The 7 Most Common Mistakes People Make About Their Health …

… and what you can do to avoid them

Marilyn Glenville PhD

The 7 Most Common Mistakes People Make About Their Health And What You Can Do To Avoid Them E-book

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The 7 most common mistakes people make about their health and what you can do to avoid them

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The Natural Health Practice

In this e-book you will discover the 7 most common mistakes people make about their health and what you can do to avoid them.

We trust you will find the information you read here both helpful and practical on a day-to-day basis.

This e-book has been designed to give you as much useful information as possible in order for you to be able to help yourself and make a difference to your health and the way that you feel.

At the end of the e-book there are some links to other resources that you might find helpful at this time.

Happy reading.

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The 7 most common mistakes people make about their health and what you can do to avoid them

Introduction

We are living in a time when degenerative diseases have become epidemic. Illnesses such as cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis and autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, are on the increase, and they are the cause of death and disability in a huge percentage of the population.

In the West very few of us die of 'old age'. We are dying of diseases that take time to manifest themselves in our bodies. They are not a 'natural' part of ageing, but the result of the way that we take care of ourselves over the years. For example, arthritis is a common feature of old age in the West. In other cultures, it simply does not exist to the same degree. Does the fact that it is common make it acceptable? I think not.

There are 7 common mistakes that many people make with their health and if you're making any of them they can stop you from being healthy. Most of us want to live a long time but we also want to live those years feeling well, with good energy and a good quality of life. It is no good living until you are 100 riddled with pain, mentally unwell, being slow and sluggish and with no quality of life. The key is to stop making those mistakes and find out how you can look after yourself so you are always in the peak of health.

Imagine that you have now reached a crossroad in your life, one path is the way to degenerative illness, getting old before your time, feeling tired, aching joints, not remembering well, depressed, etc and the other path leads the way to good health, being active, lots of energy, happy, optimistic and enjoying life. Which path do you choose?

By knowing these 7 common mistakes, and what you can do to avoid them, you are taking positive steps along the path towards a healthy way of life – one that will prevent many of the diseases associated with old age and help to encourage optimum health on all levels.

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Mistake 1: “There’s a quick fix”

Nowadays we live in a fast paced world. We have fast food restaurants, quick scan queues at the supermarkets and make more journeys by car because we can get somewhere quicker. All of which makes for less exercise and less social contact. There is no quick fix to good health. There is no magic bullet that is going to transform your health and life overnight. Sorry to burst your bubble if that’s what you thought. The path to good health requires some effort on your part and for you to make some changes over time. Taking responsibility for your health is the first step, looking at what you eat, your lifestyle, exercise and stress levels are all key factors and they involve long-term commitment if you really want to get healthy and stay healthy. But these changes are well worth the effort. They will not only have an impact on any health problem you are aiming to treat now but they will also offer you the opportunity of a healthy future. This is the cornerstone of preventative medicine. If you make changes now, you will be much more likely to prevent health problems both in the short term and the long term.

Of course, it is certainly easier to pop a pill that reduces or seemingly removes any symptoms you may have. You can then carry on with your lifestyle as it is, and push any issues affecting your health out of sight. Or can you? This is only a short term solution. Stop taking the pills and the problem is likely to come back or something different, and usually worse happens. Keep taking the pills and you have the side effects to deal with as well. The pills aren’t designed to cure, only to suppress the symptoms. Suppress them long enough and the body reacts with new symptoms and new problems. The result, you need to take a different pill to suppress the new symptoms, all because we wanted a quick fix. For lasting health you need to treat the cause not the symptoms.

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Mistake 2: “Your body can’t heal itself”

One of the common mistakes is to believe that your body cannot heal itself. But your body has profound healing energies, and given the right tools it can correct any imbalances and restore you back to good health. By ensuring you are eating the right foods, correcting any vitamin and mineral deficiencies, by taking good levels of the appropriate nutrients and using herbs, when appropriate, and creating the right environment to encourage overall health, your body can heal itself.

If you were suffering from an infection, the conventional approach is to use antibiotics, which kill off the bacteria. In nutritional medicine, the aim is to stimulate and strengthen your immune system so that *your body* can kill off the infection on its own.

What’s the difference? The conventional antibiotic approach leaves you weaker, and disrupts your system, killing off healthy bacteria that is part of your defence mechanism. Antibiotics can’t tell the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ bacteria, so it kills them all. Furthermore, when using antibiotics, your body does not ‘learn’ to fight off infection on its own and chances are the exact same problem will occur again. By using the natural approach you will encourage your body to do the work, leaving it stronger and more able to address similar illness in the future.

It was Louis Pasteur who discovered the antibiotic properties of penicillin. In the early stages of his research, he said, ‘In order for you to have a disease you have to have germs’. This encouraged the conventional approach to ‘germs’ and illness. Scientists were determined to find the ‘germs’ responsible and to get rid of them. But somewhere along the line, these scientist lost sight of the fact that your body can do this for itself If your body is strong and healthy, with your immune system functioning at optimum level, you are much less likely to become ill and, if you do succumb, you are likely to heal that much more quickly. The emphasis clearly needs to be on keeping your body strong, rather than finding shortcuts to health.

Years after making his original statement, Louis Pasteur, backtracked saying instead, ‘in a state of health, animals are shut off from the invasion of germs…… The microbe is nothing, the terrain is everything.’ What did he mean? If the terrain (your body) is healthy, disease cannot take hold. Interestingly, Louis Pasteur’s work is considered to be a turning point in the treatment of disease, but his final message has been largely ignored. Conventional medicine isn’t preventative. Nutrition is because it helps the body to heal itself.

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Mistake 3: “A healthy diet is all I need”

Imagine your health as a tree, with various symptoms attached to different branches. For example, you may suffer from a lack of energy, mood swings, headaches, weight gain, bloating, period problems, skin disorders and more. In theory, each of these ‘symptoms’ could be treated separately, as they are in conventional medicine. For example, you could be given painkillers to treat your headache, the Pill to regulate your cycle, antibiotics for skin problems and perhaps even antidepressants to deal with the emotional factors. You can be pumped up with all sorts of drugs, but once they are stopped, the problem will return. The reason for this is that most of conventional medicine is aimed at treating symptoms alone. The root cause is not addressed and the underlying problem remains, no matter how good medication makes you feel in the short term. Quite apart from that, many drugs have unacceptable side effects and in an attempt to feel better in the short term you may well be causing long-term damage to your overall health.

You could ask the question – why take food supplements? You may wonder why you might need them, particularly if you have a good diet. Unfortunately, even the best diet can no longer supply us with everything we need and supplements are longer considered to be a little ‘extra’.

Take a look at this list of symptoms – bleeding gums, frequent colds, lack of energy, nosebleeds, slow wound healing and easy bruising. These are all signs of a vitamin C deficiency. When the deficiency becomes severe, the diagnosis would be scurvy but before it gets that far the body is showing symptoms of a lack of this nutrient. By treating the cause (correcting the deficiency) it is possible to help eliminate the symptoms.

The well balanced diet is not easy to achieve. Only one third of men and women are eating the five a day fruit and vegetables and for certain minerals like iron, magnesium, selenium and potassium, people are not getting the RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance, now called RNI, Reference Nutrient Intake) from their diet (*National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2009)*. Also compared to the 1930s, the fruits and vegetables we eat contain an average of 20% fewer minerals (magnesium 24%, calcium 46%, iron 27% and zinc 59%). With regard to meat and dairy, iron in meat has been depleted by 47%, iron in milk by over 60%, calcium loss in cheese by 15% and Parmesan cheese by 70% *(The Independent Food Commission’s Food Magazine 2005).*

Another reason is that many fruits and vegetables are flown hundreds of miles and can sit in a warehouse for a period of time before getting to the shelves, creating yet more nutrient depletion. Additionally, if you buy ready prepared vegetables, such as sliced carrots, they will contain fewer nutrients than if you took the whole carrot home and cut it up just before cooking.

In order for your food to contain the nutrients it needs, the soil in which it was

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grown needs to be rich in nutrients. For instance, carrots will extract the minerals from the soil and absorb those nutrients when you eat them. But the soil has been over farmed to the point that it no longer contains the nutrients we need. Furthermore, pesticides and other chemicals reduce the nutrient content of foods and then we go on and process the foods, stripping even more key nutrients from them. Extra chemicals put an additional strain on our bodies, which means that we need more of the key nutrients, and what we are getting in our daily diets represents less.

Food is powerful medicine that has a huge impact on the biochemical processes and general environment of your body. There is now an enormous amount of scientific knowledge showing the effects of food and nutrients on treating illness and preventing disease, such as cancer. Nutrition is not just about eating well. It is also about correcting any vitamin and mineral deficiencies, improving digestive function (because you are what you eat, but also what you are able to absorb), balancing hormones naturally and eliminating toxins and waste products.

It is important to remember that supplements are just what their name suggests- supplemental or 'extra'. They are not a substitute for healthy food and a well-balanced diet. You cannot eat junk food, take nutritional supplements and hope to stay healthy.

The vitamins and minerals we require for our bodies to function work in harmony and most of them are depending on each other to act efficiently. When you take any supplements you should always have a multivitamin and mineral as the foundation of the programme. This will provide a good range of nutrients to prevent a fundamental imbalance that can be caused by taking supplements on their own.

When it comes to buying supplements, you get what you pay for. You need to get good quality supplement for maximum absorption. I would recommend you buy capsules (preferably vegetarian ones instead of gelatin) rather than tablets. Capsules tend to be filled only with the essential nutrients. Tablets can include a variety of fillers, binders and bulking agents. Mineral supplements like calcium should be in the form of citrates or ascorbates which are more easily absorbed by the body. Chlorides, sulphates, carbonates and oxides should be avoided as they are not so easily assimilated and mineral supplements in this form may pass through the body without being absorbed. It is important to read the labels. (Good supplement companies include BioCare, Solgar, The Natural Health Practice and Lamberts.) Because there are so many different supplements on the market, some good and some not so good, it can be very confusing when deciding what to use.

The quality of the herbs you buy is also important. Herbs are the oldest form of medicine and have been used for healing in every single culture in the world, since the very beginning of time.

Herbs are in fact, the foundation of numerous pharmaceutical drugs. Aspirin is based on an extract from willow, originally used for pain relief by the Native Americans. Up to 70% of drugs in use today have their origins in plants, but Western pharmaceutical practice bears no relation to how native peoples the world over have

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used them. Modern drug companies only use the 'active ingredient' of the plant or herb in a pure form as the basis of the drug. The advantage of using the whole plant is that the side effects are minimal or entirely absent. That is the big difference between modern and herbal medicine.

For example, centuries ago the foxglove plant *(Digitalis purpurea)* was used for heart problems. In modern times, scientist have isolated the main active ingredient of the foxglove (digoxin) and put it into tablet form. However, by doing so, they have created a product with a real risk of side effects. By using the whole plant, the active ingredient interacts with all the other constituents of the plant, which naturally contains 'buffer' ingredients that counteract any potential side effects. Herbalists believe this is the proper way to use the healing powers of herbs and plants.

Herbs are not like drugs. If drugs are stopped, the symptoms can return and then you are back where you started. Herbs may be aimed at easing symptoms, but they work at a more fundamental level. They help the body to correct and heal itself. At the same time that the symptoms are being dealt with, the cause is being addressed. The symptoms disappear as your body becomes more balanced.

We have, as a culture, begun to eat far too many processed, convenience and refined foods that have been stripped of essential nutrients during the manufacturing process. For example, 80% of zinc is removed from wheat during the milling process to ensure that a loaf of bread (for instance) has longer shelf life.

Furthermore if you, like many people, have been dieting for a number of years – either restricting your food intake, or trying different diets, diet drinks or pills – you are more than likely to be deficient in a number of important vitamins and minerals.

Certain nutrients, depending on your problem, will help to speed up the healing process because they can help you to detoxify or strengthen your immune system. Supplements are a great help if you want to achieve positive health benefits in as short a space of time as possible.

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Mistake 4: “It doesn’t matter what I eat”

Beneath your symptom tree are the roots that feed and nourish the plant. The nourishment of the tree determines how well the leaves on the branches grow and how it blossoms. It’s clear that in order to affect the symptoms that appear on your branches, you need to do some work on the roots. That’s the basis of nutritional medicine, which aims to get to the root cause – literally – of any condition.

If you make the mistake of not making changes at root level, many symptoms will either not go away or just come back. But if you treat the root cause, many symptoms will drop away without ever having specific treatment. Even better, once your tree is healthy, you need a simple maintenance programme to keep it that way.

Most medical students will get only a few hours of nutrition lectures in over five years of training, so you probably won’t find any nutritional recommendations as part of your doctor’s treatment plan. But nutrition is crucial. Everything that you eat can be turned into the fuel that your body uses to produce hormones, enzymes, blood, bone; in fact, every single cell in your body and all the processes that take place, are determined by what goes into your mouth.

It took many years for the link between cardiovascular disease and nutrition to be established. Now the evidence is overwhelming. More research is now linking nutrition to cancer, diabetes, mood and much, much more. In the future, further research will show that your diet plays a part in every aspect of your health.

It took, for example, 20 years for the benefits of folic acid in pregnancy to become known and accepted. The evidence that it could prevent spina bifida was around 20 years ago, but only recently was it recommended that women take it as part of a preconceptual plan. As a practising nutritionist, I find it extremely frustrating that nutrition is so undervalued when it can be so effective. While it’s satisfying to see that research is slowly turning in the right direction, there is still a great deal of information that should be made available for everybody. Twenty years is too long to wait for experts to confirm what many of us in the profession already knew.

Sadly, you may not ever have heard about the research that can affect your health on such as dramatic level. First of all, studies tend to remain lost in the corridors of the academic world. Most of them are not even comprehensible to the average person. But secondly, and most importantly, there is no vested interest in getting that knowledge ‘out there’. Pharmaceutical companies do not stand to make a big profit if the cause of conditions currently treated by expensive drugs is found to be linked to something we eat. Similarly, nutritional supplements are never going to make the kind of money that drugs do; you cannot patent a nutrient so there is no commercial incentive to investigate and promote it.

What you eat can cause many health problems, and the reverse is also true:

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in other words, if you change your diet, you can alleviate many health problems.

Mistake 5: “I only need to treat the symptoms”

The fifth most common mistake is to treat only the symptoms. You are not just a group of body parts. Everything works together and when one system is thrown out of balance, the others can and will be affected. You can see the conventional approach to treatment in a hospital setting. There are many different departments, clinics and specialities for example, ear, nose and throat, gastro-intestinal, gynaecological, psychiatric and cardiovascular.

This is one of the main reasons why conventional medicine is not always effective in the long term. We are not separate ‘bits’; we are whole people whose ‘bits’ interact constantly. So, if you were suffering from headaches and digestive problems, you would probably see two different specialists. There may only be one cause for the problems, but because they are treated separately, there’s much less chance that that cause will be uncovered.

There are also the emotional aspects to consider. Not only do our physical parts interact, but there is also a clear relationship between mind and body. Nutrition looks at the interaction on every level and treats your *whole* body and not just the parts. That’s why it’s so much more effective.

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Mistake 6: “It’s normal to have health problems”

One of the biggest mistakes is to get yourself back into good health and then losing it again. But by eating well, taking exercise and generally looking after yourself, you will look and feel healthy – both physically and emotionally. Many of us go through life with a series of niggling health problems. We wake up feeling tired all the time, which leads to feelings of depression. We don’t feel ‘ill’, but we know we aren’t ‘100%’. But that’s how we live our lives, and because everyone around us seems to suffer from the same niggling problems, we accept them as normal.

They are not normal. It’s perfectly possible to feel 100%. It’s perfectly possible to feel fantastic. Nutritional medicine aims to give you optimum health in mind and body: the kind of health that gives you energy and encourages a feeling of well-being.

You should still eat well most of the time. Because now your health is generally good, the odd blip won’t matter that much. So you might go on holiday, to a friend’s house for dinner or at a party and you may not be able to choose what you want to eat. That’s fine. It is what you are eating every day that makes the difference. The odd meal of poorer quality or even fast food is not going to set you back.

Now that you are eating to stay healthy it is worth thinking about other lifestyle factors that can affect your health. There are many pollutants and toxins in the environment that we cannot control and by keeping yourself healthy at least you are lessening the impact.

But there is one aspect that you can control and maybe don’t often think about. These are everyday products that we use in the home, on our skin, in the bath etc. that are actually full of chemicals and end up in our bodies. So you can be eating good quality organic food and then using a face cream, which is full of chemicals. Let’s take a common product that most people use, antiperspirants/deodorants.

Your body sweats for a reason. Sweating is an essential process designed to eliminate waste products through your skin. Contained in this fluid, which is secreted by the sweat glands, is salt (sodium chloride) and urea. Sweating is your body’s way of getting rid of nitrogenous waste and at the same time controlling your body temperature. The evaporation of sweats from the surface of your skin has a cooling effect on the body.

If you use an anti-perspirant, you prevent this natural process from occurring, and are effectively hampering the elimination process.

Furthermore, anything that goes on to the skin can be absorbed into the body. For example, nicotine patches or hormone replacement therapy (HRT) work by

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dispensing chemicals or drugs through the skin. It's an effective way of reaching the bloodstream. Unfortunately, antiperspirants and deodorants contain chemicals that will be absorbed through the skin. Scientists are now investigating the link between the use of deodorants and anti-perspirants and breast cancer. Deodorants and anti-perspirants are applied under the armpit and the question is whether certain chemicals known as 'parabens', which are used as a preservative in many products, can explain why more cancers develop in a certain area of the upper breast.

Deodorants and anti-perspirants can also contain aluminium, which has been linked to dementia, because it has been found in patches of cell damage in the brains of people with Alzheimer's.

The answer is to use a chemical-free deodorant where the ingredients are listed so you can see what is in it. The deodorant will not stop the natural elimination process of sweating, but will prevent any odour.

So, think about what you are putting on your body, and that means considering the face creams, suntan lotions, body lotions, shampoos, conditioners, cosmetics and anything else that you may use. Read the ingredient list. Ask yourself whether you could choose a more natural alternative to the brand you are using.

It was once suggested that we should only put on our skins substances that we would be happy to eat. It is definitely a thought, but not always easy to put into practice. But you are aiming to get your skin products and cosmetics closest to a natural product as possible.

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Mistake 7: “Eating healthily is too complicated”

Here it is, a simple ‘all you need to know’ 12-point healthy eating plan.

While much overused, the old saying ‘you are what you eat’ is definitely true. Your diet is the foundation of your health, so it is important that your food contains the right nutrients to keep you balanced and healthy and to prevent health problems from cropping up in the future.

Once you have treated a specific problem you do not want it to return. Mouth ulcers are a good example of this. You could treat them one month, and two months later they are back again. They become a recurrent problem. So once you have got rid of your symptoms, the aim is to continue to eat well and look after yourself in order to prevent problems in the future. It is much easier to prevent a problem than it is to treat it. All of us want to live a long life, but what point is there in living with a crippling disease? Taking steps to prevent problems now can make a big difference to the way you live your life in the future.

The main points of this Staying Healthy Diet are listed below and then they are explained in detail as to why they are so important.

1. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
2. Eat complex carbohydrates – wholegrains like brown rice, oats, wholemeal bread
3. Buy organic foods where possible
4. Eat phytoestrogens, including beans such as lentils, chickpeas and soya products
5. Eat oily foods, including fish, nuts, seeds and oils
6. Reduce your intake of saturated fat from dairy products, etc.
7. Drink enough fluids
8. Increase your intake of fibre
9. Avoid additives, preservatives and chemicals such as artificial sweeteners
10. Reduce your intake of caffeine
11. Reduce alcohol
12. Avoid sugar on its own and hidden in foods

1. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables

These are important in your diet for a number of reasons. They contain a good range of nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants and fibre. The vitamins and minerals are important because by giving your body the right nutrients, you are giving it the ‘tools’ to heal itself. Fresh produce is your best option – organic, if possible – but otherwise frozen vegetables are better than tinned if you can’t always get fresh.

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Antioxidants

One of the most important things that fruits and vegetables can do is to supply us with antioxidants, which protect us against the effects of something called free radicals. Oxygen, which is vital for our survival, can also be chemically reactive. It can become unstable resulting in the 'oxidation' of other molecules, which in turn generates free radicals. Free radicals are a rather complicated concept, but in a nutshell, they are chemically unstable atoms that can cause all sorts of damage in your body. Pollution, smoking, fried or barbecued food and UV rays from the sun can also trigger these free radicals.

Free radicals have now been linked to health problems, including cancer, coronary heart disease and premature ageing. They speed up the ageing process by destroying healthy cells and they can also attack DNA in the nucleus of a cell, causing cell change (mutation) and cancer. We have protection against free radicals in the form of antioxidants, which occur naturally in the food that we eat. Vitamins A, C and E, plus the minerals selenium and zinc, are all antioxidants and are contained in the following foods:

Sources of antioxidants

Vitamin A	Orange and yellow fruits and vegetables, such as carrots and pumpkins
Vitamin C	Fruits (particularly citrus), green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, berries, potatoes and sweet potatoes
Vitamin E	Nuts, avocados, seeds, vegetable oils and oily fish
Selenium	Brazil nuts, tuna, cabbage
Zinc	Pumpkin and sunflower seeds, fish, almonds

2. Eat unrefined carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are an important part of your diet as they give you energy, but it is the *type* of carbohydrate you consume that determines the **quality** of that energy, that is, whether it is slow (low GI) or fast (high GI) releasing.
Carbohydrates give you energy and the amount of energy they provide depends on the form in which you eat them.

Carbohydrates are starches and sugars, and they can either be ‘simple’ or ‘complex’. What is important is whether they are **refined** or **unrefined**. When a carbohydrate is refined, the fibre and a lot of the goodness is stripped away, so when you eat a food containing unrefined carbohydrates that food will cause glucose (sugar) to be released into your bloodstream quickly.

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The table below tells you which foods are refined and unrefined carbohydrates:

Unrefined	**Refined**
Barley Beans and pulses Brown rice Buckwheat (part of rhubarb family) Fruit (particularly berries, apples and pears and citrus) Maize Millet Nuts Oats Rye Spelt Vegetables Wholemeal breads Wholemeal flour Wholemeal pasta	Biscuits, cakes and pastries made with white flour and sugar Breakfast cereals with added sugar Brown and white sugar Chocolate Fruit juice (as the fibre has been removed) Instant 'quick cook' porridge oats Soft fizzy drinks Treacle White flour White rice

The difference between the two types of carbohydrates on the body is enormous. The unrefined carbohydrates can prevent you from feeling tired, balance your blood sugar and so minimise cravings, lower cholesterol, maintain an appropriate appetite and – as seen in the pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) e-book – help to balance your hormones.

3. Buy organic foods where possible

Because the soil in which the organic fruit and vegetables has been grown has not been so depleted, organic produce usually contains more valuable nutrients. One of the practices of organic farming involves crop rotation, which ensures that the soil is enriched rather than depleted.

If you are eating dairy foods, choose organic brands to avoid the harmful effects of chemicals that may have been added to the animal's food. Out of all the dairy foods, yoghurt is the most beneficial for your health, but only when it contains beneficial bacteria. These bacteria are important because they are one of the defences of the immune system, and help to keep unhealthy bacteria and invaders, such as fungal infections and viruses, at bay. Yoghurts that are 'live' normally means that these beneficial bacteria are present, but the cartons can be marked in a variety of different ways. 'Bio' usually means 'live' and will contain beneficial bacteria.

You can also now buy organic free-range eggs, and these are the ones to choose. Free-range is certainly kinder to animals, but the birds can still be fed on an inappropriate diet, which can include chemicals and antibiotics, among other things. Organic hens have a strict dietary regime, which includes no worrying additives.

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If your budget is limited and you are unsure of what to prioritise in terms of organic produce, go for organic grains. Even if this is the only organic part of your diet, it can make a huge difference. Grains are very small and can absorb more pesticides than other foods.

Remember that organic produce, such as carrots and potatoes, does not need to be peeled. Most of the nutrients of vegetables and fruits are concentrated just under the skin. Just scrub them carefully, with water, and prepare as normal.

4. Eat phytoestrogens

Phytoestrogens ('phyto' means 'plant') are substances that occur naturally in foods and they have a very interesting effect on our hormones. Calling them phytoestrogens would imply that we are adding yet more oestrogen into our bodies, but these plant oestrogens work in a special way. They have been shown to have a balancing effect on hormones.

Phytoestrogens also have other positive benefits. Soya has been shown to associated with a lower risk of cancer especially breast cancer. In the West, breast cancer affects 133 women per 100,000 whereas in Asian countries, it is more than three times lower at 39 women per 100,000. Research has shown that a diet high in soya is associated with a 14% reduction in risk of breast cancer.

As well as these benefits on hormones, phytoestrogens also have a positive effect on your cardiovascular health. Studies have shown that soya can lower the level of cholesterol and especially the 'bad' cholesterol (LDL).

These phytoestrogens are found in almost all fruit, vegetables and cereals but they are most beneficial in the form of something called 'isoflavones', which are found in legumes such as soya, lentils, chickpeas, etc. Beans are easy to use and they are great added to salads, soups and casseroles. Most beans (although not lentils) need to be soaked, sometimes over night, before cooking. Alternatively, you can buy organic beans in tins from most supermarkets. Humus is made from chickpeas, and it is available ready-made from most supermarkets.

5. Eat oily foods, including fish, nuts, seeds and oils

Does this seem like an odd suggestion? Oil is traditionally associated with fat, and if you listen to the scare stories in the media, fat is something that should not pass our lips. In fact, most people follow, or have followed a low- or no-fat diet for health benefits (weight loss is one). But this pervading myth can do more damage than you'd think.

First and foremost, let me set the record straight. We all need fats. Saturated fats are not good for us, and they can lead to a variety of health problems. However, some fats are not only important, but they are essential for health. These essential

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fats are, not surprisingly, known as ‘essential fatty acids’, or EFAs.

Do you get any of these symptoms?

- Dry skin
- Cracked skin on heels or fingertips
- Hair falling out
- Lifeless hair
- Poor wound healing
- Dandruff
- Depression
- Irritability
- Soft or brittle nails
- Allergies
- Dry eyes
- Lack of motivation
- Aching joints
- Fatigue
- Difficulty losing weight
- High blood pressure
- Arthritis
- Pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS)
- Painful breasts

These can all be signs of an essential fatty acid deficiency. EFAs are found in foods such as nuts, seeds and oily fish. These essential fats are a vital component of every human cell and the body needs them to balance hormones, insulate nerve cells, keep the skin and arteries supple and to keep the body warm.

Saturated fats

Saturated fats are the fats that we need to avoid. We need to focus more on unsaturated fats, and these can be broken down into two types: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated:

1. Monounsaturated fats (omega 9 fats) are not classed as essential fatty acids, but they can have health benefits. They are called monounsaturated because chemically speaking they have only one double bond. Olive oil, for example, is high in monounsaturated fats, which has been found to lower LDL ('bad' cholesterol) and raise HDL ('good' cholesterol) which is one of the factors that contribute to the low rate of heart disease in the Mediterranean.

2. Polyunsaturated fats can be split into two types:

    a. Omega 6 oils are found in nuts and seeds and also include

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evening primrose, starflower and borage oil. These essential fatty acids help prevent blood clots and keep the blood thin. They can also reduce inflammation and pain in the joints and so are vital in preventing arthritis.

b. Omega 3 oils (which are found in fish oils and linseed (flaxseed) oil and also to some extent in pumpkin seeds, walnuts and dark green vegetables. These oils can help lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease, soften the skin, increase immune function, increase metabolic rate, improve energy, help with rheumatoid arthritis and alleviate eczema. Oily fish includes mackerel, tuna, sardines, herrings and salmon. A small portion of salmon (115g/4oz) can contain up to 3600mg of Omega 3 fatty acids while the same size piece of cod will contain only 300mg.

The UK Department of Health recommends that we should double our intake of Omega-3 oils by eating oily fish two to three times a week. More and more research suggests that it is vital to supplement these fatty acids, not relying solely on diet.

Choosing a supplement

Don't be tempted to supplement with cod liver oil capsules. In the sea, fish can accumulate toxins and mercury, which pass through their livers (the organ responsible for detoxification). Extracting the oil from the liver of the fish is likely to provide higher quantities of these toxins than the oil taken from the body of the fish.

If you are vegetarian or prefer not to take fish oil, the other way to get those Omega 3 fatty acids is by taking linseed oil capsules. Linseed oil, also called 'flaxseed oil', contains both Omega 3 and some omega 6 essential fatty acids.

Note

Some of the symptoms listed under EFA deficiencies can also be caused by a thyroid imbalance, so it is important to see your doctor for a check-up.

6. Reduce your intake of saturated fat

Saturated fats are not essential for your health – in fact, this is one type of fat you could do without. These fats come mainly from animals, and are contained in foods such as meat, eggs and dairy products. They are also present in tropical oils, such as palm and coconut. Saturated fats can be detrimental to your health, especially when consumed in large amounts.

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For one thing, saturated fats can contribute to weight gain. The more saturated a fat becomes, the harder it is to digest, so it becomes deposited in the body. Butter, coconut oil and palm oil are the saturated fats most easily assimilated by the body, so they are less harmful. Fat from beef, lamb and pork are the hardest to digest because they are hard at body temperature.

Saturated fats can also block other nutrients. They interfere with your body's absorption of the essential fatty acids that are essential for health.

Margarine versus butter

Hydrogenated vegetable oil is listed in the ingredients of many margarines and also many fast foods, crisps, biscuits and crackers. The process of hydrogenation (which basically makes a fat more solid and spreadable) changes the essential unsaturated fats contained in the food into trans fatty acids which have been linked to all sorts of problems, including an increased rate of heart attack, and an inability to absorb essential fats.

For this reason, I would recommend using butter (most supermarkets now sell organic butter) in moderation or unhydrogenated margarine (obtained from health food shops) , rather than ordinary margarine. Although margarine is manufactured from polyunsaturated fats, these ‘good’ fats become ‘trans fats’ in the hydrogenation process. These have a plastic-like quality which makes your body struggle to try to eliminate them. Why put your body under extra pressure to deal with a substance that you do not really need to eat? You want to make things easy for your body so that it functions efficiently and by doing so has the resources to heal itself.

Choosing and using Oils

Oils can easily become damaged so it's essential that you take care when choosing, storing and using them. If oils are over-heated, left in sunlight or re-used after cooking, they are open to attack by free radicals, and these have been linked to cancer, coronary heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and premature ageing.

To prevent free radicals from forming, always choose cold-pressed, unrefined vegetable oils or extra-virgin olive oil. A number of supermarkets now have organic oils, which are better still because no chemicals will have been used in their production. Unfortunately, standard supermarket oils are manufactured and extracted with chemicals and heat. This destroys the quality of the oil and the nutritional content. Store your oil away from sunlight and do not be tempted to reuse it after cooing.

Do not fry polyunsaturated fats as they can become unstable when heated. Use olive oil or butter for frying. Olive oil, which is a monounsaturate, is less likely to cause free radicals, and butter will not cause free radicals because it is a saturated fat. Reduce the cooking temperature to minimise the chances of free radicals forming. Keep all fats to a minimum when frying – try to bake, steam, roast or grill

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instead.

7. Drink enough fluids

Your body is made up of approximately 70 percent water and this is involved in every bodily process including digestion, circulation and excretion. It helps transport nutrients and waste products in and out of the cells. We can survive without food for about five weeks but we can't live without water for longer than five days.

Most of us do not drink enough fluids and, ironically, women who suffer from water retention tend to restrict their liquid intake thinking that the less they drink, the less their bodies will retain. Actually, the opposite is true. If you restrict fluids your body will try and compensate and retain liquid just in case it is in short supply. You should aim to drink around six glasses of water a day, which should take the place of less healthy drinks, such as canned soft drinks, coffee, sugary drinks, etc. An excellent start to the day is a cup of hot water with a slice of lemon. It's excellent for the liver, and it works by kick-starting and cleansing. Herbal teas can be counted as part of your liquid intake but other drinks, such as coffee or black tea, can't.

Tap water can be contaminated with impurities such as arsenic, copper and lead, all of which can occur naturally and leach into the water from the pipes. Other substances such as pesticides and fertilisers can leach into the water from the ground. I would suggest that you get a filter (either a jug filter or one plumbed in under the sink) and use water from that for cooking vegetables and making hot drinks. A filter cannot eliminate every impurity but it is better than nothing.

8. Increase your intake of fibre

Everybody tends to think of fibre and its effects on the bowels, but its role is much more important than simply preventing constipation.

There are two main types of fibre: soluble and insoluble. Insoluble fibre is found in whole grains and vegetables, while soluble fibre is found in fruits, oats and beans. Soluble fibre helps to control cholesterol because it binds with some of the cholesterol and fat in the food you eat. Fibre can also be useful when you want to lose weight because it helps digestion, increases your feeling of fullness and removes toxins from the body.

Fibre does have a very beneficial effect on the bowels because it binds water and increases the bulk of the stools, so that they are easier to eliminate from the body. Fibre also prevents food from putrefying inside your body, which can give you symptoms such as bloating and flatulence.

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9. Avoid additives, preservatives and chemicals such as artificial sweeteners

The aim is to eat your food in its most natural state without added chemicals in the form of additives, preservatives and artificial sweeteners.

You may be tempted to substitute sugar with artificial sweeteners in order to cut calories. Don't. If a food or drink is described as 'low sugar', 'slimline' or 'diet', it will usually contain an artificial sweetener. These sweeteners have been linked to mood swings and depression and it has been found that people who regularly use artificial sweeteners tend to gain weight because they can slow down the digestive process and increase appetite.

Avoid any foods or drinks which contains artificial sweeteners. They can be added to yoghurts, fizzy drinks, desserts, salad dressing, confectionery, jams and many other foods.

10. Reduce your intake of caffeine

Caffeine has a diuretic effect on the body and so depletes valuable stores of vitamins and minerals that are essential for health. Caffeine in tea, coffee, chocolate, and caffeinated soft drinks are all stimulants and cause a fast rise in blood sugar followed by a quick drop, which contributes, to the roller-coaster ride of blood sugar swings. Avoid them whenever possible, even better, cut them out of your diet completely. Substitute them with herbal teas and grain coffee, spring water and diluted pure fruit juices.

I would suggest that you eliminate caffeine gradually. Suddenly giving up coffee, for example, can cause a variety of unpleasant withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches, shaking, muscle cramps. Wean yourself off gradually by substituting some of the cups of coffee for herbal teas or grain coffee and take the coffee out slowly.

Methylxanthines are a family of substances found in coffee, black tea, green tea, chocolate, cocoa, cola and decaffeinated coffee as well as medications that contain caffeine, such as headache remedies. These methylxanthines have been linked to a benign breast condition called fibrocystic disease. Many women experience breast discomfort in the week before a period and for some women they can be very uncomfortable.

11. Reduce alcohol

Keep alcohol to a minimum, particularly while you are correcting your health problem. A couple of units a week is really the maximum allowable intake while you are healing. It is important that you have at least a couple of days a week free from alcohol to give your liver a 'break'.

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Alcohol takes its toll on your liver (see below) and can compromise its ability to detoxify your system, which is one of its main roles. It also contributes to blood sugar imbalance and it acts as an anti-nutrient, which means that it blocks the good effects of your food by depleting vitamins and minerals. Alcohol can also interfere with the metabolism of essential fatty acids, which are absolutely crucial for your health. It is also full of calories – a glass of wine gives 100 calories and a pint of beer around 200 calories.

You may be wondering how this all fits in with the idea that red wine is good for us. Certainly the French eat even more saturated fat than we do and yet their heart disease rate is lower than in the US and the UK. Grapes contain an antioxidant called ‘resveratrol’, which decreases the 'stickiness' of the blood platelets and keeps blood vessels from narrowing. Resveratrol is mainly contained in the skin of grapes, which is why red wine seems to be more effective than white (red wine is made from the whole grapes including the skin and pips whereas white wine is only made from the flesh). Scientists have even compared the effect of alcoholic and non-alcoholic red wines and found that the non-alcoholic version is actually better for the heart.

In the long term, once you have achieved optimum health, the best approach is to keep alcohol in moderation and to save it mainly for the weekend or special occasions. Do not drink every night and when you do, don't have more than two glass of wine or beer.

12. Avoid sugar

Sugar is a problem because it can make you gain weight. The more sugar you eat, the more insulin your body releases. The more insulin is released the more of your food is converted into fat, and your body therefore fails to break down previously stored fat

Sugar is also 'empty calories'. It does not give you anything of nutritional value. So when you are trying to nourish your body and give it the right tools to correct a health problem you don't want to eat foods that have a negative effect on your health.

Fluctuations in blood sugar, especially low blood sugar, can cause a number of symptoms including irritability, aggressive outbursts, depression, fatigue, dizziness, crying spells, anxiety, confusion, inability to concentrate, headaches, palpitations, forgetfulness and lack of sex drive.

When you eat any food in its refined form you digest it very quickly. Refined foods are no longer in their 'whole' state and have been stripped of their natural goodness by various manufacturing processes. Two of the most widely used refined foods are sugar and white flour.

If digestion is too fast, glucose enters the bloodstream too rapidly. This also

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occurs when you eat any food or drink that gives a stimulant effect, such as tea, coffee or chocolate. The initial stimulating 'high' quickly passes and you plummet down to a 'low', in which you feel tired and drained. So what do you need? Another stimulants, like a cup of coffee or bar of chocolate to give you another boost.

If you have a long gap between your meals your blood glucose will drop to quite a low level, leaving you feeling the need for a quick boost like a cup of coffee. When the glucose level falls too low, adrenaline is released by the adrenal glands to get your liver to produce more glucose to rectify the imbalance. You can then end up with too much glucose in the blood which means that your pancreas has to secrete more insulin in order to reduce your glucose levels. Your body is then on a roller-coaster ride of fluctuating blood sugar levels.

If you continually ask your pancreas to produce extra insulin, it will literally become exhausted and unable to cope with the demands. You then have the opposite problem – high blood sugar (hyperglycaemia) – because your body is not producing enough insulin to deal with the glucose. The extreme form of this is diabetes. With this condition, insulin is supplied from the outside of the body in order to control glucose levels.

It is important that you keep your blood sugar in balance, not only to eliminate any health problems but also to keep you in good health and present problems for the future.

How to balance your blood sugar

To help maintain a steady blood sugar level during the day, aim to eat complex carbohydrates as part of your main meals and make sure that you eat little and often during the day. Sometimes just an oat cake can be enough between meals to keep eating urges at bay.

If you find the symptoms associated with low blood sugar are greatest first thing in the morning or if you wake during the night with heart pounding and you are unable to get back to sleep, then it is very likely that your blood sugar level has dropped overnight and adrenaline has kicked into play. Eating a small, starchy snack, like half a slice of rye bread, one hour before going to bed will help to alleviate these symptoms.

And make sure your complex carbohydrates are unrefined. In general, this means choosing brown instead of white. For example, whole-wheat bread, brown rice and wholemeal flour as opposed to their white versions which have been refined and stripped of essential vitamins, minerals, trace elements and valuable fibre.

Do:

- Do eat unrefined complex carbohydrates including whole-wheat bread, potatoes, brown rice, millet, oats, rye, etc.

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- Do dilute pure fruit juice
- Always eat breakfast . Porridge is a good choice.
- Do eat small frequent meals no more than three hours apart
- Do reduce, preferably avoid, stimulants including tea, coffee, chocolate, smoking and canned drinks that contain caffeine

Don't:

- Don't eat refined carbohydrates. Avoid 'white' in general. Remember that white flour is in many things such as cakes, biscuits, pastries and white bread.
- Don't eat sugar or the foods it is in, including chocolate, sweets, biscuits, pastries and soft drinks

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Conclusion

Now you know the 7 most common mistakes that stop you getting healthy, it's up to you whether you choose to implement changes into your life. Health is all about choices; it depends on which path you choose, the path to good health or the path to degenerative illness.

It is important that you have this information because you are now able to make an informed decision about your health instead of just thinking that feeling tired, for example, is just 'one of those things' and you can't do anything about it. Well now you can.

Some people will say it costs more to eat organic foods or to take supplements. But does it really? Try thinking of it this way. How much does it cost every year to repair and maintain your car? More than you would like no doubt. If you had the car serviced regularly this would help prevent the car breaking down and therefore you would have less repair costs. The regular servicing costs would be less than repair costs and save a lot of inconvenience. How much are you investing in yourself to maintain and service your body? Some people spend more on their cars than they do on the vehicle (their bodies) that is carrying them through life.

It has been said that, "without your health you don't have anything", so looking after yourself should be top of your priority list. You are not only helping yourself to feel well now but you are also investing in your future.

Jim Rohn once said, "Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live."

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Your Next Steps

If you would like to find out more information about this health topic, would like to order any of the supplements or tests mentioned above or if you would like to arrange a personal clinic or telephone consultation then please telephone or click one of the links below:

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