

HAPPY DIETING: EATING FOR HEALTH

By Jeff White

Word associations are powerful. When we hear certain words, emotions and thoughts pop into our heads. We may not say them out loud, but we think them. This can stem from what parents have told us, what we read, or based on experiences. Once we associate a certain emotion or feeling with a word, it can be difficult to change, as it can be ingrained in our psyche. What thoughts enter your mind when you read the words: cocaine, alcohol, nicotine, OxyContin, Ritalin, Adderall, Valium, Morphine, Seconal, and Heroin? For some, a first thought is danger. Drug addiction, violence, death or destruction. Others associate them with parties and fun. Whatever the choice of words, they evoke extremely vivid, powerful images. How about pizza, chocolate, ice cream, french fries, bacon, cookies, cake, soda, popcorn and cheeseburger? Many think of parties and good times. What's a party without pizza and soda, or a birthday without cake and ice cream, or a movie without popcorn? Not everyone has positive thoughts with these words, however. Some associate the words with danger, and have images of illness or even death. Words in the second group are marketed to generate feelings of happiness and fun, while words in the first group carry a negative connotation, and should be avoided.

We know the first group of words are classified as "drugs", while words in the second group are considered "food." What you may not realize is that the words in both groups have a lot more in common than we think. Most know the addictive dangers associated with heroin, nicotine, and cocaine. But what's not as known is how the foods we eat affect our bodies in ways similar to taking drugs. When a person takes drugs, the brain releases the neurotransmitters dopamine, serotonin and endorphins — natural opiates that make us "feel good." The longer a person uses a drug, the probability of them needing to increase the amount to achieve the same desired mood altering effect also increases. Over time, brain chemistry changes, and if a person tries to stop taking the drug, they may experience withdrawal symptoms such as increased sensitivity to pain, irritability, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, insomnia, hot flashes, sweating, flu-like symptoms weakness, body aches, headaches) and lack of, or increased appetite. Anyone battling addiction knows how intense withdrawal symptoms can be. To avoid this, some continue to take the drug, and become addicted.

SOME WONDER WHAT TAKING DRUGS HAS TO DO WITH A PIECE OF CHOCOLATE CAKE THEY HAD, OR BACON CHEESEBURGER, FRIES AND SODA THEY ATE. THE ANSWER IS... EVERYTHING! THESE FOODS AFFECT OUR BRAINS IN A SIMILAR MANNER AS DO HARD DRUGS. WHEN WE EAT FOODS (PRIMARILY HIGH-GLYCEMIC FOODS) OUR BRAINS RELEASE THE SAME "FEEL GOOD" CHEMICALS AS WHEN A PERSON USES ANY OF THE DRUGS LISTED ABOVE.

Not only do bad foods taste good, but we also associated them with good times, and they are socially acceptable, readily available, and most times extremely cheap. The more we eat them... the more we crave them. We turn to "comfort foods" when we are stressed, angry, or upset, and think they make us feel better. We also eat them when we are happy or as a reward. The difference is that it's "OK" to eat cake, but not socially acceptable to use cocaine. What's not "OK" is how these foods affect us. Most of them are very high in fat, sugar, and sodium with almost zero nutritional value. While eating them can surely make us feel better for the short-term — long-term they increase our risk for developing obesity, diabetes cardiovascular disease, fluctuations in blood sugar levels, cancer, sluggishness, fatigue and incredibly are at the root of most illness and all kinds of diseases.

Like drugs... food is used as an escape from our problems. Instead, of dealing with issues, we use JUNK food to take our minds off what's bothering us. Stress increases the production of the stress hormone cortisol. High levels of cortisol make us crave foods that offer us good feelings and energy. These foods are high in fat and empty carbohydrates. Not everyone uses food as an escape. But for those who do, your emotional, mental and physical health depend on what food you eat. During stressful times, seek out professional help to discuss symptoms. Also, exercise and meditation can help counteract stress. And, instead of eating non nutritional "comfort foods" that make your physical, mental and emotional symptoms worse after the initial "sugar high" wears off, eat mind and body healers such as blueberries, lowfat milk, oranges, brown rice, lots of water (has the power to cleanse and flush from your body impurities, and enhance the workability of your organs). Any color vegetables are regenerative and extremely healing.

Now that you are aware that the foods we eat affect us physically and mentally, and that we can become addicted to the "sugar high" junk foods produce, the bottom line is that when stress or problems arise, using comfort food to deal with life's ups and downs can make your health, stress levels and emotional state worse. It's the high nutritional food we fuel our bodies with that snaps us back to health and well-being, and gives our bodies the food fuels it needs to fight illness. Or, it's the non-nutritional, sugar filled, empty calorie food that lowers our immune system, allowing disease to creep creep in and destroy us. The food we eat is life or death to our bodies.

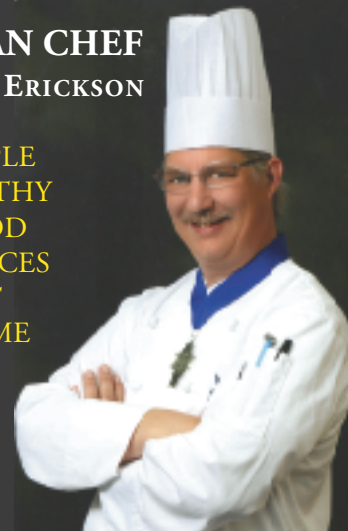
Healthy food alternatives are a learned choice you can condition your mind and body to not just NEED but WANT.

Change your mind set with regards to the food you eat, and you can dramatically change your life. Use food to strengthen your body and mind — not weaken and deplete it. ■

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VEGAN CHEF DAVID ERICKSON

SIMPLE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES AT HOME



Vegetarian Wild Mushroom & Quinoa Stuffed Kale Wraps

- 2 Cups Herbed Marinara Sauce (recipe below)
- 10-12 Black / Dinosaur Kale -Large leaves blanched.
- ½ Cup White Quinoa – Toasted dry, cooked with vegetable stock (recipe below) and cooled.
- 3 Cups Wild Mushrooms – Sliced, sautéed with fresh herbs (thyme, bay leaf) and cooled.
- 1 Cup Walnuts – Toasted and finely chopped, or use a food processor.
- 2 Tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 Teaspoon Salt and ½ Teaspoon Black Pepper

Use food processor; blend Quinoa, Mushrooms, 2/3rds of the Walnuts, EVOO, Salt, Pepper and Water to form a stiff, moldable pate. Cover bottom of 8" X 8" pan with light layer of marinara sauce. On cutting board lay one kale leaf, stem facing away from you. Scoop 1-1 ½ ounces of pate, put on leaf. Roll leaf toward stem, trim excess, put in pan, seam side down. Repeat/fill pan (10-12 pieces). Ladle sauce over rolls as garnish; don't cover completely. Sprinkle walnuts over rolls. Bake 375 degrees for 10 min. Serve warm. Goat Cheese garnish (optional). Plate over pool of remaining marinara. Appetizer or vegan entrée.

Basic Herbed Marinara

- 2 28oz Cans Whole Canned Tomatoes
- 1 Tablespoon Tomato Paste
- 5 Fresh Basil Leaves and 1 Clove Fresh Garlic
- 1 Tablespoon Fresh Thyme Leaves
- 1 Roasted Red Pepper, skin, stems, seeds removed
- ½ Cup Diced Celery and Salt/Pepper to taste

Put all into a stock pot, bring to a boil, reduce. Cook on low/medium/boil for 30 min. Cool; blend with a stick or traditional blender, process till chunky, smooth, pourable. Add water to thin as necessary.

Basic Vegetable Stock

- 1 Large Onion, 4 Stalks Celery, 1 Medium Carrot cut each into quarters, deep roasted
- 2 Stalks Fresh Thyme – whole
- 2 Dried Bay Leaves and 3 Whole Black Peppercorns

Put ingredients in stock pot, cover with water. Bring to a boil, reduce to low simmer. Cook uncovered 4 hrs or until carrots are nearly falling apart, add water as necessary to cover vegetables. Strain, cool immediately in ice bath. Store covered in refrigerator for 2 weeks. Blend stock/vegetables before straining for intense flavor, but you'll get a cloudy stock, unsuitable for clear soup applications. Proportions for vegetables should be a ratio of 2 parts onion, 1 part carrot and 1 part celery, so roast accordingly what you need.

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