

## WHO'S STAYING HEALTHY, AND HOW?

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In reading multiple pieces of information in the newspaper, wellness magazines, books written about nutrition, and reference sources, I am constantly reminded that around this country and also around the world that almost everyone has a different idea about what is healthy and what keeps them in the best condition while satisfying their individual nutritional desires. If you read any of the information from Barry Sears' multiple best selling books, you will understand that his way to stay healthy is to reduce inflammation, reduce body fat, and get a daily intake of balanced carbohydrates, protein, and fat in a very well-planned ratio. Staying healthy for him includes a moderate amount of activity, but not as much as you might see in someone like Lance Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong burns about 5-7,000 calories a day while training for and racing his bicycle. He needs to eat a lot of carbohydrates simply to act as fuel for all the calories which he is burning. Dr. Atkins proposed in his dietary plan that a way to lose weight and to keep it off is to eat mostly protein and fat, with minimal carbohydrate intake. He noted that the "breakpoint" which would allow you to gain weight was different for every person, but represented a percentage of carbohydrates beyond which you should not eat.

Following a different approach, Suzanne Somers believes in exercise and managing your hormonal environment while at the same time eating a diet that is specifically oriented to taking in nutrient foods in a moderately low quantity. Japanese sumo wrestlers approach this issue of staying healthy in a completely different way. They eat food in almost gigantic quantities in a one-pot dish which is called nabemono, which is Japanese for "things in a pot." This is also called chanko and is based on a fermented soy broth with seafood, noodles, eggs, and other ingredients.

If you ask your friends what do they do to stay healthy in regards to their dietary intake and activity level, you will get a different answer from everyone. The first thing you will see in speaking to others is that many have one or two items which they consider very healthy and which they emphasize a lot in their diet. For example, some feel that yogurt is such an excellent health food that they simply eat it every day and in some cases at every meal. Others feel that milk drinking is important and always include some of this in their daily diet. For some people, eating one or two healthy items seems to "forgive" all of the unhealthy foods which they might be eating. Food trends as noted by national advertising tend to influence some people into making choices. Low-fat diets, for example, have been popular for a long time even though they are not healthy, the foods are mostly carbohydrates with minimal protein and tend to increase body fat, whereas a more balanced intake such as the Zone Diet would keep you from being hungry and from gaining weight.

Looking at some individuals and their particular approach to staying healthy has been an interesting endeavor. Luigi Cornaro, who wrote in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century about staying

healthy, ate 12 ounces of solid food a day and drank 14 ounces of new wine. His dietary regimen is clearly outlined in his discourses, but included meats, vegetables, eggs, olive oil, etc. He lived to be over 100, which was unheard of, and did so by staying very carefully within his dietary regimen.

About 15 years ago after reading Barry Sears' first book entitled "Enter the Zone," I began eating a small amount of protein each meal, varying my foods so that I could have a wide variety of nutritional intake in terms of their vitamins and antioxidants, eating rare or no fried food, and consuming only natural oils such as olive oil, butter, cheese, coconut oil, and small amounts of saturated fat. Exercises, minimal supplements, and always being optimistic in life have given me good health which I will hopefully continue to enjoy for many years to come.

When I asked about his approach to healthy living, my son Marc noted that he runs several miles 3 times a week, eats a diet consistent with Sears' Zone Diet, loves his work, maintains a high level of social relationships, and drinks red wine. As far as the last item is concerned, that's not a bad one to add to your life. The nutrient level in red wine is 5 times as high as it is in white wine and it has about one-fourth the amount of sugar. That's almost a no-brainer.

I spoke to Harold, who is 90, and notes that he attributes his health to good medical care and a good diet. He also notes that a little bourbon and some red wine every day combined with giving up smoking 20 years ago has made a huge difference for him. Since he is confined to a walker, he can only do minimal exercise and feels that he could be healthier and stronger if he could include this. He watches TV, doesn't read very much, and likes occasional "fast" food. He feels that his health pattern is stable. He is enjoying life every day in spite of his restriction as far as exercise activity, and he still drives every day when he wants to go somewhere by car.

A 70-year-old friend Betty notes that being active with community events, eating healthy food, gardening, maintaining an active sexual life, and moderate alcohol intake helps her health pattern. A 50-year-old patient listens to new music styles, learns new technology, works out, likes to make friends, and tries to make new changes in her health regimen based on advice and criticism from others.

A 72-year-old male patient notes that exercise while golfing, having occasional sex, keeping good friends, having a strong religious belief, and occasionally gambling in the casinos of Atlantic City give him not only a healthy approach to life but a reason to continue enjoying it. He also maintains his diet which keeps him thin, and he enjoys the same body weight which he has for many years.

If you do a little research, you will find out that diets have been touted as the "best way to improve your health" for many years. There is a Spartan diet from the days of early Greece, the Pythagorean Diet from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, the Paleolithic from before 10,000 years ago, the diet of Maimonides in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century who "invented" the chicken soup which is still used today to nurse sick patients back to health. The Edgar Cayce Diet

emphasized nutrients and some aspects of vegetarianism, while the Weston Price Diet noted that any “civilized” or processed food led to dental deformities and diseases. Sylvester Graham, who invented the Graham Cracker, emphasized grains, while vegetarians emphasize no meat or animal products and rely on getting their protein from grains, beans, nuts, and vegetables. With all of this information, what is the best approach that you can organize for your own health pattern? First, you probably ought to identify how many calories you burn a day so that you can eat accordingly. If you are exceeding your calories, you are going to gain weight,. Once you establish your caloric needs, then decide what foods you want to eat to maintain that intake. Restricting your portions improves your body weight and energy pattern. Once you decide how many calories you can eat, you need to look at the nutrient content of everything eaten. White bread, pasta, bagels, cakes, cookies, “snacks” with hydrogenated fat, and many other items simply don’t have any nutritional value and probably are more damaging than helpful to your body. Use the internet to ask questions about the nutrient status of foods. For example, what is the ORAC value of any food that you are eating? This information can be found simply by asking Google about the ORAC or antioxidant properties of foods, spices, and condiments.

Talk to other people about what they are doing to stay healthy and compare your activities and your dietary intake to theirs. Also compare your approach to life, your weight pattern, your desire to live a long time or not really care about that beyond a certain age, and other factors.

What you will find is that if you follow advertising trends, it is probably unhealthy but does maintain the profit levels of the food companies. Individual magazines such as “Healthy Aging” tend to have “flash articles” about the value of soy, the value of blueberries, the value of the acai berry, how to keep your abs flat, how to keep your energy level up, and other focused articles. Read these critically and when appropriate combine them in your regimen if they appeal to you and if you feel that following them would add to your overall health and well-being.

If you ask enough people and read enough articles, you will find that there are consistent trends which are the thread that runs through all of these healthy diets. This will include reduced caloric intake, a broad spectrum of food and nutrients, a good way to burn your calories, moderate approaches to alcohol and vitamin supplements, and a desire to maintain your social interaction with others. A purpose in life, often nurtured by your religious belief, is one of the final things that wraps it all up and gives you a reason to live your healthier life.