

[IMAGE]

Reading is Fundamental

By Nancy Irven, DC

We eat for a variety of reasons - because a particular food tastes good, as part of socializing, boredom, or just because the clock says, "Time to eat!" Occasionally, we even eat because we are actually hungry. When we do eat, for whatever reason, our health depends on whether or not we choose superior nutrition.

Essentially, we can define superior nutrition as whole foods that humans have consumed for hundreds of years. Examples include vegetables, fruits, meat, eggs, cheese, whole grains, nuts, seeds and fats.

My review of more than 1,000 diet diaries reveals that these whole foods do not constitute the majority of calories in most people's diets. What I find are numerous packaged products, heavily advertised as "heart healthy," "low fat," "100 percent RDA" and "lowers cholesterol." Most of these packaged products contain one or more of the following ingredients: enriched wheat, trans fats (partially hydrogenated vegetable oil) and high-fructose corn syrup. These three ingredients are prevalent in our food supply - yet they are basically "empty calories," lacking any nutritional value. In addition to the health benefits of avoiding these three ingredients, you can also avoid many chemicals and additives by association.

Enriched Wheat

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The word *enriched* actually sounds pretty healthy. The whole wheat contains the bran, germ and endosperm. The refined wheat kernel has had the bran and germ removed. The majority of the nutrients are in the bran and the germ. These include many B vitamins, healthy fats, minerals, fiber and more than 99 phytonutrients known to prevent disease. What is left is the endosperm. The endosperm is ground into flour and bleached to produce the popular white flour. This white flour can be mixed with water to make a very effective paste. As a child, I watched my mother mix flour and water to make paste to put on wallpaper. This flour is clearly not superior nutrition. If you mix whole-wheat flour and water together, however, you cannot make glue and hang wallpaper. Most flour is enriched with five ingredients: niacin, reduced iron, thiamin mononitrate, riboflavin and folic acid. The enrichment of five synthetically produced nutrients from questionable sources, (thiamin mononitrate is derived from coal tar from China) does not make this enriched grain a source of superior nutrition.

Manufacturers use a variety of methods to mask that a grain is not whole. They use phrases like "wheat flour," "stone ground," "cracked wheat," "multigrain," "durum semolina," "unbleached," "enriched" and "fortified." This information is found in the list of ingredients, but not in the nutrition box. If the ingredient list does not say "whole wheat," then it has been refined. The front of the package may say, "Made with whole wheat," but I recommend you look at the list of ingredients. In many products, *whole wheat* is not listed first, which means it is not the main ingredient.

Trans Fats

There are many well-documented dangers of consuming trans fats. In the March 2004 issue of *Harvard Women's Health Watch*, a study revealed that nearly 30,000 U.S. women die annually of heart attacks and strokes due to trans fat consumption. Trans fats are clearly not superior nutrition. On the front of a food package, the manufacturer may state, "Zero trans fats." However, when you look at the list of ingredients, you may still see the words "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil," which is just another name for trans fat. This means even though the front of the package promises zero trans fats, the product actually *contains* trans fats! How do they get away with this? If a serving size contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fats, then, by law, the product can be advertised as containing zero. The manufacturer can accomplish this by reducing the serving size to a very small amount. Who eats only six chips? When you see the words "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" in the ingredient list, I recommend you choose another product. The study in *Health Watch* stated that there was no acceptable level of trans fat consumption. Yet there are thousands of products on grocery store shelves, and many in your cupboard, that contain them. My review of diet diaries tells me trans fats are still a staple in our diets.

High-Fructose Corn Syrup

I've chosen high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) as the third ingredient to avoid on a label because it is so prevalent in our food supply and has such a profound effect on the body. Most people are consuming gallons of it in their sodas, fruit juices, cakes, cookies, breads and even health food products. HFCS entered our food supply in the early 1970s. This man-made sugar is exceptionally sweet, so manufacturers can use less. It is also very cheap, so manufacturers have higher profits. My review of diet diaries revealed that in many cases, 50 percent or more of calories were coming from products with HFCS. These calories offer no nutritional benefits. There is evidence it may be even worse than just empty calories. HFCS metabolizes differently than sugar and may be responsible for higher triglycerides. It also does not cause the release of

the hormone leptin, which makes us feel full. Therefore, a person can eat a package of cookies and several sodas and not feel full, which, of course, can contribute to obesity. The super-sweetness of HFCS can also become the preferred taste in a snack. Many people no longer enjoy the sweetness of fruit and other healthy snacks because they prefer the flavor of HFCS.

As you can tell, enriched wheat, trans fats and high-fructose corn syrup definitely do not provide nutrient-dense, superior nutrition. Yet they constitute up to 90 percent of consumed calories for many people. My recommendation is to start reading the ingredient label on all packaged foods. Avoid all products with these three ingredients. Choose more fruits, vegetables, lean meats, dairy, nuts, seeds, beans and whole grains. Flavor them when necessary with natural sweeteners and fats that have not been created in a laboratory. Remember, if people have been eating it for hundreds of years, it is probably OK to eat, because humans are still here. Choose superior nutrition and enjoy vibrant health!

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