

NOVEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Early last month I attended an interesting two-day workshop on nutrition. Although generally seminars are designed to hi-light new research findings, Dr. Burford-Mason, the workshops' primary presenter was very emphatic that it is general nutrition that contributes most to ones' health, not "super-foods". This is an opinion shared by Du and I. Often, as a result of media reportage, the public develops the impression that increasing their intake of a single food that has been shown to contribute to the prevention of a specific chronic illness (a recent example is pomegranate) is the most effective thing they can do for their health.

The reality is that the four dietary factors for which there is the strongest evidence with respect to impact on human health are fruit and vegetable intake (more is better), glycemic load (the degree to which a food increases blood-sugar a particular food has; less is better), body-weight (lower is better) and alcohol intake (less than two drinks daily is better).

In the year 2000, seven of the top 10 causes of death, including the top four (heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive lung disease) were diet-related. In 1900 these numbers were three and one (heart disease was fourth on the list) respectively.

Life expectancy aside, health expectancy measures ones' disability-free years of life. In the year 2000, Canada ranked 12th in the world with an average of 72 years. Canadians' life expectancy is 80.2 years. For those not so strong with "the math", that's eight years in poor health.

IN THE NEWS ...

To all of you expectant mothers and people planning to start a family: Good nutrition is important before birth as well as well as after. Some practical evidence of this can be found in a study published on-line in 2007 at the Public Library of Science (PloS ONE 2[8]:e666). In this study 11,106 pregnant women were health-assessed according to a variety of simple signs including vitality of eyes; health of skin, hair and teeth; posture and muscular development. Women whose health was determined to be poor were at greater risk for complications during pregnancy, and their children were more likely to be of low-birth and five-year weights. Fifty years later, researchers did a follow-up study with 97% of the children originally studied and found that they were at increased risk for heart disease, stroke and lung cancer.

It is possible that unhealthy parents teach their children unhealthy habits, and this may account for these children's health outcomes as adults, but evidence exists that poor maternal health affects children on a genetic level as well. A 2004 review article in the *Journal of Nutrition* (issue 134, pages 2169-72) concluded that poor *in utero* nutrition alters the way that genes are expressed, resulting the child being more genetically predisposed to chronic disease. The premise of this theory, called nutrigenomics, is that, as vitamins and minerals are essential in many biochemical processes, including protein production (genes are proteins), dietary deficiencies (or excesses) can adversely affect gene production and thus have lifelong consequences.

Please consult with Du if you are planning a pregnancy – good nutrition really does make a difference.

HEALTH TIP

How does one go about increasing their health expectancy? By eating a diet conforming more closely to what the Harvard School of Public Health describes as the "prudent diet" – a diet high in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, fish and poultry.

To balance your intake and serving size, at each meal eat a palm-sized serving of meat or other protein source (e.g., tofu, egg), a palm-sized serving of whole grain or starchy vegetables (e.g., bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, squash, carrots) and two handfuls of non-starchy vegetables or fruit, preferably of different colors (as the colour of a vegetable or fruit generally reflects the phytochemicals it contains, and different colours therefore represent greater variety). For another take on this approach, see our April 2008 newsletter.

Also, further to our latest newsletter on the ONQI, the latest foods ratings are available at www.nuval.com.