

# HEALTHY HOMEWORK™

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## EATING

*"An essential to life, a key to wellbeing"*

As a clinic focused on a holistic approach to health, patient responsibility is the essential element in creating an optimal health plan. We have created healthy homework that offers tools to challenge you in making positive changes in your lifestyle and possibly accelerate your level of healing. We feel that true health is not just physical comfort, but a holistic union of well being on all levels. This is why we present your homework focus in 3 different perspectives-body, mind and spirit. We will explore 3 different ways of approaching one singular subject. In this case we will look at eating and 3 different ways to reap its benefits and possibly deepen your experience and enjoyment of this form of practice. It is always important to remember that your healthcare is your own practice, so follow what feels best for you. This may mean pushing comfort zones at times and pulling back at others. Please experiment and enjoy this practice program on all levels... mind, body and spirit.



*every cell in your body. Beyond what simply keeps us alive, there are many levels which can support ourselves through the food we consume in our daily meals.*

### Body

If we have made it this far and surviving, why is there so much attention given to when, how and what flavor we should be eating? From the industrial revolution to the technological revolution, in the past 200 years the demand on human time and energy has teamed up with the processing of food. This has resulted in a complex experience for our bodies. Fast food

and convenience food are unavoidable. This leads us to question their true value, so we read the complicated ingredient list on the back of the wrapper. One can assume that our ancestors never doubted the nourishing content of the potato that came from the ground or the loaf of home cooked bread. Why would they if there had never been any other way? In current times, we are faced with a challenge, as the voice of tradition has become the voice of the media. With chronic illness on the up-rise, people are looking for more energy and balance in their lives. Exploring the purpose of nutrition is a vital element in empowering ourselves. How do we know what is truly best for our body when much of our guidance is coming from a consumer based source? This is truly one of the greatest challenges in this fast paced world, but there is a certain level of confidence we can trust in the wisdom of our ancestors. It has after all, gotten us to this point alive and mostly well. In the past, our eating has been mainly based on what the land can provide us. This simple fact can guide us to begin a more friendly experience for our body.

### This month's article: Eating

*There are certain rules of nature we just can't seem to break and the need to eat in order to live is one of them. So we rightfully oblige and try our best to keep a healthy level of sustenance. From a lavish gourmet meal to a 99-cent hot dog or power bar, most of us usually are able to find something to fill the void.*

*The drive to eat begins from a point of instinct and expands forth into a broad range of mixed messages. The ritual holiday family feasts, commercials selling kids a gimmick for their lunchboxes, to diet pills and food supplements. In all the different messages in our culture regarding food, the important question lies here- where does the word health fit in?*

*Food has always been a pinnacle to quality of life. This is in reference to quantity and quality of food and to whom you're eating it with, when and how. Although eating is simply the act of consumption, your choices in this process will impact*

Why is processed food considered unfriendly? Without getting into detailed chemistry, processing has altered food to the point that it can be difficult for the body to breakdown and digest. Because many of the foods are fragmented and

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chemically altered, the body must provide the missing pieces in order to ensure that the substance can be digested properly. This often results in a depleting effect on our system. The simplest example is refined sugar. It is not just the stuff you put in your morning coffee or the obvious cola product and candy bar, it is hidden in a majority of store products, including a variety of cereals, breads and juices. This familiar cornerstone of our diet is more health deteriorating than just making your kids hyperactive. White sugar is refined from sugar cane, isolated into the substance known as glucose-fructose or sucrose. Because it has been stripped of the many vitamins and enzymes sugar cane naturally provides, your body actually has to compensate and provide these nutrients from it's own stores every time it digests this substance. This results in a deficit in vital nutrients, primarily the B-vitamins, which regulate your ability to handle stress and strengthen the immune system. Although so many people eat sugar or sugar products to get a quick 'boost', they are actually making it harder for themselves to have stable moods and a strong system. What results is a vicious cycle, which involves cravings for the culprit itself. In the long run, excessive consumption of refined sugars lead to modern day illnesses such as child and/or adult obesity and Type II Diabetes.

This is the unfortunate case of many of the 'foods' we consume when eating pre-packaged foods. With this being a complex and multi-layered subject, let's focus on WHAT YOU CAN DO.

### **HOMEWORK**

In all three aspects of eating, your homework starts with one key word: AWARENESS. This means perking up your senses to the substance that you are actually putting into your mouth. So start to read labels and try to understand what each word means. If it is truly intangible, it may be an indication to gift your body with simplicity and choose another food choice. Instead of a strawberry flavored fruit roll ups, how about just strawberries. Try making moves towards home-made foods, using ingredients from "the

land". This includes whole grain rice, 100% whole wheat pastas, veggies, fruits, lean meats, fish, milk, eggs and real butter. It may feel like there is no time for home-cooked food and the habit towards convenience comes forward. Your homework is to take the extra step. Cooking and baking your own food can be a creative process that can be highly rewarding in experience and flavor. Your body will thank you too! Nothing feels better than whole foods made with care. Taking the extra step shows a form of commitment to yourself and your family. Building on the traditions of our ancestors and eating from a simple base can help us derive the best from what we're eating.



### **Mind**

The mind and the body often conflict when on the subject of eating. The mind may be too busy and crave convenience to a body that hungers delicacy. Or the body may scream cravings to a mind that is unable to tame them for a moment of focus or silence. How does one find peace and balance in this realm of tangling wills?

Eating is a physical act, intended to nourish and fuel not only your body but your mind as well. It is unfortunate that the relationship between food and mind is often disregarded and forgotten. It is important to realize that how you eat has a direct connection with your mental health and can be a major factor in stress and life management.

Your mind needs nutrients to function at it's optimal potential. The building blocks of your diet are essential to create a good foundation for your mind to work and create from. As we've already discussed, going back to the basics can be the most profound way to make a shift in how you nourish yourself.

We've emphasized the role in what you eat, but there is also how you eat. This can have just as much impact on your level of nourishment. Your mind can be the culprit behind bad eating habits due to a lack of awareness, especially when it is in a state of stress. High stress will stimulate the

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flow of adrenaline in our systems, triggering what is called the 'fight or flight' mechanism. Originally, this extra 'boost' was necessary because human lives were threatened daily and the strength for survival was needed- such as fighting off a saber tooth tiger. In modern day living many of the stresses many be equivalent to this but they are usually present in a mental form. When this mechanism is triggered, our digestive system actually shuts down so that all reserves of energy can go to fighting off the "saber tooth tiger". When you "eat on the run" and inhale fast food in the midst of rush hour traffic, the food eaten is not being broken down effectively and thus not absorbing whatever nutrition there is. Indigestion can cause mental sluggishness, fatigue and general discomfort. This is stressful to the body, especially when eating is supposed to be a form of support.

Where do we start? How about breakfast? Breakfast is the ground work for your day. Having a balanced breakfast of whole grains, fruit and a good source protein is your best bet for good mental function. Cereals that are high in refined sugar will burn up quickly and can start your day with a violent jump in your blood sugar. This sets a cycle for cravings and can cause mental fogginess and lethargy, let alone reek havoc on your pancreas. A balanced breakfast burns slower and keeps you uplifted, giving you sustained energy to start the day. This means better mental focus and clarity, without the crash experienced by caffeine or sugar!

## **HOMEWORK**

### ***PART ONE of your homework is EAT BREAKFAST!!***

It might have the resonate sound of your mother speaking, but eating a good breakfast can be the most important activity of your day. You will be surprised how good you feel! Oatmeal and musli are good hearty options especially with nuts and yogurt to give a light source of protein. For those who don't have much time in the morning, smoothies have

become a popular way to pack a lot of nutrition into an easy to consume drink. This can include fruit, greens and protein powders, flax oils - you name it! Remember not to stuff yourself with heavy fatty foods such as bacon and pancakes, this can set you up for a day of indigestion!

### ***PART TWO is to practice SELF AWARENESS.***

Taking time to check your state of mind before you put food in your mouth makes a huge difference to how the food will nourish and support you. Instead of just gobbling down your next meal in the midst of a busy work day, or eating cold leftovers over the kitchen sink before running out to your next meeting, have the awareness to take the time (or make the time) to sit down and eat properly. Check in with yourself

and see how you are feeling. Often when we are stressed we tighten the muscles in our abdomen- see if that is the case and consciously try to relax. Deep breathing can be very helpful and while you do this remember that eating is a time you have to truly nurture yourself. When you finally do begin eating, remember to chew your food properly because digestion begins in the mouth. As you foster the awareness in how you eat, then the awareness of what you eat will

come much easier. Meals can become a time of relaxation, reflection and quality time with your self and others.

### **Spirit**

Food and eating has always been an integral part of spiritual tradition. In Buddhist monasteries, only the most realized monks are granted the duty of cooking. When the food is served, the first bite is always eaten in silence, in reverence to the divine nourishment of food. In Hinduism, food is seen as one of the finest offerings to bestow and rituals entail offering a portion of their food to the gods by resting a plate before a statue of a deity. Christian's pray before eating as with many other traditions all over the world, to give gratitude for the important gift of food.



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Most of us take the food for granted. We all have been caught standing in front of the open fridge door or putting coins in a vending machine with limitless possibilities. Habits have developed where we are caught on the extremes of overeating or ignoring our needs and eating on the run. We often treat our body like machines- cars that need to be filled with gasoline when the tank gets empty. But what happens when eating becomes a sacred act? There is a different kind of experience that manifests when reverence is given to the food we eat. This can create a feeling that transcends the physical mechanics and offers enjoyment and a different kind of nourishment.

There are benefits that can be derived from food that go beyond the simple chemistry of nutrition. It is that "special ingredient" that comes with someone who really cares about what and who they are cooking for. Consider the difference between mom's turkey dinner and a frozen T.V dinner. They both may taste good, but there is a distinct difference in how they feel. The spirit in you craves a different kind of nourishment than just flavor, protein, carbs and fats. Food keeps us alive and the life force that runs through it, runs through us. It connects us to the earth. Understanding this can create a more holistic experience to eating that adds better quality to our life and health.

## **HOMEWORK**

Whether you are of a religious discipline or not, take a moment prior to eating or during to appreciate the rich gift of good food. We are so fortunate to live in a land where food is abundant and there are so many choices. Keeping this perspective reminds us of the simple pleasure that comes with eating and nourishing our body.

Invite the ritual of eating to become a sacred act. Though we can do this in many ways, use a level of awareness and intention that it is most meaningful for you. Maybe it is taking extra effort to make time and cook a healthy meal with all the fixings. It may be making your table setting look extra beautiful. It can be a quality time of sharing and enjoying time with others, or a quiet space of solace for yourself. Recognize that eating is something that living beings share in order to be part of the living system we have on planet earth. It is something that connects us all for survival and also into an art rich in tradition and innovation. Invite your spirit to the table the next meal and see how much better food tastes. Junk food tastes good, but soul food can taste even better.

*The power of love to change bodies is legendary, built into folklore, common sense, and everyday experience. Love moves the flesh, it pushes matter around.... Throughout history, "tender loving care" has uniformly been recognized as a valuable element in healing.*

*-Larry Dossey*