

<http://www.enjoywinter.com/larson.htm>Food

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As a nutritionist and exercise physiologist I find that many people have misconceptions about healthy eating on a day-to-day basis. It's really quite simple. The less processed the better, meaning whole foods are the way to go. Eat the apple instead of drinking the apple juice or eating the sugared applesauce. Purchase cheeses and cuts of meat from the deli department instead of processed lunchmeats, sausages, and cheeses. Go for whole grains instead of Pop-Tarts and white bread. Don't be afraid to experiment with new grains, fruits, vegetables, and spices; some foods are an acquired taste or should be prepared in a certain way to be enjoyed. An example of this is eggplant. Raw eggplant is not very appealing but sauté it with a little extra-virgin olive oil and garlic and it becomes an amazing topping to whole-wheat pasta.

It's also important to keep in mind that there is no one optimal macronutrient ratio for everyone. America has gone through a series of nutritional fads: low-fat, high-carb, high-protein; with so much contradictory information it's no wonder why many people are confused about what to eat. The truth is there is no magic ratio. Different people function optimally on different amounts and kinds of food. Some people may be carnivores and feel "off" if they don't consume enough meat and dairy while others may crave a higher carbohydrate diet, heavy in fruits and grains. Very lean athletes may need more fat than the recommended 30% of total daily calories to maintain a healthy body fat percentage and weight. However, everyone functions better on a nutritionally dense diet, no matter the macronutrient combination. Long-term, people who eat foods that naturally contain vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants will have a decreased risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes and will generally feel better.

Exercising on a regular basis and maintaining a low body weight does not mean that it's all-right to eat in an unhealthful manner. These habits can affect how you feel on a day-to-day basis as well as have long-term effects such as increased cholesterol and blood pressure. No matter your age, training schedule or body weight it is important to have a nutritionally dense diet that focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, lean meats, and low-fat dairy. Subsisting on Top Ramen, white tortillas, Pop-Tarts, and Gatorade will not make anyone a more competitive athlete or an optimally functioning human.

There are lots of easy ways to eat more healthfully: Eating a breakfast of whole-grain cereal such as raisin bran or oatmeal and using low-fat or skim milk and yogurt starts the day off right. Using whole-wheat breads and pastas, experimenting with new whole-grains such as bulgur and wild rice as well as baking with whole wheat flour, brans, oatmeal, and wheat-germ can increase your consumption of fiber and broaden your culinary horizons. Adding fresh or frozen vegetables to soups, pasta dishes, and eggs can boost your vitamin and mineral consumption and frozen fruits are a great addition to any frozen yogurt smoothie. Fat should not be avoided as it increases pleasure and satiety at mealtime as well as being an essential component of a well-balanced diet. Saturated fat should be limited to 10% of total caloric intake. This type of fat can be reduced by avoiding fatty cuts of meat and high-fat dairy products. Fried foods are also very high in saturated fat as well as transfat. Transfat should be avoided at all costs. Not only does it increase LDL (bad cholesterol) but it decreases HDL (good cholesterol). Transfat can be nearly eliminated from the diet by not purchasing processed packaged foods. Transfat will appear on food labels as partially or fully hydrogenated oil (generally soybean). It is commonly found in many peanut butters, cookies, chips, and packaged baked goods. Good fats to consume are poly and monounsaturated fats such as those found in nuts, "natural-style" nut butters, avocados, most vegetable oils, and fish. Olive oil is a great medium for cooking vegetables and canola oil is good for baking.

One final tip: When grocery shopping focus staying on the perimeter of the store. The perimeter contains the fruits and vegetables, followed by the meat and cheese counter, and the bakery (just remember to buy whole wheat bread). This makes it easier to avoid a lot of processed foods found in the aisles. This is just a general rule, of course there are a lot of healthful foods found in the aisles (beans, brown rice, whole grain cereals, ect.) but it is something to consider