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Are you deficient? How to get the most from your diet.

Many leaders in the natural health movement agree that disease is caused by two things: toxicity and deficiency. Nutritional deficiencies are far more common than we may realise. Why?

1. Because our soils have become depleted in key nutrients from unsustainable farming practices and therefore the food grown in this soil is also deficient.
2. Our fruit and vegetables are often picked unripe and are gassed to artificially induce ripening. In most cases this practice drastically reduces the vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients available.
3. Malabsorption result from our body's inability to absorb and utilise vitamins, minerals and other nutrients contained in our food.

This can be caused by the following:

- Helicobacter infection in the stomach, (the bacterial infection that causes stomach ulcers).
- Candida (Yeast infection), as a result of a bacterial imbalance in the gut due to a lack of probiotic bacteria.
- Parasites acquired through the consumption of contaminated food and drink.
- The inadequate production of stomach acid (hypochlorhydria) due to age degeneration, zinc deficiency, or the consumption of certain drugs.
- Allergies to gluten, and lactose can result in a leaky gut wall, where food particles pass into the blood stream without being properly digested and utilised.
- The consumption of certain food additives causes the body to excrete vitamins and minerals.
- Stress
- Exposure to heavy metals and other toxins

So what can we do to make sure our bodies are getting all the nutrients they need to thrive?

While most of us eating a balanced organic whole food diet can get a majority of our nutrients from the food itself, there are also circumstances when it is beneficial to use supplements and superfoods. But before we look at supplementing lets first see how we can obtain maximum nutrition from our food.

1. Eat fruits and vegetables that have been freshly picked as much as possible.

This means locally grown and in season. If I had the choice between eating a freshly picked conventionally grown orange or an organically grown orange that was picked 6 months ago 10,000 km away, I would choose the conventional orange. After 6 months in cold storage nearly all of the vitamin C disappears from fruit along with a whole host of other beneficial nutrients.

So how can you ensure that you are eating freshly harvested fruits and vegetables? Well nothing is fresher than harvesting from your own trees and veggie patch. We have recently become members of a wonderful project called Organic Farm Share which is a community owned organic farm in

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Northern NSW Australia. The farm is being designed to feed several hundred local families. If these are not options for you, sprouts can easily be grown in any home in either jars or special sprouting machines. Sprouts are the most alive of all living foods as they are still growing even in your fridge until the moment you eat them.

The next best option is to buy your produce from farmers or growers markets. If you are unable to buy organic, there are things you can do to clean the produce and minimise pesticide exposure like spraying with a solution on apple cider vinegar water and hydrogen peroxide.

2. Store your produce properly.

While harvesting and then eating organically grown produce straight from the plant is by far the best option for maximum nutrition it is not practical for many of us so knowing how to store your food is a very important factor in maximising its nutritional value.

Vegetables are powerhouses of vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients. Unfortunately, after you pick vegetables, their nutrients start to break down. They continue to lose their nutrient value as time goes on. Light, heat and exposure to air can speed up that process, so it's important to eat vegetables as soon as you can after they're picked, or store them in a way that helps slow their nutrient loss.

Any type of storage results in some deterioration. Produce on store shelves has already begun to lose vitamins, and nutrient losses multiply each day. Wilting is a sure sign of nutrient loss, especially of climate-sensitive vitamin C (ascorbic acid). Lettuce, kale, silverbeet/chard and other leafy greens that are prone to wilting register a higher ascorbic acid reduction after several days of optimal cold storage than does cabbage, which is more resistant to wilting. Green beans lose 58 per cent of their original ascorbic acid during the first three days of refrigeration after harvesting.

While a certain amount of nutrient loss is inevitable, we can minimize it by purchasing the freshest possible produce and storing it under optimal conditions.

Refrigerate all leafy greens such as lettuce, dandelion, collards, mustard greens, chard, watercress and broccoli. They keep best when they are dry and wrapped in plastic or put in airtight plastic containers to prevent loss of moisture and vitamins. Cucumbers and eggplant, however, are best stored in paper bags in the crisper to protect against excess cold temperatures that cause the development of pitted, mushy spots.

Refrigerate carrots or store in a cool place in perforated bags or containers to allow air circulation. Protected from heat and light, carrots retain their nutrients for up to seven months. Their beta-carotene actually increases during the first five months of storage then remains stable for two months before decreasing.

Tomatoes tend to lose flavour if refrigerated. They are best stored loosely in a basket that permits air to circulate. Unripe tomatoes should be stored on a counter or on top of the fridge, which allows the ripening process to continue. Any type of produce that continues to ripen after picking, including unripe pears, peaches, and plums, must not be refrigerated. These should be stored in a brown paper bag at room temperature until ripe.

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Citrus fruits may be stored at room temperature for several days and will last for up to two months if refrigerated. Apples must always be refrigerated. They will keep for several months, but gradual loss of nutrients, especially vitamin C, still occurs with lengthy storage. Store apples away from vegetables, or keep them in a plastic bag, as they give off ethylene gas as they ripen, promoting spoilage of other produce.

Here are a couple more tips on storing fresh produce

Store your vegetables whole. Don't slice them, as slicing vegetables exposed the flesh to air and light, which helps quickly break down the nutrients. Intact vegetable skins offer protection from light and air.

Store root vegetables in a dark, cool place like a cellar or low cabinet. Keep them in the crisper drawers, which are generally farthest away from the refrigerator lights and adjusted to be cooler than the rest of the refrigerator.

So as you can see when you bring your produce home, how you store it will make a huge difference to how long it will last and retain nutrients.

3. Nutrient dense superfoods

Another way to maximise your nutrient intake is to eat the most nutrient dense foods you can get your hands on. As you are probably already aware we consider fresh wild leafy greens to be the #1 superfood as they match human nutritional needs most completely. The second best would be more traditional leafy greens such as kale, spinach etc.

You may also like to take advantage of a wide range of dried and powdered superfoods which can be very high in certain nutrients and micronutrients. While fresh is always best it is still possible to benefit from some of these dried nutrient dense foods which are not commonly available fresh.

Here is a list of some of the more popular super foods.

AFA Blue Green Algae - 60% protein, long chain fatty acids, PEA. To detoxify body, increase mental focus and concentration, stabilize mood swings, balance blood sugar, decrease insulin requirement, decrease side effects of chemotherapy;

Spirulina - 60% protein, contains most of the essential minerals and vitamins, particularly iron and the B vitamins

Organic Raw Sprouted Brown Rice Protein – 98.2% bioavailability

Bee Pollen – rich source of high-quality protein since it contains all the essential amino acids plus quite a few more. Bee pollen contains vitamins A, B, C, and E, and is extraordinarily rich in most of the B vitamins, including folic acid (folate).

Chia Seeds - High in omega 3, 22% protein, a powerful source of the antioxidants that protect delicate essential fatty acids from oxidation

Cacao – high in antioxidants and magnesium and mood enhancing chemicals such as Anandamine

Maca - balances hormones, increases energy, full of minerals, vitamins, and protein, containing many of the essential amino acids, and particularly rich in calcium and magnesium,

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Camu Camu Berry Powder – nature's highest source of vitamin C

Lucuma Powder – High in betacarotene, niacin (B3) and iron

Mesquite Meal – High in calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron and zinc, and is rich in the amino acid lysine

Purple Corn Extract – Powerful antioxidant with anti-mutagenic, antimicrobial and anti-carcinogenic properties.

Coconut Oil - Anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal; great for skin; assists weight-loss; assists body to burn fat; lowers bad cholesterol; lauric acid; important in building and maintaining immune system; doesn't go rancid at room temp; Good for thyroid

Maqui Berry - Highest ORAC value of all berries and one of the most successful weight loss supplements.

Goji Berries - They contain 18 kinds of amino acids (six times higher than bee pollen) and contain all 8 essential amino acids (such as isoleucine and tryptophan). They also contain up to 21 trace minerals Goji berries are the richest source of carotenoids, including beta-carotene (more beta carotene than carrots), of all known foods or plants on earth! They contain 500 times the amount of vitamin C, by weight, than oranges making them second only to camu camu berries as the richest vitamin C source on earth. Goji berries also contain vitamins B1, B2, B6, and vitamin E.

2012 Probiotic Superfood - Re-colonise the GI tract with the full spectrum of Lactobacillus (friendly) bacteria. Contains significant enzymes, vital amino acids and a broad spectrum of essential nutrients. Helps break down nutrients. Keeps the colon clean and healthy. Health effects of compromised probiotics: toxins in the GI tract - lupus & psoriasis, partially digested proteins - eczema, arthritis, & immune system disorders. Contains the complete Lactobacillus bacteria family.

Sea Vegetables – most sea vegetables including sea weeds such as kelp, Nori, dulse, arame and wakame to name a few contain highest levels of trace minerals and iodine that you will find in any foods. These important minerals are often found lacking even in organically grown produce.

There are many many more superfoods available with more arriving on the market all the time.

by Anand Wells, Live Food Education

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