

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Food vs. Nutrients

Hello! My name is Whitney Buckles and I am a Registered Dietitian-- otherwise known as a trained professional in the area of food and nutrition. I am employed at Fairfield Memorial Hospital, where I have been providing inpatient and outpatient nutrition services since 2011. In coming months, I will be sharing information with you about a variety of nutrition-related topics and look forward to providing insight about an oftentimes confusing topic: food.

While some of you may argue that food is a simple topic, I beg to differ. A quick stroll through any supermarket will yield a dizzying amount of beautifully- packaged, eye-catching food products that boastfully flaunt the nutrients contained within. Whole grain Pop-Tarts? Low fat Twizzlers? Common sense tells us that these are not “healthy” choices. So, why are these types of nutrition claims becoming easier and easier to find? This is because somewhere along the line, we stopped focusing on *food* and started focusing on *nutrients*.

Now don't get me wrong, nutrition science has come a long way in identifying and understanding the various vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, etc. in our food supply. And, this information can be useful to help prevent and manage chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. However, the epidemic proportions these diseases are being seen prove that promoting *nutrients* may not be the answer. You see, when you isolate a nutrient (fiber, for example) from the whole food (apple) you make an assumption that the nutrient (fiber) will produce the same effects (lower cholesterol) no matter what food product you put it in. However, what if there is something else in the apple that we haven't identified yet that lowers cholesterol? Or, what if apples lower cholesterol because the fiber works along with some other nutrient compound present in the apple? By choosing the apple instead of a fiber-fortified food product, you put the nutrient back in its original context and don't have to answer those questions.

The point of all this is, when we abandon common sense and allow pretty packages and marketing efforts to determine our food purchases, our health suffers. So, what do I suggest? Get back to the basics. Seek out food in its whole or least-processed form. Cook and season your food at home more often instead of relying on pre-cooked convenience items or eating out. Do the majority of your grocery shopping around the perimeter of the store and be wary of food products in the middle aisles (even those that have nutrients claims on the front of the package). Fill at least half of your plate with fruits and vegetables. Getting the most out of your diet sometimes means stepping back from all the nutrition information that is circulating, trusting your intuition, and simply choosing...food. To quote Michael Pollan in his book *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”

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