

Chicken Soup For the Nutritionally Deprived **By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB**

“The truth is that vitamins are very good for you, and each morning you should take a Vitamin A pill followed by a Vitamin D, followed by an E until you have spelled out the helpful mnemonic phrase “A DEAD CAD BAKED A BAD CAKE, ACE”. This will probably be plenty of vitamins for you...”

- Dave Barry

“Stay Fit and Healthy Until You’re Dead”

“Better Living Through Chemistry” was a slogan used by General Electric back in the days when television was in black & white. And today it seems that you need a degree in chemistry to figure out what’s best for your nutritional needs.

Terms like “antioxidants”, and “trans-fats” that pertain to nutrition and good health are being bandied about just like “low-carb” was a few years ago. So what do they all mean? Funny you should ask.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines antioxidants as chemical compounds or substances that inhibit (hold back) oxidation. These substances include Vitamins E, C, beta- carotene and the mineral, selenium, and are thought to protect the body from the damaging effects of oxidation.

Oxidation is a normal process that takes place in the cells of our body as a result of regular metabolism. Metabolism, in turn is defined as a chemical process within our cells that breaks down substances to yield energy and creates substances necessary for life.

Pretty heavy stuff so far, isn’t it? Stay with me, it gets more interesting.

Oxidation causes damage to our cells and it is believed that the cumulative damage causes aging and eventually death. It can be accelerated by pollution, exposure to sunlight, alcohol and smoking.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see that slowing down the process would be helpful to living a longer life. So, how can we slow down this process? More chemistry, first.

Our body has certain particles called “free radicals” floating about- not the same as the free radicals enrolled in many American colleges in the ’60’s.

These free radicals are either charged ions or some form of the oxygen molecule. In order to re-establish their stability, they look to steal an electron from their surroundings. This usually means they take one from one of our own healthy cells. As a result we either end up with a little damage to our cell’s DNA (genetic material) or a dysfunctional protein. All these damages can add up.

But, there's good news. Antioxidants are chemicals that generously give up their own electron to the free radicals thus sparing us the cellular damage. However, every time they neutralize a free radical they stop being able to function- kind of like committing chemical suicide.

That is why we need to constantly re-supply our bodies with vitamins and other chemicals that act as antioxidants. Nutritionists tell us that the best way to do this is by eating food rich in these substances rather than to rely on unproven supplements.

According to the famous talk show host Larry King (who has had more wives than another famous King- Henry the VIII), grape juice is a good source for Vitamin C. So are citrus fruits, broccoli, green leafy vegetables, strawberries, potatoes, and raw cabbage.

You can get plenty of Vitamin E from wheat germ, nuts, whole grains, fish-liver oil and those same green leafy vegetables.

Sources of beta-carotene include carrots, squash, apricots, peaches, cantaloupes, broccoli, tomatoes, kale, collards and sweet potatoes.

Fish, grains, eggs, chicken and garlic are good sources of selenium.

Green tea contains high levels of Vitamins C and E, and beta-carotene as well. Oil of Oregano is also rich in antioxidants.

All of these substances are thought to be effective in helping fight many of the diseases we face in our society today like cancer, strokes and heart disease.

On the other side of the kitchen table, there are substances containing "trans-fats" which are not so good for our bodies. Trans-fats have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease. They are formed when hydrogen is added to vegetable oils to improve shelf life and stabilize the flavor of food.

But they can also be very harmful in humans. They lower good cholesterol and reduce the quality of many of our natural hormones.

If a product ingredient is listed as "partially hydrogenated" that means that at least some trans-fats are created in the product. Sources of trans-fats include vegetable shortening, margarine, deep fried chips, and packaged breads, cookies and crackers.

Beginning January 1st of this year, new rules on food labeling began making it easier for consumers to avoid artery-clogging trans-fats.

Good nutrition is essential for good health. We all have choices we can make to enrich our diets and to ensure a healthier life.

In closing I would like to pose a BURNING question that people are ITCHING to get an answer to:

“What ever happened to Preparations A through G?” I’d like to get to the bottom of this.

(Lou Lombardo is a NYS Licensed Massage Therapist, nationally certified by the NCBTMB and is a certified Strength Training Specialist. For questions, comments or more information you can contact him at (585) 734-2200 or by e-mail at lombardolm@aol.com)