisements say.

8. Too much cholesterol in the diet is not good, as is too little. The body makes all of the cholesterol we need and any excess taken in is either passed through the bowel, absorbed and utilized by the body or stored as fat, or in the walls of our arteries. I recommend periodic cholesterol and triglyceride (fats other than cholesterol) checks and a monitoring of your diet to keep them low. High fiber in the diet, from fruits and vegetables, will lower cholesterol as well as keeping your bowels functioning normally. If you are having a fruit or vegetable drink in the morning, add a tablespoon of olive oil to it. This causes the gallbladder to expel cholesterol and bile acids that can be eliminated.

9. Meal times should be structured so they are eaten slowly in a relaxed atmosphere, and the food should be thoroughly chewed. Soft background music, candlelight, prayer or meditation, along with an eye pleasing presentation of the food and table have all been shown to enhance digestion.

10. Make sure you are consuming adequate amounts of fluid every day. Generally 6 to 8, 8 ounce glasses of water are recommended, but should be increased during hot weather or cold and dry weather periods. Fresh fruits and vegetables also add water to our bodies in addition to their nutrients. As we age our ability to retain salt decreases, so increasing fluid intake for an elderly person is recommended. Adding a pinch of salt can also be helpful. As there are different types of water drinks on the market such as alkaline water, ionized water, deionized water, kangen water and water with electrolytes added, one needs to be aware of the benefits or down sides to each. More water intake is also not necessarily better as too much water can lead to an inappropriate diuresis syndrome that can be difficult to manage.

Remember that in nature, foods come completely packaged for optimal digestion. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains contain enzymes, proteins, carbohydrates, small amounts of fatty acids, vitamins and minerals which are packaged by the plant so they can be digested easily and more readily absorbed. The same occurs with meats and fish, but as they are more susceptible to contamination and disease, cooking is recommended. By consuming processed foods, which have been broken down during manufacturing, the body must expend additional energy to re-assimilate the food into a more absorbable form. Thus, less energy is derived from a processed food source compared to a natural one.