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Dear Friends,

When I see parents about their children, they frequently tell me how difficult it is to get them to eat healthy foods; either they are fussy eaters, don't like vegetables, won't eat anything that is smooth, or anything that is lumpy, will eat nothing raw, or nothing cooked, or dislike many other food characteristics.

I think it must be a cultural phenomenon, because in other countries it is hard to imagine similar interchanges—a Chinese child who refuses vegetables, rice, or tofu; a Mexican child who won't eat tortillas and beans, or mangoes; an Indian child who won't eat vegetable curry, chick peas, and fruits.

In most cultures, the availability of foods determines the dietary choices that children make, (of course, we don't want to neglect the possibility that a child refuses something because of a food allergy). If junk is not as available, healthy eating becomes the routine. A recent study showed that parents and family situations have a great influence on children's eating habits.

The study of 3000 high school students showed that those teens who had good communication with and close supervision by their parents were far more likely to have healthy eating habits. The number eating a healthy breakfast ranged from 12 to 24 to 32 percent among those in foster homes, living with another family

member, or with a single parent, compared to 43 percent of those living with both parents. Children were more likely to eat healthy breakfasts and lunches if they spent more time with family and less unsupervised time. While their healthy breakfast might not be the same as mine, the point is that parents can influence what children eat. We need to pay attention to this because our epidemic of obesity (and diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and hypertension) starts with childhood eating habits.

Curiously, in the better family situations, the number of children eating healthy breakfasts was still only 43 percent, meaning that on average in those families, 57 percent of the children did not eat healthy breakfasts. Those families with the highest parental monitoring reported that 80 percent of the children ate fruits and vegetables at least once a day. As the recommendations for fruits and vegetables is between 5 and 9 servings a day, this does not strike me as very positive.

Nonetheless, the important point to take away is that parents can have a great influence on their children's eating habits, and they don't have to despair. Many years ago I saw a report suggesting that when children grow up they are much more likely to eat what their parents ate, even if they had poor eating habits when they were growing up (if they refuse the asparagus now, they may like it in their 20's). While you can't completely control your child's eating habits, you can influence them through communication, having good foods available in the house, and through setting a good example.

Vitamin E–Which is Best?

A large body of evidence shows that the antioxidant vitamin E is beneficial for prevention of heart disease, cancer, and menstrual pain, as well as enhancement of immunity, and slowing the aging process related to oxidative damage.

A lot of the research has been done with synthetic vitamin E, referred to with the prefix “dl-” before the alpha-tocopherol. However, it is increasingly clear that natural vitamin E is more desirable, better absorbed and more biologically active. A plain “d-” before alpha-tocopherol indicates the natural form.

Even more desirable is a combination that includes not only the alpha form, but the “mixed tocopherols,” containing other isomers called beta, gamma, and delta. In particular, the gamma-tocopherol (GT) appears to be valuable in both laboratory and human studies.

Most vitamin E on the market, even the natural mixed vitamin E, has very little GT. However, evidence is accumulating that GT is an important nutritional antioxidant in addition to alpha-tocopherol (AT). A December report shows that GT is an effective scavenger of oxidative molecules in lipid tissues, and both GT and its metabolites inhibit an enzyme called cyclo-oxygenase, which is a mediator of inflammation. GT provides an anti-inflammatory activity not seen with AT.

High plasma GT is associated with reduced cardiovascular disease and a lower incidence of prostate cancer. Evidence also suggests that high intake of AT can inhibit the accumulation of GT in tissues and plasma (even though most studies with AT show it is beneficial). Earlier studies suggest that GT is a more effective detoxifier of the pollutant nitrogen dioxide. Supplements with 40 to 50 percent GT are available, and may be preferable to those with little or no GT.

Dietary E and Other Antioxidants

GT is the predominant form of vitamin E in the diet, and it seems prudent to take a balanced vitamin E with higher levels of the GT. However, most of the studies that show benefit from supplements of vitamin E are done with the synthetic form or the natural AT, with little or no GT. Recent studies that cast some doubt on the value

of antioxidant supplements often use too low a dose, such as 50 mg of vitamin E, but perhaps they should be looking at using combinations of effective doses of several antioxidants, and including GT in the tocopherol mix.

With combinations of antioxidants they support each other synergistically. These include selenium, vitamin C, carotenoids—not just beta-carotene, alpha-lipoic acid, coenzyme Q10, and flavonoids, as well as others. Recent articles show that alpha-lipoic acid supplements can restore youthfulness to animals, improve the function of their cells’ mitochondria, and enhance their brain function, especially when combined with a derivative of the amino acid L-carnitine. These supplements also help reverse the age-related memory loss in older animals.

My recommendation is to take some vitamin E in a multivitamin, with the natural d-alpha form, and add some extra mixed tocopherols with high levels of GT. In addition, get as many dietary antioxidants as possible, from vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains, adding complementary antioxidants for greater aging protection.

Love, Marriage, Work, and Stress

For Valentine’s day, the World Heart Federation, a collection of cardiology societies and heart foundations, came out and said that love is good for your health. Citing a study of 10,000 men, they noted that love and support can markedly reduce the development of angina, even in the face of numerous other risk factors.

It appears that marriage itself is not protective, but a loving, supportive relationship. In one report, lack of social support nearly tripled the mortality from coronary disease, while marital status was unrelated.

On the other hand, marital stress significantly increases mortality. In other words, if you are in a loving relationship, married or not, you reduce disease risks, but a stressful relationship makes things worse. Recent divorce has a significant negative effect on health risks, but so does staying in a stressful relationship.

Another study, the MRFIT, or Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial, is a long term study that has led to a report that both work and mari-

tal stress can significantly contribute to mortality from heart disease. The lesson is not to go out and get married, but to strive to find satisfying relationships and work, and combine them with healthy lifestyle choices—exercise, diet, and stress management.

It has been shown that psychological support and stress reduction can improve the mortality in people with heart disease. Support groups and rehabilitation programs can help significantly. In one study, mortality was reduced from 17 percent to 4 percent over a nine-year period for heart attack patients in rehab programs. In addition, the rehab patients had less stress and depression than controls. I've reported earlier on other studies showing that yoga and meditation provide similar benefits.

Supportive relationships are usually the result of giving support, not expecting it or searching for it (D.H. Lawrence writes "...only the loving find love, and they never have to search for it."). Satisfying work comes from giving every effort to whatever job you are doing. If you are in difficult work or relationship situations, they are likely to have negative effects on your health, and you should consider what is necessary to improve them or change them.

Ask Dr. J

Q. I have Raynaud's syndrome. My hands turn very blue when exposed to the cold. Can you recommend something? FK, New York

A. Raynaud's disease involves spasms of the small arteries in the hands, and sometimes the feet or face, triggered by cold. The syndrome is sometimes associated with auto-immune diseases such as scleroderma, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis (when it is called Raynaud's phenomenon), and it can be the first sign of such disorders, but it often occurs alone with no apparent disease association. It can also be triggered by reaction to some drugs, including beta-blockers, chemotherapy. It is much more common in women than men.

The extremities turn white with lack of blood flow, and as it persists they can turn blue and then bright red as the spasm abates and blood rushes back in to the tissues. It can cause numbness and tingling from lack of blood flow, and then pressure and pain with the last phase.

The obvious recommendation is to keep warm and wear gloves and scarves in cold weather (not everyone can move to warmer climates as a solution, but it is a nice idea!) and get regular exercise. Avoid all tobacco, a cause of arterial spasms.

While medications are sometimes used, a number of dietary supplements may provide relief. Vitamin B3, as timed-release niacin (250 mg twice daily) or inositol hexaniacinate (800 to 1600 mg daily) has been successful. Gamma-linolenic acid (GLA, 240 mg from borage oil) relaxes the blood vessel muscles by rebalancing the prostaglandins that affect smooth muscle contraction (reducing meat and other animal fat in the diet may provide similar benefit by reducing arachidonic acid that leads to increased muscle spasm).

Ginkgo biloba improves blood vessel function and can relieve Raynaud's symptoms (120 to 240 mg of standardized extract). Other supplements that help include magnesium as a blood vessel relaxant (400 to 1000 mg), fish oil (2000 to 10,000 mg), and L-carnitine (2000 to 3000 mg).

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Love, Stress, and Mortality

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In the Health News

- Elevated levels of homocysteine in the blood is a known risk factor for heart disease. Now research shows that it is also a significant risk for the development of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease (Seshadri S, et al., Plasma homocysteine...and Alzheimer's disease. *N Engl J Med* 2002 Feb 14;346(7):476-83). Information from the Framingham study indicates that each 5-unit rise in plasma homocysteine leads to a 40 percent increase in dementia incidence. Levels above 14 units doubled the risk. Homocysteine can be lowered with B vitamins, including folate, B6, and B12.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) are contributors to the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding, and now it appears that in patients with congestive heart failure they can increase the likelihood of relapse (Feenstra J, et al., Association of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs with...heart failure. *Arch Intern Med.* 2002 Feb 11;162(3):265-270). Natural anti-inflammatory agents curcumin, ginger, vitamin C are free of this risk.

Diet and Disease

- Insulin resistance, most commonly the result of obesity, and a reflection of poor sugar metabolism, is a risk factor for the development of heart disease and diabetes. A recent study shows that caffeine intake, even in moderate amounts, can cause insulin resistance and thus increase disease risks (Keijzers GB, et al., Caffeine can decrease insulin sensitivity in humans. *Diabetes Care* 2002 Feb;25(2):364-9). Caffeine increased blood levels of adrenal stress hormones, and elevated blood fats and blood pressure. The editorialists noted that this adds another risk from caffeine, but they cryptically remarked that coffee drinkers should not panic, because these were experimental conditions with healthy people! They think you should wait to become sick from caffeine, then panic.

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Herb Nut Loaf

Nut loaf can be quite tasty, although often ridiculed by non-vegetarians. In a mixing bowl, combine 1 1/2 cups of walnuts or almonds ground up in a blender, 2 cups of bread crumbs (toasted whole wheat sesame bread is good), 1 1/2 cups of minced tomato, 1 1/2 onions and 4 cloves of garlic minced and lightly stir-fried in olive oil, 2 beaten eggs, 1 Tbsp of soy sauce, 1 tsp of lemon juice, 2 tsp each of thyme, oregano, and chili powder, and 8 Tbsp of minced parsley and cilantro. Mix well and fill into an oiled loaf pan; bake for 35 minutes at 350° F. Slice and cover with mushroom gravy (mushrooms, onions, garlic and ground pepper, sauteed in olive oil, with added organic vegetable broth—you can buy this at a health food store). This is a delicious main course with steamed veggies and salad.

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