

Food Rules

Find out about the latest nutrition rule that will boost your health!

I got a very interesting question the other day. Someone asked me, "Is the rule still on 5 fruits and vegetables a day?"

Do you know why I thought that question was interesting? First of all, because it seems that this person has noticed that food rules change ALL THE TIME! There are enough health messages around to confuse anyone. There was a time when fat was the big enemy, now carbohydrates seem to be the enemy. It used to be good to stick to just three meals a day, but now they're saying small frequent meals and snacks throughout the day. Some say coffee is good for you, some say it's the worst poison. Butter or margarine? Diet coke or regular coke? And the list goes on.

So who's right? And who sets these rules anyway?

This brings me to the second reason why I think that question was interesting. If you pay close attention, you'll notice that people thrive on rules. They actually want to know what the new 'rule' is so that they can restrict themselves to it, or feel guilty when they're breaking it. We are constantly looking for others to tell us what or what not to do, instead of listening to our own body.

That's the exact basis of dieting. Diets work on the assumption that you have no willpower, no common sense, and a desperate need for a quick fix. When you go on a diet, you are telling your internal voices to be quiet, and you are putting your health in someone else's hands. You are letting someone else set the rules and make decisions for you, while the only person who really knows what your body needs is you!

Some food rules, however, make sense. The rule of "5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day" for example is a very sound one; but also very easy to break. When this rule was set by the 'health authorities', they decided that if they set a target of 5 fruits and vegetables a day, people will aim for 5 but if they get less then that's ok.

What is very easy to forget is that the body rarely works on a 'daily quota' concept. Unless you are going out of your way trying, it is very hard to get the optimum amount of anything on a daily basis. There are just too many factors involved. It's possible that you don't have access to 5 fruits and vegetables in one day; you may be too busy to squeeze all that good food in; or you may just not feel like it (a factor many people are ashamed to admit).

The way I see it is that the body does not work in terms of 'daily quota' but rather an 'overall maintenance of health'. You may not feel like eating 5 fruits and vegetables today, but you may eat 10 tomorrow. To demonstrate this theory, it's best to look at children. You may notice that a child spends, for example, 2 or 3 days eating only rice-based dishes, and then switch to eating only meat for a few days. Some days they may eat lots of vegetables, and other days they may just feel like going to bed with no dinner. They are listening to their body a lot more closely than adults, and you will probably find that their body gets its 'quota' over a week, rather than on a day-to-day basis.

Tip

Instead of worrying about the current ‘food rule,’ listen to what your body needs. Cravings are a very good indication of what the body is going through. If you are craving red meat, for example, your body may be low in iron. Eating some good quality red meat may satisfy that craving. If, however, you decide to have a salad instead because you’re worried that red meat will make you put on weight, your craving may continue and you’ll find that you’ll stay hungry. In pregnant women, a severe iron deficiency may even make them crave strange things such as coal or mud!

Beware of cravings that may indicate more than a mineral deficiency. Regular sugar and chocolate cravings point to a blood sugar imbalance, not a ‘need’ for sugar. And, most commonly, craving dairy products or bread indicate a possible food sensitivity to these common culprits.

Hunger is another way that the body tells you what it needs. Most people eat because they are depressed, happy, lonely, bored, or simply because it’s lunch time. Very few actually eat because of hunger. And very few spend a few seconds to think about what they are actually hungry for. When you’re hungry, stop and ask yourself: do I feel like something hot, cold, sweet, sour, crunchy, or smooth?

Remember that your body comes ready with amazing internal survival mechanisms and it is usually very capable of telling you what it needs. If you don’t listen to what your body needs, you will never be satisfied.

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