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The Kitchen Transition

by Lori Lapinski

For many people the concept of "eating healthy" means sticking to a temporary diet for a short period of time. But when you truly understand what it means to eat healthy, you realize this is not just something cool to do for a little while and then quit, it's something you need to do everyday.

Eating healthy is a way of life. For most people this transition can be a little overwhelming at first. Many people are so afraid to change, they never do. Others make changes, but easily give up and go back to their old ways. Some jump in head first and change everything, but have no idea where to go from there. Sure, when it comes right down to it, most people want to be healthier, but just don't really know how to make it happen.

If you want to be healthy, it makes sense to stop doing things that make you unhealthy. This article will help you get started making the kitchen transition by getting rid of six ingredients that compromise your health. You'll also learn why these foods should be eliminated from your diet and what foods to replace them with.

Pick a day for your kitchen makeover. Get out a big trash can and then open up the refrigerator and all your cupboards. Now you are ready to begin.

Refined Sugar and Artificial Sweeteners

In today's over-processed, sugar-crazed society the average person consumes 154 pounds of sugar per year. That's 53 teaspoons of sugar per day. Now let's pretend that sugar actually has some benefits. Eating one-half pound per day may not seem like such a bad idea but the truth is that refined sugar has absolutely no nutritional value whatsoever. Not only does it completely lack nutritional value, it also robs the body of enzymes, minerals and vitamins, especially B-vitamins.

Symptoms of B-vitamin deficiency include: fatigue, depression, anxiety, inability to concentrate, poor memory, insomnia, rapid/irregular heart beat, swollen/inflamed tongue, dry skin around the nose and cracking around the lips. Considering the amount of sugar consumed in this country, it's no surprise so many Americans suffer from symptoms of a B-vitamin deficiency.

Eating too much sugar also creates blood sugar imbalances in the body. When blood sugar drops too low (shortly after eating a high-sugar meal or snack) the fuel supply to the body is impaired, with adverse effects on mental function, physical energy and emotional stability. Symptoms of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can range anywhere from headaches, irritability and shaking when hungry to explosive anger, panic attacks, or crying easily for no apparent reason. Not only can sugar affect the quality of your day but it can also make you sick. Many studies have shown that sugar is very effective in weakening the immune system and is a source of fuel for feeding

cancer and tumors.

In an attempt to avoid the problems associated with sugar, many people have been convinced that artificial sweeteners are a better alternative. The word artificial should give you a clue that they are not. Artificial sweeteners are associated with cancer, weight gain, increased cravings for sweets, impaired coordination, decreased mental function, diabetes, MS, Parkinson's, seizures and migraine headaches.

Trash It

It's fair to say that no other food contributes to as many health problems as sugar. So if you want to achieve your optimum health potential, avoiding sugar is the best place to start. You can begin your kitchen transition by throwing out that big bag of sugar and all those little packets of artificial sweeteners. Then get rid of all the products in your cupboards and refrigerator that are made with refined sugar (sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, maltodextrin). This will include all commercial brands of cookies, candy, pop, ice cream, pastry, cakes and pies. It may seem like a good idea to pass these foods along to family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers but considering the problems caused by excess sugar consumption, it's best just to throw them out. Even if it seems like a waste of money at the time, the savings in your health, and the health of those you care about, will be well worth it.

Stash It

The best sweeteners to use are those that occur naturally such as raw cane sugar (Rapadura), pure maple syrup, raw honey or molasses. These are best used for baking. Stevia, an herb that is much sweeter than sugar but does not affect blood sugar levels, can be used for sweetening beverages (if necessary in the initial stages of transitioning your diet). Keep in mind that even natural sweeteners can affect your blood sugar and contribute to cravings for sweets. For this reason it's best to avoid eating sweets by themselves; instead include dessert made with whole foods as part of a balanced meal, no more than 2-3 times per week.

Good fats and protein help to stabilize blood sugar and reduce cravings for sweets. A steak with some steamed veggies and butter, a salad topped with a dressing based on olive oil and a couple of naturally sweetened cookies would be a healthy and balanced way to include dessert. Avoid having dessert with a meal that is high in carbohydrates like pasta, bread or rice. (Nourishing Traditions is loaded with many incredible dessert recipes!)

White Flour

Now that you've eliminated the sweet sugar from your kitchen, your next step is to get rid of the "other" sugar - white flour. White flour breaks down just like sugar in the body and can lead to many of the same problems as white sugar.

During the process of turning whole wheat into white flour, the B-vitamins as well as vitamin E, calcium, zinc, copper, manganese, potassium and fiber are removed. Due to the lack of fiber in white flour, it is a major contributing factor to constipation and other bowel problems.

Wheat is also a major allergen and can cause reactions such as headaches, fatigue, malabsorption, irritability, upper respiratory congestion, nausea, diarrhea and other bowel

disorders like celiac and Crohn's disease.

Trash It

Search for anything in your kitchen made with enriched wheat flour and toss it out. That includes most commercial breads, crackers, pasta, bagels and stuff like pancake mixes. While you're at it, you can throw out white rice and all other processed grains such as corn bread mixes, instant oatmeal, and all processed grain cereals - even if they are organic. During the extrusion processing of whole grain flakes and puffed cereals, high temperatures and intense pressure destroy nutrients, cause fragile oils to become rancid, and make the processed cereals very difficult to digest.

Stash It

Although many commercial brands offer "whole grain" breads available at the grocery store, there are none that I really recommend. In most cases, the bread is still made from enriched wheat flour with a few whole grains added in. And even if the bread is made purely from whole grain, it most likely still contains unhealthy ingredients like high fructose corn syrup and partially hydrogenated oil.

To get good quality whole grain bread, you're going to have to take a ride to your local health food store. Look for bread that is made from whole grains, even better organic, sprouted whole grains. My favorite brand of bread is Alvarado St. Bakery, which is available at most natural food stores. If yours doesn't carry it, ask them to. It's a light bread with a chewy texture, a perfect sandwich bread.

You can also find whole grain pasta and bagels, however, they are extremely high in carbohydrates and have a major effect on blood sugar. So unless you can use control to limit the portion of those foods and eat them sparingly, it's best not to eat them at all.

Despite the fact that 98 percent of the wheat consumed in this country is refined wheat flour, surprisingly, it is pretty easy to find whole wheat flour at almost any grocery store. Keep in mind, however, that shortly after wheat is ground it begins to lose its nutrient value and quickly goes rancid. So if you plan to do any baking with whole grains, it is best to grind them yourself (For more information on how to properly prepare whole grains, see *Nourishing Traditions*.)

Hydrogenated Vegetable Oils

For many years the media have told us to replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats, like those from vegetable oils. This is not very good advice considering that, in the process of producing vegetable oils, toxic chemicals and high temperatures are used to extract the oil from the seed or bean. In this process, virtually all of the nutritional value has been destroyed, not to mention the fact that high temperatures turn the oil rancid before you even bring it home.

Even worse, most vegetable oils in processed foods have been hydrogenated, a process that rearranges the fatty acid molecules and creates trans fatty acids. Not only are trans fats difficult to digest, but they have also been implicated as a cause of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and sterility.

Trash It

Since most packaged food that contains sugar and white flour also contain hydrogenated oil, you should have already eliminated those foods from your kitchen anyway. Hydrogenated oils are found in almost all processed foods, commercial salad dressings, sandwich spreads and, of course, margarine. Rather than just throw away these items, rinse out the containers and recycle them- at least it won't be a total waste.

Stash It

A "must have" in your kitchen is real butter. Butter is a rich source of fat soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K and contains important minerals like manganese, zinc, chromium, and iodine. The saturated fat in butter enhances our immune function, protects the liver from toxins, provides nourishment for the heart in times of stress, gives stiffness and integrity to our cell membranes, and aids in the proper utilization of omega-3 essential fatty acids. Butter will add extra nutrients and flavor to your vegetables, whole grain breads and sautéed dishes. Butter produced without the use of hormones, steroids, and antibiotics is available at natural food stores and even many grocery stores.

Another important oil to stock in your kitchen is olive oil. Olive oil is a rich source of antioxidants, relieves the pain and inflammation of arthritis, normalizes blood fats and cholesterol, stimulates strong gallbladder contractions, and is known for increasing longevity. Olive oil can be used for sautéing at moderate temperatures and is a perfect base for salad dressings.

Another fat you may want to try is coconut oil, a once-maligned but very healthy fat that is making a come back. Coconut oil is a rich source of medium-chain saturated fatty acids, especially lauric acid, which has strong antifungal and antimicrobial properties. Coconut oil is extremely heat stable and can be used in baking, frying, sautéing, and especially for making popcorn! I recommend unrefined, organic coconut oil from Garden of Life--available online or at many natural food stores.

Commercial Dairy

We have been told for years to drink milk because it's good for our bones and makes us strong and healthy. But milk is only as good as its source. Unfortunately, it is common practice for commercial dairies to keep their cows in confinement with little or no access to pasture. Instead of their natural grass diet, cows are fed a diet of grain. Grain feeding leads to digestive disorders in the cow and diminishes the nutrient content of the milk, particularly vitamins A, D and CLA (conjugated linoleic acid, a fatty acid naturally occurring in grass-fed beef and milk that reduces body fat and protects against cancer).

Furthermore, corn and soy, which make up the bulk of a cow's grain diet, are commonly genetically engineered foods that receive heavy doses of pesticides. Commercial dairy cows are also given hormones and antibiotics, which ultimately affect the consumer.

Another thing to consider is the processing of milk. Once the milk is exposed to heat through pasteurization, enzymes and beneficial bacteria are destroyed, and the availability of nutrients like B-vitamins, vitamin C, calcium, and fat-soluble vitamins A, D, and E is greatly diminished. Consumption of commercial milk has been linked to many health conditions, such as allergies, asthma, atherosclerosis, diabetes, chronic infections (especially upper respiratory and ear

infections), obesity, osteoporosis and prostate, ovarian, breast and colon cancer.

Trash It

Considering where commercial milk has been and what it has been through, it's best to avoid it altogether. Clean out your fridge and get rid of commercial milk and all other commercial dairy products, such as yogurt, sour cream, and cottage cheese - and don't forget to recycle!

Stash It

To avoid unnecessary hormones, antibiotics, and pesticides in dairy, it's best to buy organic dairy products. Stock up on raw cheese and good quality whole milk yogurt. These foods are available at natural food stores and even at many grocery stores. Even if you can find organic milk at the store, it has still been pasteurized or even ultrapasteurized, destroying many of the nutritional benefits of the milk. So unless you can get milk in its natural state, raw and unprocessed, just skip it.

Caffeinated Beverages

Caffeine addiction is a serious problem for many people, even those who are health-conscious. But no matter how good your diet may be, that innocent little cup of coffee in the morning can wreak havoc on your health for the rest of the day.

Caffeine stimulates the adrenal glands, leading eventually to adrenal exhaustion and symptoms like fatigue, lack of physical endurance and stamina, impaired ability to deal with stress, depressed immune system, allergic reactions, weight gain, low blood pressure, dizziness and lightheadedness or blacking out when standing up.

Caffeine also stimulates the liver to release more sugar in the blood stream and further stresses the body's delicate sugar-regulating mechanism. Besides creating major hormonal imbalances in the body, caffeine also impairs calcium absorption. This is a major concern for children who consume a lot of soft drinks while their bones are still developing.

Trash It

So if you still haven't kicked your caffeine habit, there's no better time than now. Simply get rid of all caffeinated coffee and tea (and soft drinks, if you haven't done so yet).

But it may not be so simple if you're seriously addicted to caffeine. You may actually need a little time to wean off of it. But you can do it, in fact, you need to if you want to achieve your true health potential. So, start by cutting your caffeine intake in half, do that for one week, and then cut it in half again, and continue until you are no longer consuming caffeine. This will probably require you to make huge changes in your lifestyle, both at home, at work and even in your car.

It's important to understand why you liked caffeine so much in the first place. If you're like most caffeine addicts, chances are you rely on caffeine to pick you up when your energy starts to fizzle out. This can be resolved by eating balanced meals at regular intervals throughout the day. Eating protein-based meals with natural carbohydrates and plenty of good fats will keep your blood sugar stable and reduce your cravings for both sugar and caffeine.

Also, it is important to get enough rest at night, which is sometimes easier said than done. But, if you plan ahead and use your time more wisely during the day, you will most likely be able to squeeze some more, well deserved time into your sleep schedule.

Finally, if you are feeling sleepy in the afternoon, there is nothing wrong with dozing off for ten minutes or so - a short nap can be extremely refreshing.

Stash It

The best way to kick a bad habit is to replace it with a better one. Don't just stop drinking caffeinated beverages, start drinking healthier beverages- and there's nothing better than water.

Not drinking enough water can lead to symptoms like: dizziness, feeling lightheaded, nausea, stomach ache, muscle cramping, confusion, headache, and fatigue. Ideally, we should all drink $\frac{1}{2}$ our body weight in ounces of water each day. So if you weigh 150 lbs. you should drink 75 oz. of water everyday, and even more if you are physically active. That may sound like a lot of water, but your body really needs it.

We all understand the importance of taking a shower. Well drinking water is like an internal bath that bathes every single cell in the body. Without enough water it would be difficult for the body to eliminate waste- kinda like flushing a toilet without any water in it. Now that's something to think about!

The cleanest water available is filtered through reverse osmosis (R/O). Serious water drinkers should consider investing in an R/O unit that can be installed under the kitchen sink (whole house units are available as well).

If clean, refreshing, tasteless water is a little boring for you, try adding some fresh squeezed lemon or lime juice, or try adding a few drops of essential oils (cinnamon, tangerine, peppermint, etc.). You can also spice up your water with many varieties of naturally "un"caffeinated herbal teas. There are many types of flavored water available at the store, however, almost all of them contain sugar in one form or another. Glacieu makes a fruit infused water without added sugar, which is available at most natural food stores. But remember, when it comes right down to it, there is no substitute for good, clean water.

Commercial Salt

The salt that you find in table salt and most processed foods is sodium chloride. Salt in this form has been processed at high temperatures, which changes the molecular structure and removes vital minerals from the salt. Table salt also contains additives, anticaking agents, and even sugar. Excess salt consumption is associated with high blood pressure, fluid retention, heart and kidney disease.

Trash It

Dump out your salt shaker and toss out all other packaged or processed foods with a high sodium content. This should be pretty easy for most people.

Stash it

We have been told for years to avoid salt, but following this advice can lead to even more problems. We are all salty on the inside - our blood, sweat, tears, and even our urine - it's all salty. It's important to replenish the salt in our body, using the right salt is what makes all the difference in the world.

The best way to put salt back into your body is to use Celtic sea salt. This high quality salt contains over 80 balanced minerals from the sea. Celtic sea salt is essential for maintaining proper fluid balance and utilization in the body. It also normalizes blood pressure, enhances digestion, and nourishes the adrenal glands. Celtic sea salt is available at many natural food stores.

New Beginnings

Well, that was easy, right? Now that you've made the kitchen transition, you have built a solid foundation for your health. It can only get better from here - let the journey begin!

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About the Author

Lori Lipinski is a Certified Nutritional Consultant, lecturer and writer whose articles have been published and quoted in highly respected national and international health journals and books. Lori developed the "Making the Transition" series to help people transition toward a REAL food diet, one step at a time.