

Keep it REAL

30-Day Food Challenge Educational Emails

Email 1: What can I eat?

Technology is a wonderful thing. It keeps us warm in the winter, cool in the summer and often better connected to family and friends. But in the world of food, some technology, while providing our country greater access and convenience to food, has diminished our access to the nutrients within that are meant to nurture and protect us from illness and disease.

But, what should I eat?

Low carb? Gluten-free? High Protein? Low Fat? Rather than over complicating it, ask yourself, “is this something we ate 100 or more years ago? “

Today, when over 50% of our available food is processed, it’s easy to blur the lines of what is real and natural and nourishing. Many foods are processed to some degree, but there is a big difference between a cooked potato and a bag of chips. A whole food is something that is more of a product of nature than a product of industry. If it has a “label” on it, it’s likely a processed food. And even more likely it’s processed if it has ingredients listed that are not foods.

In general:

1. Eat whole, unprocessed foods that are in season. Choose organic. This includes grains, meats, dairy, fat, and cooked or raw vegetables and fruits.
2. Eat the variety and achieve balance. For some this may be a little higher in protein, than carbohydrate or vice versa.
3. Take time to prepare your food and sit down and enjoy it.

What if I have food cravings?

It’s not about willpower. Highly processed food is addicting and cravings for it are real. Once you clear your system by nourishing yourself at the cellular level with REAL food, cravings are minimized.

Sweet cravings:

If you are craving sugar and sweets, this is often related to dips in blood sugar levels or an imbalance in your gut bacteria. Feed your microbiome and correct the craving!

Fat cravings:

If you are craving fat, you may be deficient in fat soluble vitamins or essential fats. Add grass-fed butter or extra virgin olive or avocado oil to your vegetables or grains and get a boost of Vitamin A or K.

Salt cravings:

If you are craving salt, it may be related to your body’s need for salt. Add a bit of natural sea salt to your whole, unprocessed foods. Sea salt is evaporated ocean water or water from saltwater lakes that has undergone only slight processing. It contains natural minerals that add flavor.

How will I feel?

Depending on the amount of processed food you typically consume, you may feel tired, sluggish or have mild headache for a few days as you cut back on your intake. But, with each passing day you should feel more vibrant and energetic.

Week 1: Download the food journal and start tracking your foods and drinks. Your goal this week is to aim for 50% or more whole foods. And if you already eat more than 50% whole foods, aim to eat more whole foods and drinks and less processed items than you typically consume.

Tools: [Food Journal](#). [Grocery List](#). [Whole Foods Spectrum](#).

Email 2: Is it a Product of Nature or Product of Industry?

Today's grocery store is comprised primarily of processed foods making it difficult to easily spot the difference between a whole food and a processed food. How do you know if it's a real, high quality food? Ask yourself:

Is it natural? Does it reveal its source? What in nature did this come from? Did this exist 200 years ago? If so, then it's likely a good choice.

The more that has been added to it, the LESS natural it is. Look at the ingredients on the label or look at how it was prepared. The more that is added to the food beyond what it may have been in "nature" makes it less and less a natural food. Steer away from:

- a. Sugars; like fructose, sucrose, glucose, dextrose, (if ends in "ose"=sugar), corn syrup
- b. Artificial sweeteners, flavors, colors and "natural" flavors and colors
- c. MSG, potassium bromate, sodium benzoate, sodium nitrite, sodium sulfite, sulfur dioxide, propyl paraben, BHA and BHT
- d. Anything hydrolyzed, autolyzed, or extracted or genetically modified
- e. By products of processed fats. Trans fats- vegetable fats that have been heated in cooking process or fried, i.e. partially hydrogenated fats, hydrogenated fats, trans fatty acids.

Test Your Knowledge

Which yogurt is the most whole and natural? (see answer at bottom of email)

- A. vanilla, non-fat, organic
- B. plain, whole fat, no sugar, organic
- C. plain, whole fat, organic, from cows that were grass-fed
- D. fruited, whole fat, organic

Remember to complete your food journal each day!

Make BIG Changes.....in Steps.

Answer: If you selected C you were right! It has the fewest additives, no sugar or fillers etc. Whole foods have the natural fats included. It's also organic and came from cows that lived on a grass diet (rather than grains) and therefore the omega 3 fatty acid profile (the one you want more of) is higher in their milk.

Email 3: Your Questions...Answered

1. **Is organic worth the extra cost?**
2. **Will eating whole eggs raise my cholesterol?**
3. **What should I be looking at on the food label?**
4. **I am not sure what to eat.**
5. **Are fruits just as good as eating vegetables?**

See answers below!

Q: Is organic worth the extra cost?

A: Organic plant and animal farming practices abstain from the use of synthetic chemical inputs; fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, antibiotics, food additives, irradiation and the use of sewage sludge. In addition, organic foods are not grown from genetically modified seed ("GMO").

When plants and animals are exposed to these chemicals it gets taken up in their tissues. The majority of chemicals are fat soluble and therefore accumulate in fat. Since produce is quite low in fat, produce exposed to chemicals absorb smaller amounts of toxins. However, since animal products (meat, milk, cheese, etc.) are higher in fat content, when exposed to chemicals, larger amounts of toxins are absorbed. Therefore, if you have a limited budget, yet you want to eat organic, skip the extra spend on organic produce and spend your money purchasing organic animal foods.

Q: Will eating whole eggs raise my cholesterol?

A: No. Humans have been eating real, whole eggs (including the yolks) since the beginning of time. Heart disease however, is a modern disease.

About 75% of the cholesterol circulating throughout your body, is made by your liver and your liver is designed to remove excess amounts of it. About 25% of the circulating cholesterol comes from what you eat....but it's not what you might guess. Both the consumption of sugars and Trans fats (vegetable oils that have been heated, partially hydrogenated or hydrogenated) are what create the inflammatory response, thereby raising the LDL and Triglycerides in the blood. Reduce those types of foods and achieve healthy cholesterol levels.

You not only can eat eggs, you should eat eggs. The yolk is rich with brain-building fats, and if the chicken was free-range, then the yolk contains healthy amounts of protective nutrients like vitamins A, D and Omega 3 essential fatty acids. Cook eggs at low temperatures as high temperatures can damage the nutrients. Fully cook the whites, but the yolks are healthiest if they are left softer and/or runny.

Q: What should I be looking at on the food label?

A: Turn it over and look at the list of ingredients on the back. Ingredients are listed in highest to lowest amounts. In general, the first 3 ingredients make up the largest part of what you are eating. This is an easy way to see what you are really getting in the product. If you see any of the types of ingredients listed that include sugars, any processed and trans-fats and other ingredients noted in the September 7 challenge email---be cautious!

Avoid foods that make health claims on the label. Often, if it suggests that it is healthy, it's probably not. Some of the healthiest foods in the store are in the produce section and you don't see any claims there. If the package tells you it's full of fiber, antioxidants, phytonutrients, low fat, low salt----it's trying too hard to sell you on its value.

****Be sure to read all your emails coming from WebMD-Baystate Healthy—that's where you'll find all the REAL food "nuggets" of information!****

Tip from Patti Randazzo, Lab Assistant, Whitney Ave: *Paying greater attention to the food label was my first step towards eating healthier foods. I was inspired by Dr. Oz who educated me on the harmful effects of consuming high fructose corn syrup and sugars. One step at a time, I made an ingredient or food change for the better. As a result, I now eat primarily a whole food based diet and I feel great!*

Q: I am not sure what to eat. Mostly I eat cereal for breakfast, a salad for lunch and a convenience meal for dinner.

A: Try not to overcomplicate it and don't worry about being perfect. Rather than look at it like eliminating all that you are doing, view it as a "replacement" process. Take it step by step looking at what you are eating now and noticing how you can make changes to improve the quality of the ingredients you are cooking with or the foods you are selecting.

Breakfast ideas: Have an egg, piece of cheese, a slice of sprouted grain bread, yogurt (whole fat, plain) and add a few fresh blueberries and walnuts.

Salads should be colorful—the more color the better.

- Change it up with using different varieties of lettuce; arugula, endive, chicory, radicchio, Boston, green or red leaf.
- Use a combination of raw, cooked or fermented vegetables, for taste, texture, nutrition and digestibility.
- Add other interesting components: capers, olives, nuts, seeds
- Add creaminess with fresh soft cheeses like mozzarella or goat cheese, fontina, etc.
- Include a protein in it to make it more satisfying meal. I.e., meats, eggs, beans, fermented tofu
- Use quality salad dressing that contains monounsaturated fats—the fats will help you better digest and absorb the nutrients. Check the label and avoid cheap vegetable oils – as they have all been processed similarly as the process of hydrogenated oils—that contain Trans fats. All of which increase body inflammation (we will talk more about that next article).
Choose: olive oil or avocado oil based dressings
Avoid: cheap, high inflammatory oils like soybean, corn, canola, cottonseed, sunflower, safflower, grape seed

Again, be careful about the claims on the front label—many will claim "made with olive oil", but when you turn it over you see that other oils make up the most of the ingredients.

Better than store bought, make your own dressing. It's healthier and more affordable! [View Dressing Recipes](#)

Dinner: One of the easiest ways for busy working people to get a healthy dinner on the table, outside of having a personal chef, is with a slow cooker. Put all your ingredients in the pot before you leave for work and when you get home it's ready to go! Accompany it with a vegetable or two and you'll have dinner ready in a snap. Make extra so you can take some for lunch the next day. Fresh greens like mustard, collards, chard, spinach cook super-fast and can be made even more tasty by adding sautéed onions and mushrooms, some fat and pinch of sea salt. You can easily find slow cooker recipes on the internet. As you look at the ingredients, consider which ones could be replaced with foods that rank higher on the whole foods spectrum.

Q:I'm not a big vegetable eater, but I do eat a lot of fruit. Can that replace my vegetable intake needs?

A: We often refer to "fruits and vegetables" as if they are interchangeable. Nutritionally, vegetables pack much more of a punch than fruit. In general, vegetables deliver more nutrients than fruits—they are higher in Vitamin A, iron, folate, calcium and they have far less sugar. Every doctor and diabetic knows that fruits raise blood sugar levels. The more tart the fruit tastes, the better; like cranberries and blueberries. Tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers are technically fruits, but we tend to classify them as vegetables since they are so low in sugar. Health Tip: Eat far more vegetables than fruits.

Email 4: Enjoy the Benefits of Sprouted Grain Bread

Buy Sprouted Grain Breads

Breads come in a various degrees of quality and wholeness. White bread is least healthy, containing mostly empty calories. Brown bread is often no better, often made from white flour and colored and labeled as wheat. Whole grain is a step up from that.

The best bread choice is a sprouted grain bread. It is better than whole grain bread for these reasons:

1. When a grain is allowed to sprout it goes through an enzymatic process. This process converts some of the empty starch calories to better things like fiber, vitamins and amino acids. The process also reduces the amount of calories in the bread—by about 30%.
2. Minerals in grains are "locked up" until they are allowed to go through that natural germination process. Once sprouted, these minerals calcium, magnesium, copper, iron and zinc become available for you to absorb...and benefit from!
3. Digestibility. All types of grains are much more easily digested (leaving you less full and bloated) after they have been sprouted, soaked or fermented. To learn more, read *With the Grain* and discover ancient preparation methods that increase the nutrients and digestibility of grains.

When buying, look for breads with the majority of their grains listed as sprouted in the ingredient list. Most of the 100% sprouted versions, are in the refrigerator section (sometimes frozen). Some of the non-refrigerated versions contain preservatives to allow them to last longer at room temperature—so

keep that in mind. If you can't find sprouted bread, real sourdough bread is a good runner up because it has gone through a fermentation, or "souring" process.

[Enjoy the Benefits of Sprouted Grain Bread](#)

Emial 5: Myth or Truth? What you eat can cause inflammation in your body.

Truth! To inflame means to "set on fire" and that is figuratively what is happening in various areas of the body when things have gone awry. When your ankle is injured with a sprain, inflammation occurs. White bloods cells responsible for inflammation move to the area and cause increases in fluid, swelling, redness, warmth etc. Once the underlying cause for the inflammation is resolved, healing occurs. The same occurs when you have a cough, cold, etc.

Inflamation blocks the normal metabolic functions and disrupts cellular growth. When there is a dietary imbalance, inflammation takes longer to go away because you are "bathing" yourself in an inflammatory environment. That impacts how quickly your body will heal that ankle sprain, cough or cold as well as many other chronic health conditions.

Chronic exposure to known dietary "inflammers" leads to chronic inflammation and eventually is what is behind or worsens chronic diseases and conditions including; weight gain, diabetes, cancer, atherosclerosis, chronic fatigue, allergies, asthma, anxiety, headaches, learning disorders, hypertension, and digestive disorders and others. These conditions should all be taken as warning signs that your diet is harming your body.

Intrigued? Read tomorrow's newsletter and find out what foods are the top "inflammers." Can you guess?

Email 6: Am I eating foods that can cause inflammation?

Some of the biggest changes in our diet over time include the increase in consumption of sugars and vegetable oils and shortenings. The side effects of sugar consumption include, but are not limited to, reduced immune function, increased fat production, fatty liver, heart palpitations, hypertension, anxiety, and diabetes. Our consumption of sugar has grown exponentially over that past 200+ years, from negligible amounts less than a couple of pounds a year to now around 160 pounds of sugar per person per year.

The same applies to vegetable oils. The side effects include, increased risk for heart disease, weight gain and type 2 diabetes. Vegetable oils are polyunsaturated fats, which are unstable fats that are damaged by heat and susceptible to oxidative rancidity—releasing of free radicals (inflammation). Science has proven that excessive free radical damage to cells can cause mutation leading to cancer.

At this point we are (hopefully) all aware that shortening and margarine, aren't good for us because they have been hydrogenated (turned the liquid into solid) and contain Trans fats and other toxic fats. But,

vegetable oils don't just have to be hydrogenated to be harmful. The process of acquiring oil from a "vegetable" requires a superheated refining process, even if it was "expeller pressed." As a result, all vegetable oils contain a variety of harmful molecules, most commonly Trans fats, but there are others. The toxic chemicals in vegetable oils and hydrogenated oils damage cells and disrupts basic metabolic function, and have been linked to serious health problems. Unfortunately, manufacturers are not required in the US to note this on the label.

Polyunsaturated fats in small amounts are not the problem. Consuming large amounts of polyunsaturated fats are new to the human diet, due to the modern use of commercial liquid vegetable oils. The average person consumes 10-20 times the amount that is deemed safe. This imbalance creates inflammation.

Label Ingredient List Lookout

Sugar is sugar. Watch out for these ingredients: Evaporated cane juice • Corn syrup • Corn sweeteners • High fructose corn syrup • Fructose • Sucrose • Malt • Malt syrup • Barley malt syrup • Barley malt extract • Maltose • Maltodextrin • Brown rice syrup • Maple syrup • Dextrose • Beet juice • Molasses • Honey • Grape juice (usually added to jellies and jams) • Muscovado (partially refined molasses) • Turbinado (more highly refined molasses) • Sucanat (a version of brown sugar) • Invert sugar • Agave nectar • Xylose

Avoid soy oil, canola oil, corn oil, cottonseed oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, grapeseed oil, rice bran oil—they are polyunsaturated fats that have all gone through a super-heated process to become oil. Vegetable oils are in many commercial products that we consume every day. Some include;

- Salad dressings (Have you made any of the Dozens of Dressings recipes yet?)
- Crackers
- Granola
- Bread
- Breakfast cereals
- Cookies and "snack foods"

Email 7: Are you listening?

First and foremost, listen to your body. While there are tools that can help you track calories, points and other aspects of your food intake, the most important thing is to listen to what your body is telling you. If your body is telling you to eat more than it should, it's trying to tell you something. That something is that you are consuming too few nutrients. Many times the reason why we eat until we are stuffed or we eat when we are not even hungry, or we have strong food cravings is because we have not given our body the nutrients it *needs*.

Nutrient: [noo-tree-uh nt] *Noun*. A substance that is needed for healthy growth, development, and functioning.

Dense: [Dens] *Adjective*. Having a high mass per unit volume.

Eat nutrient dense foods like dark leafy greens, blueberries, salmon and shellfish, eggs, beets, fermented vegetables; sauerkraut, whole yogurt, kefir, and many of the other foods we have already discussed this month. Notice the pattern? Whole, unprocessed foods are the more nutrient dense foods.

Take time to enjoy what you are eating, pay attention and when you feel satisfied, stop and save the remainder for tomorrow.

Email 8: What does your gut say?

A growing body of [research](#) is showing that the amount and type of bacterial colonies living in your gut not only play a role in good digestive health, but can act as protection from the development of asthma, allergies, obesity, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune diseases and conditions like ADHD, autism and depression.

Nourishing gut flora from infancy and throughout life is vitally important. Along with consuming a low sugar, low processed food diet, the best strategy is to eat high quality fermented foods daily. While no longer a common practice of modern society, fermentation has been around for thousands of years, in every culture across the globe. Consuming traditional fermented items like sauerkraut, kimchi and dairy, to name a few, increase the level of healthy fermenting bacteria in the gut.

Fermentation is making a comeback and there are numerous resources for those interested in exploring this exciting “old” way to enhance the nutrient content and flavor profile of food:

[The Art of Fermentation](#)

[Wild Fermentation](#)

[Fermented Vegetables](#)