



### Food as Medicine

In January I attended a 4 day conference called Food as Medicine. It was lead by physicians, dietitians, and scientists that follow a practice called Functional Medicine. Food really is the most powerful medicine and the choices we make can keep us healthy. This month I share tips from the conference.

### Genes Don't Determine our Fate

Did you inherit "bad genes"? Not to worry. In most cases environment trumps genes. By environment, I am referring to the beneficial body chemistry that you create with healthy food and lifestyle choices, and with healthy thinking.

It is interesting that while we only have 26,000 genes, there are over 3 million SNP's (single nucleotide polymorphism) – or small genetic variations. This is what makes us so variable. We are even more different on the inside than the outside. This means that our needs are different, and some of us could need greater amounts of specific nutrients.

### The Paleolithic Diet

It is interesting to look at what our ancestors ate, and some scientists believe it provides a clue for which foods provide the best fuel. These foods are often more sustainable, too.

Arugula, kale and collard greens are similar to the earliest foods eaten by humans. Lacinato kale, also known as dinosaur kale, is especially high in lutein content.

Yams were also one of the early foods; part of the diet long before white potatoes came along. Millet was one of the first grains that humans cultivated in bulk. It is nutrient dense and requires less fuel to grow than other grains. Quinoa is another ancient grain with excellent nutrition value.



Wheat is a more recent development, and some scientists think it is hard to digest even for those of us who tolerate it. Sprouted wheat is easier to digest because it breaks down the gluten, making sprouted whole wheat a good bread choice.

Extra virgin olive oil is the least refined of the oils, and generally there is less heat involved in making it. However, it is best used at lower temperatures. They recommended baking at 325-350 degrees F, and sautéing at low to moderate heat.

In general it is good to eat big volumes of produce, preferably local and organic, and smaller amounts of fish and animal protein. It is also good to eat perishable foods. Think twice before eating anything that will live longer than you do!

### The Role of Fats in Cell Membranes

Every cell in your body has a membrane made of fat. This is why the type of fat you eat is so important. Think of how fats appear in your kitchen. Lard, shortening and meat fats are solid at room temperature. That is the nature of saturated fats. They have the same effect in our body, making cell membranes stiff and rigid, which limits their effectiveness.

The most fluid membranes are made up of the omega-3 fats EPA and DHA (found in fish and fish oil). Both have a small bend in their physical structure. This means they can't be packed as closely together as straighter saturated fats. This extra space allows better communication between the outside and inside of the cell.

The reason why trans fats are so bad is that they are artificially made and have a sharp angle that damages the cell membrane.

Incidentally, EPA is particularly useful in the body and for heart health. DHA is especially important for healthy brain development and function. This is one of the reasons breast milk is so great — it is a good source of DHA, especially in moms that get enough omega-3s in their diet.

A drop in DHA due to the demands of breast feeding could be the cause of post-partum depression. Unfortunately, DHA is not routinely added to infant formulas, but recent research is showing how critical it is and that it could impact IQ. If you use infant formula, get one with added DHA or add it yourself. Check with your RD or MD for amounts.

I recently wrote about fats in more detail - if you don't get the Healdsburg Tribune or Rohnert Park Community Voice, you can see the article on the nutrition page of my website: [www.HealthyHabitsCoach.com](http://www.HealthyHabitsCoach.com).

### Recipe of the Month

Need ideas for dinner? I recently blogged about my favorite new comfort food — **baked polenta with braised greens**: [www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com](http://www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com).

### Make 2009 a Healthy Year

*Do you know what you should do but have trouble putting it into practice? Designing healthy habits that are just right for you can provide the necessary motivation! Call me to find out more: 707 431-7524.*

### Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

*Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!*

