

TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic - 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

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Connecting Your Plate and the Health of the Planet

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As a dietitian, I counsel clients on how different foods impact their physical health. But, did you know different foods we eat also have an impact on the health of the planet?

The food we eat directly links human health and environmental sustainability. The human diet has the potential to benefit both. Over the past 50 years, advances in food production have aided in increasing life expectancy, reducing hunger, infant and child mortality rates and decreased global poverty. But these positive results have been offset by shifts toward unhealthy diets.

With urbanization and increased wealth traditional diets, higher in high quality plant-based foods, have shifted to the “western” diet, consisting of high consumption of calories, highly processed carbohydrates, sodium, added sugars and saturated fats, and high quantities of animal products.¹ Besides the deleterious human health impacts, this dietary pattern is not sustainable. The current food production system is responsible for pollution, loss of biodiversity, accelerating climate change and causing changes in water and land use.

Just as different foods have varying impacts on human health, so do different foods have differing effects on the planet. The production of animal-based food, (especially beef and dairy), has much higher greenhouse gas emissions than plant-based foods. In fact, beef and dairy production account for 14.5 percent of the world’s greenhouse gases

each year—a similar amount that comes from the emissions of all cars, trucks, ships and airplanes combined in the world today! Beyond emissions, food production contributes to climate change when forests are cleared for farms and livestock, and carbon is released into the atmosphere. When cows, sheep, and goats digest their food, they burp up methane which contributes to climate change. Manure and rice paddies are also sources of methane. Finally, the fossil fuel used to make fertilizer, run farm equipment and transport the food all generates emissions.²

In 2019, the EAT-Lancet Commission has called for a “Great Food Transformation” given the expected world population will reach 10 billion by 2050. This could be achieved with combined reductions in food waste, improvements in food production practices and a significant dietary shift toward mostly plant-based diets. This commission has deemed the “planetary health diet” as a dietary pattern distinguished by high-quality, plant-based foods and low amounts of animal-based foods, refined grains, added sugar, and unhealthy fats. The commission projects that global adoption of this diet would provide major human and planet health benefits. This diet would reduce meat and sugar consumption by 50%, while doubling the intake fruits, nuts, vegetables and legumes.

Such a drastic change in the global food system will depend on dramatic reductions in food waste and major changes in



food production along with international and national commitment through policies and action to make healthy and sustainable food more accessible, affordable and available. Everyone has a part to play in this “Great Food Transformation.”

How much would changing your diet actually help? A number of studies have concluded that those currently eating a diet heavy in meat, (much of the U.S. and Europe), could reduce their food-related footprint by one-third or more by changing to a vegetarian diet.³ Giving up dairy would further reduce emissions. If you do not want to go that far, just eating less meat and dairy, and more plants can reduce emissions.

Do your part in helping in the “Great Food Transformation” by:

- Buy locally produced food
- Cook more of your meals
- Eat foods in season
- Reduce food waste
- Prioritize plants
- Minimize meat and dairy
- Avoid additives, pesticides, buy organic
- Support the local farm
- Visualize your plate: half vegetables/fruits, with the rest whole grains, legumes, nuts, plant-based protein and small amounts of animal-based dairy and protein.

Our food choices ultimately effect more than just ourselves. Consider your diet and ways you can improve your health and the health of the planet.



¹ Willet, et al. The Lancet. 2019 Jan16

² Key Facts and Findings, 2020 FAO

³ Aleksandrowicz, et al, PLOS/ONE 2016

Health Education Lecture

"Ancient Medicine for Modern Ailments "

**Presented by Wyatt LaCoss,
Licensed Acupuncturist and
Chinese Medical Herbalist.
Credentialed at Mount
Auburn Hospital/Beth Israel
Lahey Health.**

**Please join us for this very
interesting Lecture.**

**Wednesday,
March 11, 2020
10:30am —11:30am
Auditorium Center**

Preparing for Coronavirus

The Healthcare Team at Carleton-Willard Village is closely following updates from the CDC, Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Bedford Board of Health for guidelines and recommendations regarding the novel coronavirus or COVID 19. We will keep you up to date regarding any changes in policy as we stay prepared. As always the best defense against any virus is to avoid contact with people who are ill and wash your hands frequently. If you develop any respiratory symptoms, even mild ones, stay home and call the Clinic.