nutrition 101

Lating a nutritionally balanced diet is among the most important things we can do to protect our health. Unfortunately, many have become desensitized to the importance of our diet. Still, most people don't know what a nutritionally balanced diet is or how severe the consequences of a nutritionally imbalanced diet can be. Our bodies are designed to receive nutrients found in specific categories of foods on a daily basis to provide for and protect a healthy heart, vital organs, and to fight disease. Deficiency of these nutrients causes breakdown and ultimately chronic diseases, disability, and premature death.



What the Body Needs

Protein is critical for health since it serves as the major structural component of all cells. The amount of protein to consume daily depends on your personal lean body mass but a good general guide is to consume from 75 to 100 grams daily. Your wellness coach can estimate your lean body mass to more accurately determine your daily need. Half of your daily intake should come from plant sources (at least 25g from soy), and the rest from lowfat, lean animal sources like meat, poultry, fish, and low-fat or non-fat dairy.

Carbohydrates are the body's primary energy source. The recommended daily amount for adults is 6 servings for women and 8 servings for men. The best sources are "unrefined" carbohydrates normally found in plant foods (like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains). "Refined" carbohydrates are found in highly processed foods like sugars, white flour, pastas, and white rice. Because unrefined carbohydrates are lower in fat and higher in nutritional value than refined carbohydrates, they are a better choice for everyone.

Fats and oils. Some types of fats are essential to health while others have adverse health effects. Bad fats (saturated fats) elevate "bad" cholesterol levels and are considered a major risk factor for heart disease. "Good fats" (unsaturated fats) contain a beneficial fatty acid called "omega-3," which can be found in soybeans, olive oil, flaxseed, nuts, avocados, fish, and fish oil supplements. It is recommended that everybody include omega-3 in their diet since most do not get enough.

Dietary fiber is essential for cardiovascular health, reduces risk of coronary heart disease and cancer, assists in maintaining normal blood glucose levels, and supports proper bowel function. The minimum recommendation is 25g for women and 38g for men daily. Most only consume a fraction of this amount.

Vitamins and minerals. There are at least 13 vitamins and 22 minerals that your body essentially needs daily to be healthy. Deficiencies can lead to innumerable adverse health effects, diseases and death.

Antioxidants are food substances that protect cells from genetic damage which is at the root of chronic disease and aging. Many fruits, vegetables, herbs, and supplements are rich sources of antioxidants.

Phytonutrients are natural food substances that help our bodies destroy carcinogens and other harmful substances before they cause cancer and other chronic diseases. Fruits, vegetables, herbs, and some supplements contain thousands of phytonutrients.

Water is one of the most overlooked things our bodies need in proper amounts for ideal health. Our bodies are more than 70% water, so it makes sense that it is extremely important. Water is essential for virtually all operations of the body. It is generally recommended to drink about 64 ounces of water daily.