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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM: APRIL 2007 ISSUE | BY: SANDRA FONG YOUNG

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An Optimal State

If you're overstressed, underfed and wiggled out, it's time to break free from that unhealthy balancing act

BEING HEALTHY—PARTICULARLY THE "right" weight and body shape—is an obsession for many. By next year, *Americans are predicted to spend \$61 billion on weight-loss solutions*, according to Marketdata Enterprises Inc., an independent analyst company that has tracked the U.S. weight-loss industry since 1989. People are increasingly seeking advice, often from popular media and the internet, for ways to look and feel better in all facets of their lives. People want to be healthier.

Unfortunately, statistics show Americans are not as healthy as they could be. The U.S. government's annual report on Americans' health, *Health United States, 2006*, reports that *heart disease remains the leading killer in the country. Obesity, which is associated with increased risk for type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers, is one of the 10 U.S. Leading Health Indicators*, as established by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Heart disease and obesity are just two of the many conditions that can often be prevented by healthier lifestyle choices. Sue Dieffenbach R.N., a certified nutritional consultant and founder of Perk Up!—a clinical nutritional counseling center in Poway—describes that the definition of optimal health "is different for everybody because of our biochemical individuality, but everybody has a weak link." People realize that they have these weak links in their health and strive to fix them, but not always in the best ways. New fad diets constantly appear that guarantee they will solve everything fast, which appeals to many people. Despite these promises, there is no quick fix.

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"How can I lose weight quickly?" is a question people frequently ask Tracy Daly, M.S., registered dietician for San Diego State University and San Diego Sports Medicine. Daly emphasizes that lifestyle behaviors, not just decreasing food intake for weight loss goals, must be changed and assessed over time for a healthy wellbeing.

A person's overall healthy state is determined by "how you eat, how you think and how you move," Dieffenbach explains.

What's Wrong
What's wrong with people's health?

"We're overstressed, underfed and wiggled out," Dieffenbach says. Being overstressed leaves the body mentally and physically exhausted. People spend their time focusing on everything except themselves and their health.

In regard to being underfed, although Americans eat larger portions of foods than they should, what they eat lacks key nutrients. "We're too busy, so we grab a Lean Cuisine that has maybe a medallion of protein, some gloppy gravy and a tablespoon of vegetables," says Dieffenbach. Like many fast foods, TV dinners do not usually contain the most important nutrients and are often high in sodium. A lack of real, whole foods depletes the body's energy levels. Real foods include those with complex carbohydrates, such as breads and pastas, and protein, such as poultry and nuts.

Overall, the most common health mistake made is falling for fad diets. These diets are most often low in carbohydrates and calories, which cause the body to lose fluid and seemingly lose weight. Yet, once the body is rehydrated with water, the weight comes back.

One of the most famous fad diets is the Atkins diet. "It's not a lifestyle to eliminate the carbohydrate world," says Dieffenbach. Any extreme diet that disregards key ingredients necessary for optimum health is not a wise dietary choice.

The energy provided by the little real food that people do eat is drained by "wiggling out." This refers to humans as over-thinkers, constantly worrying about everything. "There are two speeds: 'maintenance,' where you heal and recharge, and 'grizzly bear,' where you have a flight response and tunnel vision," says Dieffenbach. She explains how people spend too much time in grizzly bear mode, stressing and focusing on all the things they want to do during the day. Not enough time is given to resting the body and mind.

People also generally neglect daily exercise. Statistics collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2005 reported that only 51.9% of San Diegans were actually doing the recommended 30 minutes of physical activity per day for five days per week. The rest of the population often uses the excuse of "not having enough time" to eat well, rest or exercise.

What's Right

A healthier life starts by maintaining a healthier lifestyle. One important element is what people eat. Consuming foods rich in vitamins and minerals not only has the short-term benefits of more energy and alertness during the day, but there are numerous long-term benefits. The American Heart Association Dietary Guidelines state that a healthy food intake can help reduce blood cholesterol, blood pressure and excess body weight, as well as reduce the risk of stroke.

Healthier eating starts in the morning. To gain more energy and maintain a better mood throughout the day, people need to eat breakfast. Most people's mornings—and days—are filled with coffee and soda, which are the initial energy boosters people crave, but end up slowing down their metabolism as the day goes on.

"Your energy is low without food. If you have coffee instead of breakfast, by 3 p.m. your body needs a sugar rush," Daly warns.

A person's daily routine must include every meal and food group. And one should also use up at least as many calories as he or she takes in. **"You don't need to do something elaborate. Just start moving,"** Dieffenbach advises.

She says to do an activity, such as walking around the block, 10 minutes three times a day, or even once a day to start. Experts say that habitually adding daily physical activity increases energy and reduces stress. And for sunny San Diego in particular, Dieffenbach adds, *"There is no reason for there to be heavy people here."*

Prevention is also important. A healthy diet, outlook and exercise must be incorporated into daily life before major health problems occur. Regular checkups, such as mammograms and prostate exams, should also not be neglected. And perhaps most vitally, people need to take time out for themselves to assess what their body and mind need to be healthy and happy. As Daly says, *"Feeling good about yourself is huge."*

5 Healthy Tips

Here are five things to do for a healthier life—starting now.

- 1 Value your health. Being healthy should be a priority of life. If you are conscious of what you are doing to your body—physically, mentally and biologically—the results will be positive.
- 2 Do something you enjoy. Whether it is reading, making jewelry or polishing your car, do something that makes you happy. This will reduce your stress. "We are too worried about taking care of other people," says Daly. "Enjoy life."
- 3 Exercise. Get up from your desk and walk to lunch or just walk around the office. "Exercising doesn't necessarily mean going to the gym," Daly says. It is any physical activity to keep your body moving and energized.
- 4 Eat whole, real foods. Eat apples, salmon and beans. Feel free to have items with sugar or fat, but in moderation. And whatever you do, do not eliminate any food group.
- 5 Sleep. "Everybody needs a good six hours of sleep," Dieffenbach says. Value your body. Let it rest.

Nutrition Q&A

What are some of your key recommendations for people who want to reach a state of optimal nutrition?

Optimal nutrition is 20% science and 80% habit. Optimal nutrition is achieved when the foods you eat create a healthy body, a healthy body composition, and allow you to feel energized through your day and your workouts. So, our main recommendations are to:

- (1) *Eat Early and Eat Often: Eat breakfast as soon as you can after you get up and then eat mini-meals every three hours to keep you fueled all day and your metabolism going.*
- (2) *Eat Clean: Choose high fiber whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Try to eat minimally processed foods that give you the biggest nutrient punch.*
- (3) *Think before you drink: Stay away from sugary drinks and sweet coffee beverages because they will pack in the calories. Focus on water and unsweetened green/white/black teas*

What standard foods and drinks should people be consuming on a daily basis?

Whole grain, high fiber carbs (whole wheat breads, brown rice, whole wheat cous cous, etc.) - anything with 3g of fiber or more per serving.

Fruits and Vegetables - A variety of fruits and vegetables will help you to get your vitamins and minerals naturally. You should include a fruit and vegetable at every meal. The deeper the color, the better.

Lean Proteins - Fish, Chicken, Turkey, and Lean Red Meats every once in a while will help you to the protein your body needs to repair itself.

Healthy Fats - Natural nut butters, Nuts (pecans, almonds, walnuts), Olive Oil, Flax Seed and Flax Oil, and Fish Oil

How important is it to take vitamins daily in order to maintain a healthy diet and why?

People do not get what they need on a daily basis from food alone; therefore, taking a multi-vitamin will ensure that your foundation is covered. This is why the Journal of the American Medical Association recommends that adults take a multi-vitamin daily. One should always think, "food first, supplement second" - but if you know you are not getting the nutrients you need from food, you better take a multi-vitamin.

What recommendations do you have for people who don't think they have the time or willpower to eat healthier?

- Habits are created over time, so if you have bad ones, those will take time to change! 1. Take things one step at a time. 2. Take some time to plan. We can do anything we put our mind to - sometimes, it just takes a little extra planning and a little extra effort. In all other aspects of our lives we plan, prepare and practice. Nutrition is no different. 3. Eating healthier will make you feel better, which will allow you to have more energy on the job, more energy with your family, and more energy to enjoy the things you love to do. It's not about your weight, it's about how you feel day in and day out. 4. Surround yourself with a support system. 5. Keep a food journal and write everything you eat and drink. 6. If you "slip up" on your nutrition, remember its only food and you have your next meal to get back to eating healthy. 7. Don't let one "not so good meal" ruin your attitude! Finally, don't obsess. Just try to eat as healthy as you can wherever you are. Can you provide a sample one-day meal plan for our readers?

Breakfast: Scrambled egg whites with veggies and low fat cheese and a bowl of berries or an Optimal Nutrition Breakfast smoothie

Snack: Apple with 1 Tablespoon of peanut butter and a string cheese or a Optimal Nutrition Meal replacement bar

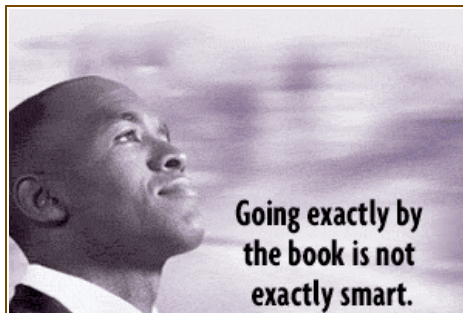
Lunch: Spinach salad with 4 oz grilled salmon and an olive oil dressing or a customized Optimal Nutrition meal

Snack: Handful of walnuts and a kiwi or a Optimal Nutrition Meal Replacement bar

Dinner: Grilled Chicken breast, fist sized portion of brown rice, steamed veggies or a customized Optimal Nutrition meal

Snack: Cottage cheese and berries

Answers provided by Optimal Nutrition Inc., which creates and provides custom organic meals for customers throughout San Diego County and the rest of the US. For more info, visit www.optimalnutritioninc.com Amanda



Carlson, Director of Nutrition and Research for
www.athletesperformance.com and
www.coreperformance.com also contributed.



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