

Mark Surdut

BSc, BScMed(Hons) NutrDiet(UCT), APD

## Understanding more about Nutrition & Healthy Eating

*'Food should nourish life. This is the best Medicine.'*

*Okinawan Proverb*

Do you eat too much, too fast and not give your diet much attention?

You need to slow down and take a good look at your eating habits.

By understanding some basic principles and making some small adjustments to the way you eat, your health can benefit in a big way.

**Here are some tips to get you started:**

The way we feel (our mood and energy levels) and common food cravings, particularly for high calorie sugary foods, often result from unstable or sharply fluctuating blood sugar levels.

**Eating regularly**, which means not going without food during the day for more than 5-6 hours at a time, helps keep your **blood sugar level** steady and in addition, it helps keep your metabolism in check and helps maintain a healthy body weight.

What is a healthy body weight? There are **2 simple methods to check your weight and shape**.

1. Divide your weight in kilograms by your height in metres (squared). This value is referred to as your Body Mass Index (BMI). Take a 70kg person who is 1.75m tall, his BMI is equal to  $70 / (1.75)^2$  or 22.9. Your BMI should lie between about 19 and 27.
2. Another useful and important gauge is your waist circumference (taken at the level of your belly button).  
Men: keep it well below 102 cm and women well below 88cm

Structure most of your meals around **low Glycaemic Index (GI) wholesome carbohydrate** foods - sweet potato and raw muesli are two nutritious examples. These carbohydrates are slowly absorbed into the blood stream, have more subtle effects on blood sugar levels (see above) and provide us with longer lasting energy.

In addition, you should also eat a **variety** of fresh fruit (but not too much!) and an abundance of vegetables every day (shop for an assortment of different colours). Fresh fruit and vegetables house powerful disease-fighting *anti-oxidants* (including the flavonoids and carotenoids) and are essential sources of tummy filling **fibre** that help to satisfy hearty appetites.

A high fat diet is one of the leading causes of overweight and being overweight in turn places one at risk for a number of diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. Eating too much *saturated* fat can clog vital coronary arteries! Foods high in saturated fat include some high fat animal derived products as well as some vegetable oils like palm oil.

*Hydrogenated* oils (an ingredient to look out for in many processed foods) can also damage the arteries.

However, be sure to include some **healthy fats** in your diet - in appropriate quantities of course - such as olive oil, canola oil, avocado, seeds, walnuts and almonds.

**Protein** in *moderation* is also part of a well balanced diet. Proteins help maintain strong muscles as well as having other important functions in the body. Choose *lean* meats, *skinless* chicken, fish and legumes eg. Tofu, chick peas, lentils and beans. Nuts are a good source of both protein and oils.

The **volume** you eat at a meal is essential too. Overeating can slow you down, make you feel drowsy and force your body to stack on unnecessary weight. **Accredited Practising Dietitians** can provide you with a tailored, quantified eating plan, based on your age, weight, health status, metabolism, likes and dislikes.

Drink lots of fluids, especially **water**, even when you're not thirsty.

Alcohol may be a fluid but it's no way to quench your thirst- need we stress the rule: **Moderation is key**.

Although 2 cups of regular coffee or tea may help "perk you up", more than 5 cups a day can put you on an energy roller coaster.

**Take charge of your diet, eat smart and feel the benefits.**