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Dear Friends,

In this issue, I want to discuss some current dietary fads, and tell you which diet really helps you to stay young and healthy, and live a long life. Also, I'll mention some more misreporting in the media that threatens people's health and your ability to choose just what is best for you (see: In The Health News).

Dietary Fads

The medical literature is full of articles on which approaches to diet lead to the healthiest results. What I mean by health is not simply weight control, but protection from everyday health problems, such as arthritis, digestive disorders, and skin conditions, and prevention and treatment of chronic, debilitating and lethal diseases. By this I am referring to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, strokes, hypertension, gout, and osteoporosis, among others.

Weight Loss Does Not Equal Health

Unlike the medical literature, the popular press is full of a variety of books and articles on diet that sound scientific, but for the most part ignore the science. These authors propose to help people with weight loss, and their plans might do this, but that is one of their dangers: they lull people into thinking that because they lose weight they are healthier. These diet plans are almost always

based on some metabolic gimmick that is supposedly hidden in the medical literature. They may provide temporary weight loss (no such system has been shown to help people maintain lower weight), but at the expense of long term health, and the risk of increasing the illnesses mentioned above.

Vegetarian Diet Wins for Health

The science is clear that a mostly vegetarian diet, with the inclusion of some fish is the healthiest diet for most people. This diet is based on vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains, seeds, and nuts. Adding fish (salmon and sardines are the best for omega-3 oils) and olive oil, further reduces heart disease, cancer, strokes, and other causes of death. This diet is also lowest in environmental toxins, including pesticides, although it is always best to choose organic products to further reduce these poisons.

If people choose to consume a small amount of low-fat dairy product or eggs, it is even more important to choose organic sources. Animal products accumulate more toxins than plants, and animals are treated with antibiotics and hormones to increase growth and reproduction. Residues stay in the flesh, leading to increasing problems with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and hormone irregularities.

Many of the diet fads are based on low carbohydrate plans, and are high in protein and fat. They often ignore the difference between simple carbohydrates, such as sugar and white flour, and complex carbohydrates, found in whole grains, beans, potatoes, and squashes. The programs I am referring to

include the Atkins diet, the “zone” diet, the “blood type” diet, and others.

The “Danger Zone”

The zone diet proponent, Barry Sears, suggests that the “American experiment with low fat diets has failed” but he is wrong. Americans have not been on a low fat diet. When he started saying this, Americans had dropped from an extremely high fat diet (over 40 percent of calories), down to a **still** very high intake of 33 percent. The drop in percent was not from reduced fat, but the result of increased calories as sugar and white flour. The total fat in the diet had not decreased. I agree with Sears that processed and hydrogenated oils have replaced important essential fatty acids from the diet (see the next article), and that extra refined carbohydrates, and artificial ingredients have increased illness, but the solution is not to eat a diet that is unhealthy for other reasons.

In addition, he talks about “insulin resistance” as the cause of obesity. This is a serious metabolic problem that is the result, not cause, of obesity. The best treatment for insulin resistance is exercise, reduced caloric intake, and a high fiber diet. Fiber is virtually absent in all animal foods.

High protein diets increase the loss of calcium in the urine, leading to an increased risk of osteoporosis. Calcium loss is also increased by phosphorus, which is abundant in animal products. The nitrogen in high protein diets is a burden on the kidneys and liver. Animal products also increase the risk of gall stones and gout.

The Atkins Diet

This is a high-protein, high-fat diet, with carbohydrates of any sort being considered villainous. No credible scientific evidence shows that people who stay on this diet are healthier, or even that they maintain consistent weight loss, although any of these diets can help people lose weight in the short term, mainly from calorie restriction.

It is hard to imagine a diet being promoted as healthy in which the recommended breakfast consists of eggs, bacon, sausages, cheese and similar foods. If nothing else, such a diet is high in pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones. The proponents of the Atkins diet say “well, of course, you should choose organic foods whenever possible.” However, I have observed many proponents of these

diets, and if what they choose when they are at conferences is any reflection, they eat high animal protein no matter what the source.

Another problem with such diets is the lack of the important phytochemicals found in a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. These are important antioxidants, isoflavones, bioflavonoids, and other protective substances. They are simply not present in animal foods. For example, blueberries were recently shown to be the food with the highest antioxidant levels.

The Blood-Type Craze

In the blood type diet, D’Adamo suggests that most people are not adapted genetically to be vegetarian, and that what you need is based on whether you are type A, B, AB, or O. Again, no credible scientific data supports this, as no studies have been done on people who choose diets based on their blood type. In fact, people who choose vegetarian diets do so for other reasons, and if they were ill-adapted to this choice, you would expect more illness among those who were vegetarian for the wrong reasons.

But the science shows that people who choose vegetarian diets are healthier. This information comes from a variety of population groups, epidemiological studies, and intervention studies, and it is consistent, independent of the country in which the research is done.

Recent reports from Dean Ornish have shown that circulation to the heart and brain is much improved on mostly vegetarian diets, while high protein-fat diets restrict their blood flow.

The Best Diet Choice

My advice: choose a wide variety of fresh, whole, organic foods, including vegetables, fruits, beans, grains, seeds, and nuts, and add to that a small amount of sardines (water packed) or salmon, and if you choose, a small amount of organic eggs and organic, plain, low-fat yogurt. Flavor these foods with many different herbs, spices, onions, and garlic. This diet is healthy and delicious, will help you lose weight if you combine it with exercise, and will protect you from chronic disease.

It provides adequate protein, the widest variety of vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, flavonoids, phytochemicals, and antioxidants, as well as the most energy and the most flavor.

Dietary Fats and Health

You probably have heard about the bad things that dietary fat can do to you, and it is true that, for the most part, Americans (and now much of the world, influenced by the American food industry) eat far too much fat, and too many calories overall.

However, certain fats are essential in the diet, although we only need small amounts of them. Unfortunately, commercial oil processing, hydrogenation, refining of grains that strips away the essential oils, overcooking of oil with deep frying, and too much saturated fat in the diet have all led to dietary deficiencies or imbalances.

Proponents of the dietary fads mentioned above suggest that low-fat diets make this deficiency worse, but low fat intake is not harmful if you take in the right fats in the right amounts.

Fats have several functions in the body, such as insulation and mechanical protection (padding), a source of energy, and as components of cell membranes, where they allow passage of molecules in and out of cells and maintain receptors for hormones. Two unsaturated fats are necessary in the diet: linoleic acid and linolenic acid, and they are called “essential fatty acids” or EFA. They are building blocks for some hormones, and are converted to “prostaglandins,” important regulatory substances. Good health depends on a proper balance of the different types of essential fats.

Essential Fatty Acids (EFA)

Linoleic acid, an “omega-6” unsaturated fat found in vegetables (e.g. corn), seeds (e.g. safflower and sunflower), and beans (such as soy), is a precursor to gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), which is then converted to “prostaglandin E1” (PGE1). This regulates blood pressure, inflammatory responses, blood clotting, allergies, hormone activity, and immune function, and lowers cholesterol levels. It also decreases the tendency of platelets to clump together, stabilizes blood sugar, and decreases arterial and intestinal spasms.

Some people do not make PGE1 efficiently from linoleic acid, and they need to take GLA. This is especially true as people age, or if they have diabetes, consume alcohol, have immune disorders, or are exposed to environmental toxins.

GLA is found in borage oil and evening primrose oil, and supplements of 240 to 480 mg are valuable

for the heart, autoimmune diseases, arthritis, diabetes, hyperactivity, PMS, and eczema.

Alpha-linolenic acid is an “omega-3” oil found in flaxseeds, walnuts, and other nuts and seeds, while EPA and DHA are found in oily fish or fish oil supplements. Omega-3 oils are also precursors to prostaglandins, but different ones than GLA.

Supplements of omega-3’s are valuable in heart disease, high cholesterol, digestive disorders, depression, fibrocystic breast disease, neurological development in children, arthritis, and psoriasis. The usual dose is from 1 to 3 Tablespoons of flax oil, or 1200 to 3000 mg of EPA/DHA combined.

When taking oil supplements you need extra vitamin E, carotenoids, flavonoids, and other antioxidants to protect them. Olive oil is mostly monounsaturated, does not oxidize easily, and can be part of a healthy diet. However, you need to be cautious with any oils, as they are all high in calories, and can easily add to your weight.

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In the Health News

- The media is often biased against health alternatives, but John Stossel of ABC is particularly prejudiced. He reported in February that organic foods were more dangerous than conventional foods. It was a lie; the bacterial studies were misleading, and he quoted studies on pesticide levels that were simply never done! When this was pointed out, he and executives at ABC ignored the criticisms, and even rebroadcast the show in July. Only in August, when his lies were exposed by the New York Times, did he finally have to apologize. He made a superficial effort. Organic foods are safe and better for you, and his report seriously damaged public confidence in these healthier foods. The Environmental Working Group said, “Stossel lied and threatened an entire industry by disseminating false and damaging information. He should be fired for violating the most basic ethical standards of journalism.” (www.ewg.org)
- A diet high in antioxidants from fruits and vegetables can markedly reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease. Dutch research reported at the World Alzheimer’s Congress showed a 25 percent reduction related to high intake of vitamin C, beta-carotene, and vitamin E. The information on vitamin E confirms previous reports. (Reuters Health, July 13)

Diet and Disease

- An animal study shows that oxidative stress and free radicals increase hypertension (Hypertension 2000;36:142-146). Antioxidant supplements (vitamins C and E) help control blood pressure despite such stress by protecting nitric oxide—essential for relaxation of blood vessels. Garlic also protects nitric oxide production, and supplements of arginine help because it is the metabolic precursor to nitric oxide.

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A Quick and Easy Meal

Everyone likes speed and efficiency, especially in the kitchen. Here’s an easy recipe. Take a cup of millet and boil it in two cups of water for 25 minutes or until the water is gone. Add chopped organic vegetables: scallions, tomatoes, sweet peppers, avocado, corn, and sweet peas. Dress with some ground pepper, crushed garlic, and some balsamic vinegar, and you have an easy, nutritious meal that is filling and delicious. Try other vegetables or replace the peas with chick peas for variety.

A blender full of frozen organic bananas, strawberries, and blueberries with some vanilla soy milk makes a great dessert (I also thicken it with some ground flaxseeds for extra fiber and omega-3 oils).

If you have specific health questions that might be of general interest, write to me or submit them through the **Ask Dr J** page on my website: www.drjanson.com. Come visit for more health updates.

The new edition of my book, Dr. Janson’s New Vitamin Revolution, (Penguin-Putnam-Avery, \$15.95) is now available at bookstores, and health food stores, or order it from QCI Nutritionals at 888-922-4848.

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