



Enjoying the Good Life

Sonoma County is a food haven. We have fabulous Farmers Markets, hundreds of wineries, great restaurants, and people who appreciate really good food.

My clients regularly tell me that they like food *too* much. Yet it seems to me that liking food, and especially liking to cook, is actually an advantage. The problem comes when we equate “the good life” with excess. Adjust your thinking just a little and you can still enjoy this great life.

A little wine can be healthy. More than that increases your risk for diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It is not just the calories, too much alcohol promotes metabolic syndrome.

And then there is the food that goes with the wine. Artisan cheeses, house-made sausages breads, crackers; a veritable feast. Does staying healthy really require giving it all up? No! But it does require moderation.

Rich foods are best enjoyed as a small burst of flavor – not as the main event. Start with a base of fruits, veggies, whole grains and lean meats. Go lightly on the fun extras.

Experiment with barbequed or roasted fruits as an alternative to rich desserts. Create an inviting platter of fruit garnished with nuts and bits of dark chocolate. Save rich desserts for occasional fare instead of a regular occurrence.

As the holiday season begins, the opportunities to indulge escalate. It is possible to enjoy yourself with small but exquisite servings. Savor the good life by focusing on the enjoyment you get from being with friends and family and the beautiful land that we call home.



What is Your Vitamin D Level?

I've been taking vitamin D supplements, 1,000 – 2,000 IU a day, and a recent blood test still put me at the low end of the “normal” range. While I'm not deficient, I am also not at optimal level. I have early signs of osteoporosis (called osteopenia), so I am starting an experiment to see if 3,000 - 4,000 IU stops my bone demineralization. I should mention that I'm doing this in consultation with my physician.

4,000 IU may sound like a lot, especially when the old recommendation was only 400 IU. The truth is that we are still trying to fully understand the role of vitamin D in the body and to figure out just how much we really need.

A blood level below 30ng/ml is deficient. Several of my clients who have been tested have values between 10 and 20! This was in the summer when you'd expect it to be higher!

The optimal blood range for vitamin D is 50 – 80 ng/mL. More than 100 ng/mL is considered excessive. So far the main health risk with vitamin D supplementation seems to be elevated blood levels of calcium. That means that if you are supplementing with bigger doses, it is important to keep a watch on blood calcium. It is also worth being cautious if you take medications that raise calcium – like hydrochlorothiazide – a common diuretic (water pill).

Some of the risks associated with deficiencies (<30 ng/mL):

- Calcium loss from bones
- Poor wound healing
- Muscle, joint and back pain
- Depression, schizophrenia, migraines
- Diabetes and inflammation
- Autoimmune disease (lupus, scleroderma)
- Allergies

Even at suboptimal levels (30—50 ng/mL) there could be increased risk for heart attack, high blood pressure and multiple sclerosis.

Reading this list may make vitamin D sound like the solution for everything. Keep in mind that it is only one of many factors that impact health, *and* that while there has been extensive research, we are still learning. Still, if you have any of the conditions listed above, or are concerned about them, I'd recommend getting your vitamin D levels tested next time you have blood work.

If you were wondering, the risk factors listed above were taken from a seminar I attended this month hosted by the Institute of Functional Medicine. Although this group is progressive, it is evidence (research) based.

In the meantime, unless you live close to the equator, you can't get enough vitamin D from the sun this time of year. Increasing evidence suggests that due to the angle of the sun at northern latitudes, even in summer many of us may not be able to meet our needs from sun exposure alone. Consider supplementing with 1,000 - 2,000 IU of this vitamin.

Holiday Help! *The holidays can be one of the hardest times to stay on track with healthy food and life choices. To help you feel your best through the season, I'm offering a holiday strategy session—an hour consultation (in person or by phone) for \$75. Ask about my relaxation techniques!*

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!

