



Nutrition

Nutrition is one of the most complicated pillars of health. There are so many diets being marketed – vegetarian, carnivore, pescatarian, vegan, paleo, keto, to name but a few and there are thousands of books claiming how these diets are ‘the ones’. The truth is that there is no one size fits all. We are all unique and highly individual.

Reduce our sugar intake

Half the population is either overweight, obese, diabetic or pre-diabetic so clearly the standard British diet is not working. A good place to start would be to reduce sugar.

The body has two main energy systems, fat and glucose. When we consume carbohydrates, our body converts these into glucose for instant energy and moves the glucose from our blood into the muscle or liver where it can be used for energy or the excess stored as fat. If we regularly eat high carb foods like bread, pasta, cakes and chocolate, our body loses its sensitivity to insulin and the sugar cannot be cleared from our blood, causing a state of insulin resistance and eventually diabetes which in turn causes chronic ill health and inevitably a reduction in lifespan. High insulin which is triggered by carbohydrates also means excessive weight gain.

As a species, we have an innate attraction to sugar. Our hunter gatherer ancestors would walk for miles to get water and food, and rarely they would stumble across some berries to gorge on

and provide instant energy which could also be stored as essential fat for the lean winter months. Unfortunately for us, there is an abundance of sugar 24/7. We only need to walk to the goody cupboard or the local supermarket to get our fix.

So trying to cut down on simple carbohydrates or sugar is a great place to start for a healthy diet. I started by cutting sugar in tea and coffee. Then I avoided sugary snacks. The less you have, the less you will want, we can adapt and re-programme.

Be label savvy

Avoid processed foods and certainly read the labels. Food manufacturers have cottoned on to how addictive sugar is which is why you will see it in virtually every pre-packaged food. Don't think swapping out sugar for artificial sweetener is a good idea. The brain only knows sweet as sweet and it will have a similar biological impact with the addition, in some cases, of harmful chemicals.

Consider healthier choices and have these easily accessible. I like carrots with hummus or celery with some kind of nut butter.

Get your five a day

Another area we can help ourselves is to eat more vegetables. We've been told for many years to eat our five a day. But why is that? The Greek philosopher Aristotle is famous for the quote *"Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food"* and how right he was.

It has been scientifically proven that our gut is a very important part of our biological functioning and as clever and sophisticated as our brains in messaging the rest of the body. This is through trillions of bugs known as the microbiome. These little friends help control and regulate all sorts of essential processes. For example, 80% of the hormone serotonin, a chemical messenger that's believed to boost our mood and help produce healthy sleeping patterns, is created in the gut! Others create vitamins or boost our immune system. Again, it has been suggested that 70% of our immune function comes from the gut. These little creatures love vegetables. Vegetables create compounds called phytonutrients which have a significant impact on our health, which our microbiome love and need to thrive. Examples of those would be cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower.

The diversity of these bugs is very important and different vegetables feed and support different microbiome, so eating a rainbow of coloured vegetables will support our little friends in protecting us from disease.

Fat is not our enemy

A huge discovery in recent years is that fat is NOT the enemy. In fact, fat is vital to life and helps the body create essential fatty acids which in turn helps the body absorb vitamins A, D and E which are known as fat soluble vitamins and are responsible for hundreds of different mechanisms in the body. We do not produce fat ourselves so it is important to consume fat on a daily basis. However, we are talking about GOOD fats. For example, fatty fish like salmon, avocados, olive oil and nuts. DO NOT be afraid of fat, your body needs it.

"Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food." Aristotle

Protein is your friend

And of course our bodies need protein – every cell in the human body contains protein and is necessary to help repair our current cells and produce new ones. It is essential to life. It is of course found in animal produce like beef, chicken and lamb however, if you choose not to eat meat, there are an abundance of ways to get protein – through eggs, cheese, milk, beans, pulses and nuts to name but a few.

Limit fruit intake

Historically, fruit has been heralded as a healthy addition to our diet. However, the fructose content in a lot of everyday fruits like bananas, mango and even apples, is incredibly high. In fact, a glass of pure orange juice will get into your bloodstream quicker than a Mars bar. Hence this is given to diabetics in emergency situations when their blood sugar has dropped to life threatening levels.

I'm not saying don't ever eat fruit but try to make it whole fruit; so you get the gut healthy fibre too and perhaps reduce it to once or twice a day. Also concentrating on berries and other low sugar fruit can give you all the nutrients with minimal sugar.

Buy the best you can afford

Another area to think about is buying the best produce you can afford, organic being the gold standard. Our meat, fruit and veg all look amazing because pesticides dramatically reduce disease and improve the look, but they also strip the foods of their nutritional value, increase toxins entering our body, and remove the flavour of foods. How many times have you seen the most delicious looking strawberry only to discover it tastes of absolutely nothing. That being said, it is better to eat any non-organic vegetables than none at all.

Fasting or periods of not eating

There is more and more research about how resting our bodies from eating food can have a positive impact on our health. When the body isn't busy digesting, it is using the energy to remove dead or unwanted cells, a process called autophagy. There are many suggestions on how long to fast to get the optimum benefits but a good starting point is the basic three meals a day, progressing to pushing your breakfast later and eventually having just two meals a day.

Personally, I find it easy to stop eating at 8pm and skip breakfast – just consuming black coffee, tea or water until lunch at 1/2pm. This results in a 16 hour fast which I tend to do three days a week. There are a variety of fasting schedules and it comes down to what suits the individual. However, for women who are pregnant or anyone who has an eating disorder, fasting is not recommended.

To supplement, or not?

Lastly, supplementation. It has been suggested that 90% of us are deficient in one or more nutrients so eating more whole foods, cutting down on starchy and refined carbohydrates and sugars will help. However, as many of our nutrients have been lost in mass produced farming, some supplementation might be beneficial. Testing for deficiencies can be extremely useful, however, Omega 3 fish oils, Vitamins C and D, and a good Vitamin B complex are a good starting point.

Summary

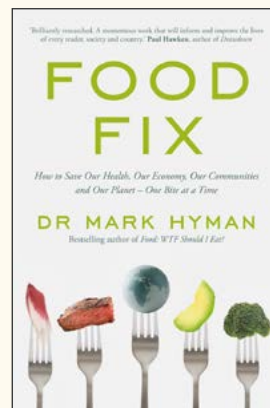
In summary, and as Aristotle suggested, food is medicine. The right kind of food will provide us physical, biological, and emotional well-being. Along with supporting sleep, movement, and stress management, it can keep us well and energised and help stave off many of the critical diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. I strongly believe that nutrition is a key pillar.

I will add however, that we are only human which is why I personally follow an 80:20 philosophy of being mindful of what you eat. That's 80% being good! And on those 20% moments, I make sure I enjoy them.

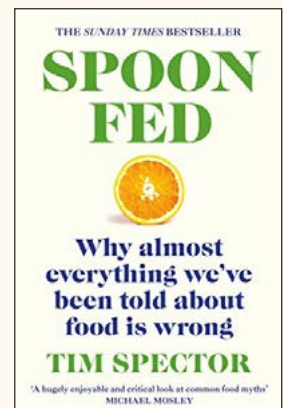
Key take homes:

- Cut down on sugar
- Cut down on refined carbohydrates like bread, biscuits and cakes.
- Try to eat whole foods (as nature intended)
- Try to eat more vegetables of as many different varieties
- Choose organic meat and vegetables or at least wash your vegetables
- Eat healthy fats, like fatty fish like salmon or nuts and avocados
- Skip a meal or two a week

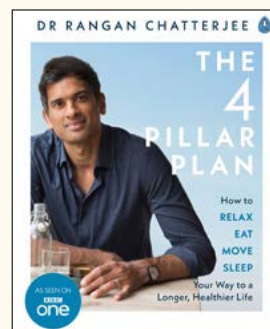
RECOMMENDED READING



Food Fix
Dr Mark Hyman



Spoon Fed
Tim Spector



The Four Pillar Plan
Rangan Chatterjee

All content is based on my own personal research and reading and, more importantly, on my own lifestyle choices that have positively supported my own health and wellbeing. Before making any changes to diet or lifestyle, it is my strong advice to take professional advice before doing so.