The General Healing Diet

with Kelly LeVeque

© 2017 mindbodygreen, LLC
Welcome to the Functional Food module and my session on the **general healing diet**. This session focuses on a state that allows the body to heal naturally through food. A general healing diet ensures that the food you eat provides your body with all the essential amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals needed to function properly and perform biological processes efficiently.

It encourages you to choose whole foods full of fiber and avoid processed carbohydrates and sugar. These choices support the body to balance blood sugar naturally. It encourages you to choose high-quality proteins, fat, and produce to avoid unnecessary inflammation caused by pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics present in conventional food.

A general healing diet is exactly what it sounds like-- a diet that supports your body to ward off and help lessen the effects of diseases like metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance, diabetes, heart disease, fatigue, depression, and obesity on its own. And to do that, you need to focus on a few pillars of health.

First, optimal nutrition. Many of today’s ailments are due to nutritional deficiencies. Nutritional deficiencies can happen because the majority of our diet is made up of processed foods stripped of their vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants, and enzymes; or because the foods we are eating have been grown quickly on less fertile soil. Modern intensive agricultural methods have stripped increasing amounts of nutrients from the soil and thus from our food.

A landmark study on the topic was published in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition at the University of Texas by Donald Davis, and the findings for 43 different vegetables and fruits found reliable declines in the amount of protein, calcium, phosphorus, iron, riboflavin-- also known as vitamin B2, and vitamin C over the past half century. So not only are we eating less whole foods, but also, the whole foods that we are eating are doing a lot less for us.

So focus on eating a variety of quality produce and lots of it, at least half your plate is a great start. If you aren’t sure what vegetables provide specific nutrients, focus on a variety of colors and types, from leafy greens to cruciferous vegetables.

Proper nutrition is vital for not only preventing disease, but also slowing the aging process, improving mental capacity, and increasing energy levels. And optimal nutrition is not about just being alive without disease, it’s about being alive and thriving in everything that you do. To live optimally, it’s important to know what deficiencies you’re at risk for.

On January 6th, 2016, the US Department of Health and Human Services and of Agriculture released the 2015 to 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and identified nutrients that were consumed below the estimated average requirement. These nutrients include potassium, dietary fiber, choline, magnesium, calcium, and vitamins A, D, E, and C.

A review from the Journal of the American College of Nutrition looking at deficiencies from 2007 to 2012 confirm that 0% of the population hit the RDI for potassium-- 0%. 8% achieved choline requirements, and only 33% were getting enough vitamin K above the adequate intake.
On top of the newly published reports showing new concerns, historically, the most common deficiencies include iron, vitamin D, iodine, calcium, B12, vitamin A, and magnesium.

So let’s get into it. Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin that works like a steroid hormone in the body that is produced out of the cholesterol in the skin when it is exposed to sunlight, and over 40% of Americans are deficient. Symptoms include muscle weakness, bone loss, increased risk of fractures, and it may even play a role in a reduced immune function and increased risk of cancer and depression. Lowering your risk is as easy as enjoying egg yolks and fatty fish, like salmon. A pretty easy and tasty solution, right?

Then there’s vitamin A, an essential fat soluble vitamin important for maintaining healthy skin, teeth, bones, cell membranes, vision, and immune function. Little do most people know that the absorption of vitamin A is actually dependent on consuming appropriate amounts of vitamin D, so balancing enough of these two vitamins is essential.

Vitamin K is also best absorbed when it’s paired with vitamin D and calcium. K2 is actually the missing link that ensures that calcium is absorbed into the bone instead of soft tissues. Within the last 10 years, the biological role of vitamin K2 to remove calcium from areas where it shouldn’t be, such as arteries and soft tissues, and shuttle it to the appropriate areas, such as your bones and teeth, has become more widely understood and seen as incredibly important by nutritionists and doctors alike.

So if you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, it’s important to consume not only calcium and vitamin D, but also adequate levels of K2. And the best way to do that is to eat more leafy greens. Again, aiming to have half your plate covered in vegetables will also help you reach your fiber requirements and support natural detoxification.

Calcium deficiency is also plaguing the US. A 2010 study confirmed that less than 15% of women and less than 25% of men are meeting the recommended intake. Unfortunately, stats like these severely increase the chances of osteoporosis later in life.

These days, with so many young people avoiding dairy, we really need to be more educated on how to increase consumption through other food groups. What food groups, you ask? As you could have probably guessed, more grains. Curly kale offers 14% of your RDI, dandelion greens offers 10%, turnip greens offers 10%, arugula offers 6%, and collard greens offers 5%.

As you previously learned, B12 can only be consumed through animal products, and therefore a deficiency is very common for vegetarians and vegans. The most common symptoms include a blood disorder called megaloplastic anemia that enlarges red blood cells, impair brain function, and elevate homocysteine levels. Homocysteine is a toxin for almost every cell in our bodies, and increases the risk of birth defects, infertility, dementia, psychological illness, stroke, heart attack, blood vessel disease, blood clots, osteoporosis, and overall death rates. B vitamins, including B12, are needed to metabolize homocysteine. Vegans and vegetarians should get their B12 levels tested annually and consider supplementation.
For meat-eaters, a four ounce piece of steak provides 100% of your recommended daily intake. Not a meat-eater? Not to worry. Three ounces of shellfish provides over 1,000% of your recommended daily intake.

Next is magnesium. Magnesium is a co-factor for over 300 enzymatic processes in the body. Yet research suggests that only around half of US adults get what they need, and low intakes are linked to type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, osteoporosis, heart disease, asthma, and colon cancer. The lack of magnesium is a result of a poor diet and depleted soils. Symptoms of low magnesium include insulin resistance, constipation, migraines, restless legs syndrome, cramping, hypertension, and fibromyalgia.

Iron deficiency is one of the most common nutrient deficiencies in the world, affecting more than 25% of people worldwide, especially among menstruating women, children, and vegetarians. Symptoms usually include tiredness, weakness, weakened immune system, and impaired brain function. Enjoying three ounces of shellfish gives you 50% of the recommended daily intake of iron, and it can be as easy and affordable as snagging a can of wild sardines.

Iodine deficiency is also very common, with 1/3 of the world’s population affected. Because the thyroid requires iodine for proper health, a lack of iodine can result in a myriad of issues for your thyroid, including a goiter, low thyroid, and/or weight gain. Looking to up your iodine? Snags some dehydrated seaweed snacks. It offers 400% to 1,000% of your recommended daily intake.

The next pillar of a general healing diet is understanding and supporting your blood sugar balance. Why should you care about your blood sugar? Blood sugar or glucose is our main source of energy. It dictates how hungry and energetically feel. Blood sugar is produced when we break down any carbohydrate, from quinoa to cake. The key idea with respect to blood sugar is balance. We feel best when our blood sugars balanced-- not too high, not too low. Eating the right amount of protein, fat, and whole food, fiber-rich carbohydrates at each meal can help you naturally stabilize blood sugar to have consistent energy throughout the whole day. It will also help to keep aggressive insulin spikes at bay.

When we eat carbohydrates, they break down to blood sugar or glucose. When glucose enters our bloodstream, our pancreas produces a hormone called insulin that's released to regulate blood sugar. The normal range for blood sugar is between 70 milligrams per deciliter and 120 milligrams per deciliter. For our body to maintain that range, it relies on insulin.

Insulin's like a small ferry boat. It picks up blood sugar then transfers it out of our bloodstream and into our cells, specifically our liver cells, our muscle cells, and last but not least, fat cells. This regulates and maintains blood sugar levels within the normal range. When we eat sugar or other carbohydrate-rich foods that are quickly processed into blood sugar, the pancreas goes into overdrive to produce the insulin necessary for all the new blood sugar to be stored. This insulin surge tells our body that plenty of energy is available and that it should stop burning fat and start storing it.

Low blood sugar, also known as reactive hypoglycemia, occurs when the insulin surge causes too much blood sugar to be transported out of the blood. This can leave us feeling
tired, weak, shaky, lightheaded, and a little anxious. As a result, we crave more sugar and carbohydrates, thinking they will pick us back up. In reality, they start the cycle all over again, and in the process, our body stores more fat, promotes inflammation, and speeds up the body’s aging processes.

Blood sugar, also known as hyperglycemia, occurs when the insulin is unable to transport enough blood sugar out of the blood. But what's becoming even more common is the state of hyperinsulinemia, a condition in which there are excess levels of insulin circulating in the blood relative to the level of glucose. This inability to clear insulin is being linked to the eventual development of insulin resistance, a hallmark of the most chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension. On top of that, insulin resistance can lead to obesity.

As you might assume, weight loss happens between meals—when we have balanced blood sugar and no excess insulin. Thus, understanding blood sugar is a great way to facilitate long-term healthy fat loss and sustainable energy. You can naturally balance your blood sugar by avoiding simple carbohydrates and hidden sugar.

Instead, as I keep repeating, eat fat, protein, and whole food carbohydrates like vegetables and whole grains, and be sure to limit your simple carbohydrates.

Simple carbohydrates include various forms of sugar. Look for words that end in -ose, such as sucrose or table sugar, fructose--fruit sugar, lactose--dairy sugar, glucose--blood sugar. They can be metabolized quickly and are therefore most likely to cause an insulin surge. This is why it’s possible to be hungrier after you drink a 100% fruit smoothie than an egg omelet. The subsequent glucose crash will have you craving and eating more throughout the day. Monitor how you respond to simple carbohydrates. Add fat or fiber to your snack or meal to decrease spikes and crashes.

It can be frustrating to clean up your diet and still feel depleted, but hidden sugar can be everywhere and may be the culprit. Check the nutrition information on everything you buy and eat. Here are a few types of foods that are some of the biggest culprits of hidden sugar.

Processed foods. There may be sugar in processed foods like bread, ketchup, salad dressing, canned fruit, applesauce, even peanut butter, and soups.

Beverages. Sugar can also be present in beverages, especially coffee and alcohol. And liquid sugar creates the fastest insulin surge.

Fat free foods. Sugar is often used to replace the flavor that is lost when the fat is removed.

Juices. Watch out for 100% fruit products that contain concentrated fruit juice and/or fructose. Juicing your way through the holidays really just means a liver full of fructose and potential muscle loss.

Although fructose doesn't cause the same surge in blood glucose, fructose is 100% metabolized in the liver and its metabolism can cause inflammation. For reference, only 80% of alcohol and 20% of glucose is metabolized in the liver. When fructose is metabolized, it converts to an activated form of glycerol, that is directly used to turn free fatty acids into triglycerides or fat. Basically the more fructose you consume, the more glycerol it converts into and the more fat
As part of the metabolic process, the fructose also replaces liver glycogen. When you juice or drink smoothies that contain mainly fruits or eat too much sucrose, a disaccharide made up of half fructose and half glucose, you're building up more than you need and all the excess will be stored.

More importantly, the metabolism of fructose also results in waste products and toxins, including a large amount of uric acid, which can drive up blood pressure and lead to gout. Fructose also undergoes the maillard reaction, which leads to the formation of superoxide free radicals similar to acetaldehyde, that can result in liver inflammation. Long-term excess fructose consumption has been linked to insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, and obesity.

I've talked about all the things to avoid to improve your blood sugar balance. Now let's talk about some of the best things to mix in. The easiest way to help your body naturally stabilize blood sugar within the normal range is to again mix the macronutrients on your plate at each meal, eating fat, protein, and fiber-rich carbohydrates that slowly release sugar into the bloodstream.

Fat. Fat has less impact on blood sugar than carbohydrates. When consumed alone, fats have no effect on circulating blood sugar. When eaten with a meal, fat slows the absorption of your meal, which helps you to avoid steep spikes.

Protein. Protein keeps blood sugar levels steady. When consumed alone in normal serving sizes, protein does not generate a rise in blood sugar.

However, do not eat protein in excess, otherwise it may be converted to glucose through a process called gluconeogenesis.

Fiber. Like fat, fiber slows the absorption of nutrients, specifically glucose. Natural sugars found in vegetables and fruit are delivered to us in their fiber package to slow the digestion and distribution of sugar into our bloodstream. Fiber is fermented by your gut bacteria or passes through your body instead of spiking your blood sugar, so the higher in fiber, the lower in glucose, and the lower the aggressive amount of blood sugar your body needs to store.

If you can find gluten free, always opt for low net carb alternatives, that's even better.

When it comes to enjoying carbohydrates, these tips should help you stay off the blood sugar roller coaster and support your body's natural goals to stay balanced. Eat whole carbohydrates, or as close to it as possible. They're wrapped in fiber, like quinoa, rice, beats, and beans. This slows the digestion too elongate your blood sugar curve and slowly release glucose into your bloodstream.

Instead of juice, which mainlines itself into our blood, eat completely whole foods or foods with limited whole ingredients. Remember, vegetables or fruit are always best eaten in their whole state.

Try to keep glucose forming foods to an appropriate serving size of carbohydrates per meal. This helps ensure your glucose is stored only as fuel in your liver and muscles and not as fat. It also helps to prevent high blood sugar. This looks like a half a cup of rice, a tortilla, or maybe a serving of fruit.
The last pillar of health is the elimination of toxins and allergies to prevent inflammation. Inflammation and toxicity are both a major cause for concern and linked to an increase in autoimmune diseases and hormonal disruption. So take the knowledge you learned previously in this training and what you’ll learn and some of the sessions up next and apply it.

Buy pasture-raised proteins free of hormones and antibiotics, they’re naturally loaded with way more anti-inflammatory omega-3.

Source local organic vegetables free of pesticides from your farmer’s market. They deliver the anti-oxidants your body needs to fight oxidative stress and free radicals.

Pick low glycemic, fiber-rich carbohydrates like vegetables and fruit. They have fiber, enzymes, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that help you age slower, improve energy levels, lose weight, and naturally detoxify your cells.

Choose to cook your foods in high heat oils never exceeding their smoke point. And use healthy cooking techniques to preserve and/or increase the bioavailability of your nutrition.

You can also use the elimination diet we cover to investigate what you might be allergic to and avoid it. All of these things will help you clear toxins from your system and help you avoid consuming them into the future.

This is your chance to live your best life and help others do the same. You will never know how great you can feel until you set your body up to perform optimally and heal itself from the inside-out.