

“Good Nutrition is Key for a Healthy Lifestyle”

Live Healthy and Be Well!

--Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS

The active time of the year is just upon us, and we need to make sure we are properly “fueled and tuned” for this great time of year. Actually, this is important any time of year, but now is the best time to get started. Good nutrition is a key element in taking care of the wonderful machine of your body. Treat yourself well through good living, adequate, proper nutrition, and a good balance of exercise, activity, and rest, and your body will be there for you for a long time. However, if you apply the opposite approach, you may find that your body will fail you in a time of need, or that you will age more quickly and irreversibly.

Good nutrition is important to all of us in a situation of disease, illness, or in recovery from an operation. Properly fed and tuned, the immune system will function at a higher state, wounds and incisions will heal properly and more quickly, and your energy level will be up to any task you undertake. If not taken care of, you may find yourself weak and ill more often, wounds will not heal well and unsightly scars may result, and you will not be able to do the activities you have enjoyed in the past. It can even adversely affect your senses, your teeth and gums, your hair, and contribute to a faster onset of joint and disk failure leading to arthritis, osteoporosis, and overall decrease in your activities of daily living and quality of life. Good nutrition and positive practices will improve your overall health and wellness, which is the pro-active approach of prevention, and also certainly assist with slowing down the aging process. So, 40 and 50 may be the new 30 and 40...but only if you take care of yourself!

Young people do seem more “invincible” to us, do they not? Realize when you were younger you could eat what you wanted and not gain as much weight. If you did, it was easier to get those few pounds off. You could go at life hard, burn the candle at both ends, and get away with it. Remember those days? The onset of “middle age” is a shock to many as they begin to realize they no longer have the “slack” conferred by youth. Weight is easy to gain, pounds are harder to take off, and activities we once found stimulating are now tiring, and we pay for them with soreness, stiffness, and fatigue. Many use this as an excuse to slow down and become less active – which is not the right answer – exercise with wisdom, but stay active.

Some solid nutritional advice for those who are middle aged and older is to realize the best way to stay healthy is to eat healthy and prevent illness. Don’t live to eat, but instead, eat to live healthy. And, don’t make the mistake of thinking if you have more fat or weight than you should, that you are in a state of good nutrition. We see people all the time that may be overweight on the scales, or even obese, but their actual markers of good nutrition (such as the amount of albumin, an important serum protein) are dangerously low. This means that while they may carry a lot of fat around, their body is deficient of protein, and probably other vitamins and minerals and substances that are essential for good overall health and wellness. Proteins are the all-important “building blocks” used by the liver to make the things you need to be strong, heal wounds, keep joints healthy, senses and thinking sharp, and accomplish great things such as enjoying children and grandchildren.

Good basic recommendations for nutrition include a low fat, high fiber, high protein diet with plenty of exercise/activity, fresh air and good hydration (coffee, cokes, and alcoholic beverages don't count – tend to dehydrate). I would also recommend a fiber supplement on a daily basis. This is not just for bowel regularity, but high fiber diets are also known to be a natural way to keep down “bad” cholesterol, as it is bound by the fiber and passed out. Something such as Metamucil (or generic equivalent) is good. If you don't like the flavored powders, there are capsules, wafers, and even “power bar” versions also available. Take a good Multi-Vitamin with Iron every day to ensure you get the essentials and trace elements. Realize that your body sees these vitamins and minerals as “chemical compounds” regardless of source. So, if it needs amino acids (proteins), it doesn't really care if they came from alfalfa sprouts or some other source. Also, the body uses what it needs and discards the rest. So, taking large doses of expensive, “all natural” vitamins just helps you make expensive urine.

More and more evidence is mounting that Omega-3 fatty acids are also very beneficial to nutrition, health, and wellness. Not only do they seem to naturally reduce cholesterol, but they have also been implicated in the improvement of bone and joint health, reduction of high blood pressure, boosting immunity, wound healing, and good for your heart and blood vessel system. Most folks refer to these fatty acids as “fish oil” (due to the original source). But, they can also come from plant derivatives such as Flaxseed and other sources. Recommendations are currently for 2 to 3 grams per day, depending on body size, and are available in easy to take gel-cap form.

Last but not least, ladies need extra calcium to ward off osteoporosis and bone loss later in life. Start now, in your 30's or early 40's, and you can help this through prevention instead of reacting to the loss later on. Take an extra calcium supplement each day in addition to your multivitamin, and try to keep your Vitamin D up as well, as this allows the body to better utilize the calcium properly.

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call us at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. This and previous articles can be now be found on the web at www.rabundoctor.com in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!