



nutrition

by Jamie Richards

Jamie Richards brings us into the 21st century with a big bang!

Imagine trying to load iTunes onto a Commodore 64 home computer, or trying to play Super Mario Bros on an original Atari VCS machine. The operating systems on those ancient machines just wouldn't recognise the new software and wouldn't be able to translate the new code. In short, it simply wouldn't work. Unlike computers, our own operating systems - our genes - can't be upgraded so quickly. Evolution takes much longer to adjust. But in recent years, the messages that our lifestyles and diets are sending our genes have changed beyond recognition. Our genes are struggling to cope and it is no coincidence that during this time we have seen a rapid rise in obesity, diabetes, cancer and other chronic diseases related to stress and diet.

modern day pressures

Our 21st century lifestyles have become far removed from the lives people led just a short time ago. In the past they lived off the earth, in small communities with close friendships and shared common beliefs. In today's society we have fewer close social ties, we learn from the TV and computer, we leave our families and support networks behind as we travel the world and have education that questions our beliefs. This makes for a stressful existence and stress-related illness has become the leading health problem in Western society today. In addition, home entertainment, transport and communication all mean we can now move less whilst doing more. Our minds are constantly stimulated and busy even though our bodies are often stationary. All these modern developments put entirely new and unique demands on our system and our system is now overloaded with messages and signals it can't identify.

Feeding the mind and nourishing the body is essential during times of stress. Essential fats, B vitamins, magnesium, zinc and others are all depleted by stress so we need to make sure we have a diet that provides enough for now and adequate reserves for later. But have we? Or is our food 'stressing us out' still further?

over produced, under nourished

Alongside our stressful lives we live in an age of stimulants, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and poor diets. Sadly, the British average diet, aptly acronymed BAD, is full of foods that tax our bodies rather than nourish them. These are energy rich, over produced foods that contain few of the essential nutrients needed to feed our mentally active, physically inactive selves in the 21st century. We tend to use the same few ingredients such as white flour, sugar, vegetable oils, alcohol, caffeine and processed meats. Many of these are empty calories that provide little but unhealthy fats, sugar and salt, often using more nutrients to digest than they actually provide in the first place. Some chemicals and toxins in our food and environment are so

unfamiliar that the only thing our bodies can do is to store them out of the way in our fat cells. That makes shedding those extra pounds not only extremely difficult but potentially toxic as well. Our fruits and vegetables (the few that we eat) contain fewer essential vitamins and minerals than ever before making it even more difficult to get the nutrition we need. Many of us with tired minds are trapped on the energy roller coaster, using energy drinks, coffee and sweet foods as weapons of mass stimulation to lift us during the day and then wine to unwind in the evening. This causes our blood sugar levels to go from energetic highs to energy lows until we find our next fix. This is both stressful and inflammatory to our bodies.

primal instincts

So, whilst our bodies need more nutritious, less calorie-dense foods, we have tended to feed ourselves exactly the opposite. In looking for nutritional solutions to this new century we could do a lot worse than taking a step back into our past. Don't get me wrong, I don't think all our ancestors lived a life of nutritious bounty; many of them were far too hungry for that. But personal experience and scientific research have shown us the benefits of eating a more 'primal diet'. A diet based on the foods humans have been eating longest, in terms of our time on this planet, and are well adapted to eating. A primal diet consists of animal foods (meat, fish and eggs), vegetables, fruit, nuts, seeds and water. The animal foods should be from cold water fish or free ranging, grass feed herds and flocks, while the vegetables and fruits should be seasonal and local.

Eating grass fed, free ranging animals provides us with higher levels of health promoting essential fats, higher levels of vitamins and minerals, lower levels of saturated fats and therefore fewer total calories than their grain fed counterparts. They more closely resemble the meats our ancestors ate. Local and seasonal vegetables and fruit are picked and eaten when ripe and at its nutritious best, not picked early then shipped around the globe to be eaten weeks later. On the other hand, nuts and seeds have long been imported into this country. They travel well and contain many essential fats, trace minerals and additional fibre lacking in today's foods. The addition of herbs, spices, oils (especially olive oil) and vinegars add aromatic flavours that stimulate digestion and make food more filling and satisfying.

Lastly, take a moment away from the madness - good food is best eaten in a calm, relaxed atmosphere where you can consider and enjoy what you are eating.

Jamie Richards is a nutritionist based in Bristol. He gives consultations throughout Europe as well as talks and workshops. His website can be viewed at www.jamierichards.co.uk

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