

FIVE GOOD THINGS TO ADD TO YOUR DIET THIS YEAR (AND WHY)

Comprehensive lifestyle modification is important to all of us who wish to take responsibility for our own health. Exercise, stress management, and dietary modification are all important to anyone who wishes to feel better or live longer.

It is becoming increasingly evident that inflammation plays a role in both overweight and cardiovascular disease. Some of the features of what has been called a "Mediterranean Diet" are foods which many people should consider adding to their daily diet. Most Americans would benefit from the addition of the following five items to their regular food intake.

1. FISH

The omega-3 fatty acids which are present in fish oil capsules are, of course, also present in fish. These have been associated with lower levels of cardiovascular disease and improved cholesterol profiles. Fish also provide high quality protein with what is usually a low overall fat content. If you never eat fish, consider eating it occasionally. If you occasionally eat fish, consider having it three times per week. Canned and packaged tuna and salmon can be a great convenience if you are too busy to catch and cook your own. Beyond increasing your fish consumption, fish oil may still be a useful addition to your diet, but you should check with your doctor about this. Remember that fish oil and other omega-3 fat supplements are not a replacement for prescription cholesterol medications.

2. OLIVE OIL

Olive oil is 100% fat, so it should be used in moderation. However, it provides the types of monounsaturated fats which are associated with improved cardiovascular health and proper weight control. Olive oil is the only vegetable oil that is commonly consumed as it is - freshly pressed from the fruit. The beneficial health effects of olive oil are due to both its high content of monounsaturated fatty acids and its high content of antioxidative substances. Studies have shown that olive oil offers protection against heart disease by controlling LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels while raising HDL (the "good" cholesterol) levels. No other naturally produced oil has as large an amount of monounsaturated as olive oil.

Substituting olive oil for less healthy forms of fat like animal fats and other vegetable oils can be a good move for most of us.

3. EGG WHITES

Good quality protein is vital as the basic building material of the body. The best sources of high quality protein are all animal sources and include meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, and eggs. As a source of essential amino acids, good quality protein is particularly important for muscle and brain. Egg whites are essentially pure protein and provide the highest quality protein of all. All of the fat and cholesterol in the egg are concentrated in the yolk. I often recommend three hard-boiled egg whites as the ideal breakfast. If you feed the yolks to your dog it will reportedly give him a nice shiny coat, or if you throw them in the garden they are good for the soil.

4. BERRIES

Berries are excellent sources of the disease-fighting antioxidants which can decrease your risk of cancer, heart disease, and possibly obesity. Raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries are also brimming with vitamins A & C and desirable flavonoids like catechin, epicatechin, quercetin, and anthocyanidin. These are the same desirable flavonoids which provide the red and purple color. While other fruits also provide similar positive benefits, the red, purple, and blue berries are the best sources

which have been studied. The sugars in these fruits are absorbed more slowly than those which are present in starchier foods and in refined sugar, and they make an excellent substitution for desserts and breads.

5. WATER

Water serves numerous vital functions in the body. Adequate water consumption reduces appetite by several mechanisms which are still not well understood. Many people misinterpret thirst and perceive it as hunger. If you drink plenty of water, you may find you are not hungry after all.

Because sugar-sweetened beverages are now the largest single source of calories in the American diet, it is critical that more of us substitute plain water for less desirable calorie-laden beverages. Due to a combination of taste, convenience, and marketing many of us now prefer bottled water. However, our local municipal water supplies are all perfectly adequate and certainly less expensive.

Water is essential for lubrication throughout the body. It is necessary for absorption of various nutrients and for the transportation of them throughout the body. An adequate supply of water is critical for carrying various waste products away from the cells and eliminating them from the body. Indeed, it can be thought of as the most important “food” of all.

© Bartels Medical Associates 2009
218 Ashville Ave., Suite 10
Cary, NC 27518
919.233.6644 www.Dr.Bartels.com