

Getting Healthy for the New Year

Written by By Lauren Deville, NMD
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One of Arizona's leading naturopathic physicians, Dr. Lauren Deville, discusses getting healthy in 2012.



The American public has been led to believe that:

1. Cholesterol is universally bad
2. High fat content in our food leads directly to high fat content in our bodies.

How Fat, Cholesterol, and Sugars Interact In Your Bloodstream

High triglycerides (fats in the bloodstream) are not primarily due to a high fat diet, but rather due to high refined sugar and carbohydrates, which are broken down into simple sugars and impact the body in virtually the same way. Both sugar and simple carbohydrates cause a rapid rise in blood sugar, which overwhelms your body: your blood can only accommodate a few tablespoons of sugar at a time. Any more than that needs to be rapidly disposed of in order to prevent hyperglycemia. And there's only one place it can go: fat, with the help of insulin. Insulin is what allows sugar to enter the cells for storage.

How This Leads to Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease

Problems come in when this cycle is repeated too often, too long: like a drug addict needing a bigger dose for the same high, your body will start to require more and more insulin to keep up with your sugar intake. Eventually, your pancreas (which creates insulin) simply can't keep up with the demand. This is bad for two reasons:

1. It can lead to Insulin Resistance and eventually Diabetes
2. The excess sugar in the bloodstream damages the lining of your blood vessels, triggering LDL cholesterol (colloquially known as "bad" cholesterol) to create a plug. This in itself is not bad. In fact, LDL cholesterol acts like a band-aid, and is a positive adaptation of the body in an attempt to restore health. But if this cycle of damage and repair continues, it can lead to cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Bottom line: the primary reason for the obesity epidemic, heart disease and diabetes is not high fat. The problems are high sugar and refined carbohydrates.

Fat Isn't All Bad

Diets that are too low in fat are not good! Fat and cholesterol are necessary for the formation and maintenance of healthy cellular membranes (including those of neurons, enabling easy transmission and uptake of neurotransmitters), the formation of all cholesterol-based hormones and neurotransmitters, and the maintenance of healthy mucous membranes. Not surprisingly, those who place themselves on strict low-fat diets experience bouts of depression at the minimum, and patients on statin drugs to lower their cholesterol must monitor their other cholesterol-based hormones carefully, and are likely to experience a wide variety of side effects such as muscle problems, fatigue, and memory loss.

How SHOULD We Eat?

So, what's the answer? First I have to start with a disclaimer that no one diet is right for everybody. There's plenty of evidence of healthy populations who live practically vegan, and others that live almost exclusively on animal products; those who consume up to 70% grains and those who live primarily on protein. But all of these populations seem to have one thing in common: they eat *real food*. It hasn't been processed, so the nutrient density remains intact and the naturally occurring fiber slows the release of carbohydrates into the bloodstream.

That said, here are a couple of rules of thumb:

1. **Choose foods that will spoil, and eat them before they do.** Foods without a lot of preservatives most likely haven't been processed very much.
2. **If you must choose something that has been pre-packaged, read labels.** If there are any added sugars, High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS), partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs), or ingredients you don't recognize on the list, don't eat it.
3. **Eat a rainbow.** Get as many naturally occurring colors in there as you can. This will most likely cause you to consume the daily recommended servings of fruits and vegetables without even trying.
4. **Have some protein with every meal,** including every snack. This will help to keep blood sugar stable. Protein doesn't necessarily mean meat; there are lots of forms, including beans, soy, yogurt, cheese, nuts, quinoa, etc.
5. **If organic food is available and affordable, buy it.** Organic animal products are produced from animals fed a natural diet, and therefore the products they produce contain the proper, anti-inflammatory balance of fats (higher omega 3 and lower omega 6).

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Additionally, organic foods in general are prepared without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or preservatives. For a list of those fruits and veggies that should be purchased organically (the "Dirty Dozen") and those for which organic is less important (the "Clean 15"), see this list by the Environmental Working Group: <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary/>

6. Drink at least half your body weight in ounces of water every day.

Again, this is not intended to be a substitute for personalized medical recommendations; be sure to check with your Naturopathic Doctor for the diet, lifestyle, and supplement regime most appropriate for you. But if you adhere to just these principles, your blood glucose, cholesterol, triglycerides, and weight will almost certainly head back in the right direction.

Let 2012 be your year to turn your health around!



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