

How Does My Diet Affect My Health?

What you eat can greatly affect your health and well-being. Scientific studies have shown time and again that choosing healthy foods can reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, and other diseases.

A healthy diet can help prevent cancer, since up to 60 percent of cancer cases are diet-related. Healthy foods can also help you maintain a healthy weight. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, close to 100 million Americans are overweight or obese. Being obese or overweight substantially increases the risk of morbidity from several conditions, including heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, and several types of cancer.

So what type of diet is best for disease prevention and to maintain a healthy weight? The best diet is one that you can stick with for life. A healthy diet is a lifestyle, not a fad that is dangerous or difficult to maintain.

Abundant evidence suggests that the most healthful diets set aside animal products and also reduce fats in general, while including large amounts of vegetables and fruits. Eliminating meat and dairy products from your diet is a powerful step in disease prevention. These products are typically high in saturated fat and cholesterol and completely devoid of fiber. They have also been specifically linked to an increased risk of certain types of cancers. Eating a low-fat, plant-based diet rich in whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables is the best way to prevent disease and increase chances of survival.

One additional diet consideration may be useful for people with diabetes or pre-diabetes. Choose foods that have a low Glycemic Index (or "low GI"), which means the foods that turn to sugar more slowly and cause less of a rise in blood sugar levels. Although you'll find various lists of the GI values of different foods, there are really only a few foods to be concerned about. Sugar, of course, has a high GI, as do white or wheat bread, most cold cereals, watermelon, pineapple, and baking potatoes. Foods to enjoy that have a low-GI are pumpernickel, rye, multi-grain or sourdough bread; old-fashioned oatmeal, bran cereals and Grape-Nuts; most fruits; sweet potatoes, pasta, rice, barley, couscous, beans, peas, lentils, and most vegetables.

- from NutritionMD.org