



# TO YOUR HEALTH



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## WHAT DIET REALLY IS THE “BEST”?

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

Few people have much confidence in the latest news on current diets and the claims that each in the array of possibilities is the best and healthiest. In his book, *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan presents the thesis that food research has focused on specific nutrients, such as fats or carbohydrates, and has lost the importance of eating as a whole process, creating more confusion than clarity. This research, along with government recommendations based upon it and the multi-billion dollar food industry, may be responsible for the growing obesity epidemic as well as growing concern for food safety. Within this web of conflicting information, is there any voice of sanity that can provide accurate recommendations for a healthy diet?

Strangely enough, the diets of generations ago were very healthy, before the advent of engineered foods. Over the past 75 or more years, foods have been “processed” to create substances that resemble food and have a longer shelf life. In discussing what we can eat to achieve a healthy diet, Pollan recommends “don’t eat anything your great grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food,” for example, cake-like cylinders with cream-like filling called Twinkies that never grow stale!

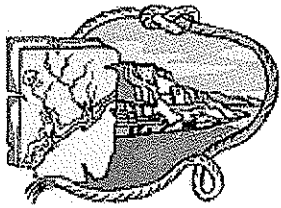
Before the Twinkie days, people ate real food like vegetables, fruit and whole grains. In many cultures that have lower incidences of heart disease and diabetes than those of us in the West, meat was eaten in small amounts. Some of the most healthy cultures ate and still eat more fish in their diets and rely on olive oil and nuts. If this

is sounding like the Mediterranean-style diet, it is because of all the diets under current discussion, the Mediterranean-style diet is turning out to be a particularly healthy alternative to the Western diet of fast food, processed food, food on the run and constant snacking.

For indeed, eating is more than consuming food; it is about where and how we eat. Take the French approach to food: meals are shared with other people, food is eaten slowly, savored, and the French seem to be more in tune to their internal feeling of being “full.” Americans tend to eat alone, a growing number eating in their cars, and many rely on external signals to stop eating: the plate is empty. In contrast, the French eat smaller portions, rarely take second helpings or snack.

Snacking has become an American way of life with snack “foods,” usually the processed food-like substances, available in shops from grocery stores to gas stations, eg. chips, cookies, candy, snack bars etc. Group gatherings, businesses and conferences usually serve “food” and drinks between meals. The majority of these snacks contain high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils (the bad kind), and numerous preservatives and additives, ingredients that are unfamiliar and unpronounceable, as Pollan writes. He advises not to buy any product with these ingredients.

Does this leave anything to eat? Well, yes, real food! Several studies including one recently reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and summarized in *The Wall Street Journal*, (July 17, 2008) found that the health benefits from low-carb and Mediterranean diets were -



greater than those from a low-fat diet. Likewise, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, reported on a study showing the Mediterranean-style diet was more effective than the low-fat diet for improving blood pressure, the cholesterol to HDL (good) cholesterol ratio, and blood sugar, *John Hopkins Medicine*, April 2008.

The best and healthiest diet is based on the principles of:

- Eating fresh food closest to its source: from gardens, local farms
- Eating non-processed food closest to its natural form: fruits, vegetables
- Eating fish twice per week
- Eating small portions of red meat as accompaniments to pasta and rice dishes
- Eating whole grain cereals and breads
- Eating olive oil and canola oil instead of butter and margarine
- Eating natural peanut butter that does not contain hydrogenated oil
- Drinking wine in moderation
- Avoiding sugared beverages
- Including small portions of nuts
- Snacking only on real food: fruit and vegetables
- Using low-fat dairy products
- Eating small amounts, slowly and with friends

As Michael Pollan suggests in his book, *In Defense of Food*, Penguin Books, 2008: eat food, not too much and mostly plants.

For more information on this subject, check out these websites:  
[www.eatwellguide.com](http://www.eatwellguide.com) and [www.localharvest.com](http://www.localharvest.com)



## ENERGY TO BURN

by Muire Lindahl

The energy equation is really quite simple as it relates to the amount of energy consumed in food and the amount of energy burned through exercise.

Maintenance of Body Weight:  
Energy in *equals* Energy out

Weight Gain  
Energy in *is greater than* Energy out

Weight loss  
Energy in *is less than* Energy out

According to Dr Cedric X. Bryant, Chief Science Officer of the American Council on Exercise, reputable research shows that muscle tissue has been observed to burn roughly 7 to 10 calories per pound per day, compared to 2 to 3 calories per pound per day for fat. With this in mind it is important to be aware that for every year after age 25 one-half percent of lean muscle mass is lost unless it is maintained through strength training.

Though the amount of energy burned per day by muscle is not as great as one might wish, it is still 2 to 3 times more than that burned by fat. Preventing the loss of that lean muscle mass through strength training is most certainly going to have an overall effect on the amount of energy expended and therefore the amount of energy that can be taken in in food calories.

Another thought is that if the pounds lost in dieting are both fat and muscle tissue, but are replaced by only fat, the energy expenditure per day is reduced and the amount of food calories needs to be reduced.

All in all it is best to arrive at a healthy body weight and maintain it with healthy lifestyle habits of nutrition and exercise.