

[IMAGE]

Diet Plans With A Purpose

By Tina Beaudoin, ND

Every person is unique and as such they will have varying needs based on the individual's genetics and current state of health. Some people prefer to accomplish their health goals through diet and lifestyle alone, while others may opt to rely heavily on supplementation or pharmaceutical interventions. Nutrition, exercise and mental health are important predictors of whether or not you enjoy health and vitality versus illness and lethargy. In terms of nutrition, Socrates said it best; "Let food be thy medicine and medicine by thy food." Sleep, hydration and environmental exposures also play a considerable role in wellness, but for the purposes of this discussion, we will explore nutrition and diets that target specific elevated cholesterol and diabetes.

Pop media has shone the spotlight on many fad diets like the Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet, but there are additional options that can help you target specific health conditions that go beyond the goal of losing weight. For example, the Mediterranean Diet supports cardiovascular health using Mediterranean-style cooking that focuses on primarily plant-based foods as well as fish, poultry and olive oil. There is also the anti-candida diet that eliminates intake of foods that contain yeast and high-glycemic foods to help re-balance intestinal flora. The Elimination Diet is the gold standard when your objective is to identify and remove food sensitivities. The DASH Diet has a list of recommendations to help control elevated blood pressure that focuses on limiting sodium intake while emphasizing vegetables, fruits and low-fat dairy products.

Elevated cholesterol and diabetes are prevalent conditions in which a targeted diet plan can offer tremendous benefit. Nearly 71 million Americans have elevated cholesterol and less than half of them seek treatment. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than 16 million people are diagnosed with diabetes in our country. In addition, it is estimated that there are 7 million undiagnosed cases and an astounding 79 million people are considered pre-diabetic. The Portfolio Diet and the Low-Glycemic Index Diet are two great examples of how a targeted diet can help individuals "let food be thy medicine."

Portfolio Diet

The Portfolio Diet is a two-fold plan that is designed to help reduce elevations in cholesterol. In a review of clinical studies, the Portfolio Diet was found to reduce LDL cholesterol by 22% to 30% after one month when all food was provided. A community-based study found a 15% reduction in cholesterol after six months. The first part of the recommendations involves following the Formal Step II dietary guidelines devised from the National Cholesterol Education Project which permits total fat calories to account for less than 30% of total dietary intake with less than 7% from saturated fat and less than 200mg per day of cholesterol.

As the name suggests, the second part of the diet relies on a business strategy of utilizing a diverse array of nutritional "investments" to increase returns. Four specific types of foods encompass the second set of recommendations that include:

- Plant sterols (1 gram per 1,000 calories)
- Soy proteins (21.4 grams per 1,000 calories)
- Almonds (14 grams per 1,000 calories)
- Soluble fiber (10 grams per 1,000 calories)

Sterols are the cholesterol made by plants that block the absorption of cholesterol in the digestive track. Sterols are found in small amounts in legumes, vegetables, grains, nuts and seeds. To achieve the target recommendation of sterols it will likely be necessary to use supplements or consume sterol fortified foods. Eating a handful of unsalted almonds (as well as cashews or walnuts) is an easy way to incorporate the nut recommendation. Reading labels and enjoying a regular intake of soy and colorful vegetables will help you reach the fiber and soy protein goals.

Low Glycemic Index Diet

It does not have the catchiest name but the results are fantastic when lowering blood sugar is your goal. Glycemic index refers to the amount of glucose released into your blood within two hours of a meal. As diabetes mellitus is one of the largest and most costly chronic disease facing Americans, learning to identify and incorporate low glycemic foods into your diet is a healthy step on the road to preventing or managing diabetes.

Foods with a high glycemic index release glucose faster into the bloodstream than low glycemic index foods. A quick rush of sugar into the blood stream puts a strain on the pancreatic cells that secrete insulin.

Chronic strain on these cells will lead to decreased production and insulin resistance, precursors to diabetes. Balancing your meals and snacks with a combination of low glycemic-index carbohydrates, fats and proteins will help slow the release of glucose into the blood stream and support healthy blood sugar control.

Most people can guess that maple syrup, honey and high fructose corn syrup are at the high end while lentils, beans and nuts are at the low end of the glycemic index. White rice, breads and pasta are also at the high end of the spectrum along with popcorn and corn flakes. Whole vegetables and legumes nearly all have a low glycemic load with exceptions including white potatoes, corn, carrots and parsnips that are higher glycemic index veggies. Melons, pineapples and grapes are higher glycemic index fruits and should be minimized.

At the onset, it be challenging for individuals to remain compliant on a targeted diet plan. This is especially true when foods seem completely foreign. Consider adding the support of a licensed nutritionist to lend expertise in learning new foods and recipes. There are also low glycemic index applications available for smart phones, as well as numerous sites online to help individuals make sure they are purchasing specific low glycemic and low cholesterol foods. Be sure to enjoy the process by seeking support and keeping an open mind, as there are the many delicious options available.

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