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Peas VS. Pills

We can improve our health and enhance our well-being if only we seriously pay attention to what we eat, says homeopath and medical doctor **NANDITA SHAH**. Here is her first dispatch from Auroville where she resides

As a doctor whose interest lies in food, I have given a lot of thought to this topic. Today let me share these thoughts with you.

These days food is chosen by its flavouring. We go to a restaurant and find a large number of chicken dishes, for example, all with different gravies. Similarly, nowadays we get all kinds of snacks in various flavours: different flavours of chips, different flavours of popcorn. We are spoilt by the sheer variety of flavours, and literally spoilt by the lack of quality in the food. Sometimes the flavour becomes more important than the food itself even though it is not the main nutrient. Neglecting nutritional value for taste could be dangerous to our health.

But that's not all. Patients with chronic diseases are prescribed a dietary regimen by their doctors and most of them follow it. Few of them stop to think about whether the regimen is actually making them better. For example, diabetics are asked to reduce their intake of carbohydrates and sugar besides exercising and taking medication. The question is: how many of them have reversed diabetes through this regimen? Most of them continue with the medication and the diet for the rest of their lives. They are never cured of the disease and actually may go on to increase their medication and develop further complications from the disease. Yet they rarely question the diet they follow because they are complacent in the knowledge that all other diabetics are on the same diet as well. The same conundrum applies to patients of osteoporosis who are asked to take calcium and perhaps vitamin D, drink more milk and consume more dairy products. They too continue with this diet for the rest of their lives, and never question it, despite never showing signs of their health substantially improving. So it is with many other diseases.



General confusion about what is healthy

Almost every day, in almost every newspaper there is an article about food. Much of this is dietary advice. Funnily enough, today's article may be contradictory to tomorrow's article. Readers, bombarded with conflicting information, don't really know what advice to follow. The situation with doctors is not much better. The number of hours of nutrition education imparted during medical school is minimal, at the most three to four hours in the whole curriculum. Most doctors get their nutrition education from the same sources as us, from their parents, advertisements, community behaviour and those confusing newspapers. Few people stop to think about whether the information they have is logical or not.

There's a reason why we do not pay too much attention to what we are eating. How to eat is the very first thing our parents teach us. This education takes place at a time when we cannot think independently, and by the time we learn to think for ourselves, we've already been conditioned about what to eat. Our likes and dislikes have been established. Indians like Indian food, Italians like Italian food, Americans like junk food. (sweeping generalisation that may not go down well with American readers? Suggest substitute with: Everyone likes junk food) It's all about conditioning. Perhaps this is why manufacturers get away with selling so much processed foods in the supermarket these days. We believe the advertisements without thinking about their content. We are willing to try almost anything that is advertised well. There are so many misconceptions and conflicting advice about food that we don't even know what to think any more. So we don't.

The Challenge – healthy and tasty

Personally, I would like to get people to think more about the foods they eat because I believe that given a chance to try the healthy options, not only can diseases be reversed, but people will start enjoying their food even more.

To change our minds about food may sound like a difficult task. We are creatures of habit. When we go to a restaurant we tend to order the same dishes over and over again. So, is giving up the food that we are used to the hardest thing of all? Not entirely: more and more ready-made food products come out every day and they have eager takers. So there is a market for new products.

People can be enticed to buy new products even from the health angle, such as when they are told the new food contains probiotics.

Advertisers can be sure nobody will stop to think about whether their general health has improved after consuming a product. www.uptodirects.com at 7/20/2010 8:06:25 PM

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So how can we change our outlook to food and our diet without feeling deprived? I think this can be done in a few simple steps:

1. Look through the myths and come to clear conclusions about what is healthy.
2. Collect a list of a few healthy options that we enjoy. There is no point embarking on this journey and then not knowing what to eat and reverting to old ways.
3. Learn how to deal with temptations.
4. Finally, we can embark on a simple one month challenge and see how it suits us.

Today let's consider a few myths to start the thinking process. In the next article, we will understand in more detail what the healthiest foods are.

Milk, considered Manna

If I were to say animal milk is not healthy for humans, most people would react adversely. There would be all kinds of accusations, starting from, 'Milk has been venerated since Krishna's time, how could it be bad for us?' A little thought would lead us to the logical conclusion, that during Krishna's time, milk was a scarce commodity, stolen by the child God. Not many children in our cities need to steal milk today. Instead, they are forced to drink more milk, even if it means topping the milk with spoonfuls of sugar that everyone knows is not a health food. Not many people know that only 40 years ago, in a city like Mumbai, there was a shortage of milk and it was rationed.

If we were to stop and think logically for a minute, our ideas would change. That just as mother's milk is the perfect food for her baby, and dog's milk is the perfect food for puppies, so is cow's milk and buffalo milk the perfect food for calves. Calves grow to be adult cows in just 18 months, which is why cow's milk contains a potent growth hormone. Humans grow to their adult size in 18 years. What happens when humans consume milk meant for baby calves? If even calves don't drink their mother's milk when they grow up, could it possibly be good for us?

The Protein Myth and Healthy Bones: Challenging our convictions

Take the example of protein. Mothers mix soya flour into atta, give their children protein supplements and urge them to consume more eggs and milk. Yet how many stop to think about how much protein humans really need or even consider how many people they know who suffer from protein deficiency? Is protein deficiency common? What happens if you consume too much protein? Most of us have seen a skeleton or a picture of one. Many may have noticed that skeletons have teeth. This is because teeth are bones. But few, if any, consider the implications of this. We know that fractures can heal if the joint is immobilized. This means cracks and breakages in the bones can heal. Why, then, shouldn't cavities close as well? Why, at the very hint of a cavity, do we go to the dentist to have it drilled and filled? Just because everyone else does? Can cavities close? They should be able to, if they are given the right conditions! They are bones and if bones can heal, so can teeth. In a later article we will discuss what the right conditions to reverse cavities are.



Think about Food in the New Year

When we begin to question our dietary conditioning and apply logic, the answers come to us naturally. We grow, our health improves, and we reverse disease. Question the advertisements and what we are told by the media. Why do they have to keep telling us to drink more milk and eat more eggs? Should we believe the claims of all advertisements? Do our real needs require to be advertised? No one in their right mind would waste their money advertising bananas to a monkey or bones to a dog. Let's embark on this journey by questioning everything and seeing if it stands the test of logic rather than our conditioning.

The author, Dr Nandita Shah is a homeopath and medical doctor who believes that food can be our best medicine. In order to bring this concept home to her patients and the general public she regularly conducts workshops to put forth scientific facts about food and disprove some of the myths. She has conducted the Peas vs. Pills workshop all over India and abroad over the past five years. Now she plans to also conduct workshops on Reversing Diabetes, Reversing Heart Disease and Overcoming Obesity. The next issues will contain more of her articles on Food as a Medicine.