

How Food Choices Affect Chronic Illness

Have you heard the statement you are what you eat. The foods and beverages we choose to put in our body can either lead to a healthier life.

Let us look at the food choices you can make to improve your health and decrease the progression of chronic diseases (Heart disease, High Blood Pressure, Diabetes and Obesity).

It begins with the **variety** of food we choose from and the **quantity** we eat. Not one food or food group provides all the nutrients that you need. A **Variety** of foods means choosing fruits, vegetables, starches, and meat, dairy and fats daily.

Let us look at how **Fiber, sodium, fat and calories** found in our foods affect our overall health.

FIBER

- A diet high in fiber has been associated with improved blood sugar control, better cholesterol levels, good bowel habits and feeling full longer. **Women aim for 21 grams and men 30 grams per day.**
- Fibers found in plant sources, whole grains, cereals and breads, fruits and vegetables. Animal products like meat cheese and fats contain no fiber. Check the nutrition label.

SODIUM

- Blood pressure numbers improve by decreasing the amount of sodium daily in your diet.
- Sodium is a mineral naturally found in food and we do need some sodium in our diet.
- Americans usually consume more sodium daily than is needed. We should consume < 2300mg daily
- Foods high in sodium are highly processed foods such as canned soups, lunchmeats and frozen dinners.
- Choosing fresh meats, fruits, vegetables and grains are good choices when limiting sodium.

FAT

- Fat comes from plant and animal sources. The animal sources such as butter, lard and fats found in meats and cheeses are considered less healthy choices containing saturated fats and cholesterol.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat, lower fat cheeses and milk. Choose more often fats that come from plant such as avocado, nuts, seeds and most oils.
- *Avoid Trans fats* as this is also associated with heart disease. Check the nutrition label.
- Fat is more than 2 times as many calories than protein and carbohydrates. Decreasing fat in diet can help in decreasing total calories eaten.

CALORIES

- Eating excess calories or large quantities of food can result in weight gain or an inability to lose weight. Diabetes management can be improved by controlling calories, the quantity of food eaten and maintaining a good weight.
- All foods contain calories but those that do not contain fat are lower in calories.



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