



## Your Health: Slow and Steady Wins the Race

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in *Do It Green! Magazine*, 2011 edition



There was a time, in the not too distance past, when choosing what to eat was simple. It entailed a jaunt to the garden or orchard and harvesting what was in season or venturing to the cellar for canned green beans or peaches. Meats were processed at the local butcher and cured for longevity. Maybe you traded raspberries for apples with a neighbor.

Until the proliferation of food processing, standardization, and packaging in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, trading, foraging for, or growing your own food was a way of life for most Americans. People spent a great deal of time planting, tending livestock, harvesting, preparing, and preserving. It was a matter of survival and while undoubtedly stressful at times, the sunshine and physical activity that accompanied the procuring of your own whole, unadulterated foods lent itself to a natural lifestyle much different than what most of us experience today.

### The Luxury of Convenience?

Nowadays, we have foods from numerous climates and cultures at our fingertips and aisles of ready-made meals and snacks proudly displayed in a kaleidoscope of packaging. Our choices are nothing short of staggering. Yet things are more complicated. Sadly, much of what is in processed foods does not deserve to be called food. Add to this a dizzying array of choices and diet gurus touting “the way” and we’re left overwhelmed with information and understandably confused about what to eat. According to Michael Pollan, author of *Food Rules*, “But for all the scientific and pseudoscientific food baggage we’ve taken on in recent years, we *still* don’t know what we should be eating.”

We’re busy being busy and for many folks, food procurement and preparation have taken a backseat to our modern day priorities. We’re working long hours. We’re commuting long distances. Both parents work outside of the home. No wonder we’ve become intoxicated with the post-World War II “heat it and eat it” culture. According to Marc David, visionary nutrition consultant and author of *The Slow Down Diet* and *Nourishing Wisdom*, “Many people are caught in a bind of what I call the one-minute eater. For these people, nourishment is secondary to taking care of business. Eating is no longer a basic need but a nuisance to be squeezed into the schedule.”

Today, we’re generally sicker, more stressed, and less physically fit than our forebears and have transferred the food-on-demand mentality to healthcare. We don’t have time to be sick, and there is always a well-intentioned doctor ready to write a prescription for what ails us. The problem is that many pharmaceuticals have serious side effects and most merely mask symptoms, inciting a false sense of security and leaving the inflammatory condition to lurk within. Drugs (arguably) improve quality of life (in the short term, like pain relievers), but there exists no drug that *cures* any of our modern diseases.

# HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



## **They Don't Make 'Em Like They Used To**

Most supermarket bread is not what bread used to be. It's full of high fructose corn syrup, a sweetener from corn that the body doesn't know how to digest, and contains highly processed grains, stripped of any nutritional integrity. Conventional meat isn't what meat used to be. It's full of growth hormones and antibiotics (from abused animals, but that's another story), which have been linked to early puberty and antibiotic resistance. Conventional produce is not what produce used to be. It's genetically modified, irradiated, prematurely harvested, and sprayed with chemical pesticides.

Herein lies our true health crisis. While indeed, there are folks who regularly eat fast and packaged foods, there are others who are eating what they believe to be whole foods, but the processing and adulteration these foods have undergone is compromising their health. Many are unaware of what our bigger, faster, cheaper food culture is doing to our collective wellbeing.

The devastating impact of processed convenience foods has contributed to overwhelming rates of degenerative disease, including obesity and Type II diabetes, and I would argue that the processing of conventional, mass produced meat, dairy, and produce has significantly contributed to this crisis. Add to this our modern stresses and a sedentary lifestyle, and we've got a recipe for an unhealthy society. According to Dr. Kara Parker of the Family Medical Center in Minneapolis, "Humans used to get up and go to bed with the sun and spend their days outside eating whole, fresh foods. Periods of stress were short. Today, stressors are constant: busy lifestyles, bad diets, lack of sleep."

## **How Did We Get Here?**

When it comes to degenerative diseases, it should be understood that it takes a long time to become ill. What came about over time cannot be resolved overnight. The beautiful thing is that, with a commitment to healing, patience, and informed food and lifestyle choices, most diseases are reversible. The body is an amazing machine, always seeking homeostasis and constantly looking to rebalance itself. With proper nutrients from clean, whole foods, adequate sleep, stress reduction, and the right exercise, what can happen is nothing less than miraculous. According to Dr. Joseph Mercola, also known as *The Ultimate Wellness Game Changer*, "What the drug industry and the FDA absolutely do not want you to learn is that healing foods, herbs, and supplements make virtually all pharmaceuticals obsolete."

## **A Grain of Hope**

With the proliferation of recent films such as *King Corn*, *Fresh*, and *Food, Inc.*, and Michael Pollan's bestseller *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, my sincere hope is that more people understand what has become of the food industry in this country. There is undoubtedly a local, organic, sustainable foods groundswell bubbling, and fortunately, Minnesota is leading the pack in many respects.

Since the early 1970s, we've made strides in creating a healthier and more sustainable food system, but there is much work to be done. People have become increasingly concerned about how their food is grown and who grows it. In my estimation, it's nearing fever pitch and we're in for a food movement. Not a trend, but a much-needed movement. A recent Context Marketing ethical food study showed that 69% of people were willing to pay more for ethically produced food.

# HEALTHFUL ELEMENTS



The recent downturn in the economy, while difficult, has encouraged many folks to get back to basics and back into their kitchens. People are growing gardens and preserving, young people are farming, more people are biking to work, vacations are spent simply enjoying the outdoors, the unemployed are finding time to get fit, and people are accepting their situations and eschewing their former high-stress lifestyles for something simpler. The economy will always ebb and flow, but the sustainable food and health movement is steamrolling forward.

## **What You Can Do:**

- Buy locally grown foods and other locally produced products
- Grow a garden
- Take a cooking class
- Shop at your local farmers' market
- Take a food preservation class
- Join a community garden
- Bike to work
- Compost
- Become a member of and shop at you local cooperative grocery store
- Buy a share in a CSA (community supported agriculture)
- Do 10 minutes of deep breathing every day
- Say no to more things
- Get regular exercise that's right for your body
- Eat only whole, unprocessed grains
- Eat as much organic grains, produce, meat, and dairy as your budget will allow
- Dine at restaurants that feature local and sustainable foods
- Host a screening of the movie Fresh