

TerranearPMC Safety Share

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Week of March 18, 2019 – Food!

Sometimes I call Las Vegas – my adopted home town – the land of buffets. You can find buffets everywhere. At one time everything was cheap in Vegas...if you were an active gambler, everything was comped; your hotel room, entertainment and food...especially the buffets. Even if you didn't spend all night in front of a slot machine or sitting down at a black jack table, everything was reasonably priced. But things have changed and now those cheap buffets can really be expensive. I'm talkin' \$50 a person...and now they want to include a standard tip of 15% - 22%....even though you have get up to grab your food as opposed to sitting down leisurely while your food is brought to you....OK, I'll get off my soap box and just stick to our country's obsession with food and eating. But because these once-cheap establishments are no longer cheap... those that decide to eat at a buffet feel the need to get their money's worth. And let me tell you, people do stack their plates high and go back for seconds, thirds and more. And as stuffed as they may be, they will force themselves to the dessert table until they can't place anything more in their bodies. And then they roll out of the restaurant... very slowly. And while we have all heard about the vomitoriums of ancient Rome; where people would empty their stomachs (i.e. vomit) after gorging themselves and then go back for more....as it turns out, these tales are fictional – but it wouldn't surprise me if Caesar's Palace installed one!

Regardless if you're in Vegas or Wyoming, fast food restaurants seem to be on every corner of every town in the U.S. Coupled with huge supermarkets within miles of most homes, the average American is far from the unpleasant feeling of hunger. On the contrary, we Americans are in danger of eating too much! Granted, it's not always easy to make the most nutritious food choices when you have so many tasty options to choose from; but making an effort to select healthy foods is a good way to protect yourself from chronic illness. Filling your plate with small portions of low-calorie, nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats, is the best way to avoid overeating without feeling hungry.

When a person over indulges in unhealthy foods, a tremendous burden is placed on the digestive system as digestive enzymes are only available in limited quantity, so the larger the amount of food you eat, the longer it takes to digest. If you overeat frequently, over time, this slowed digestive process means the food you eat will remain in the stomach for a longer period of time and be more likely to turn into fat. And consuming more calories than you burn may cause you to become overweight or obese. This increases your risk for cancer and other chronic health problems.

A physiological feature that humans have is a 20-minute message delay where the stomach sends a message to the brain when the stomach is full. Many believe that this 20-minute delay would allow early man to store more food before feeling full and therefore, this delay process could have a survival mechanism as in the days of early man, this mechanism which would help avoid starvation as their next meal was never predictable....And today, we have inherited this survival process. And unfortunately...or fortunately (as the case may be), we who live in developed countries now have this ability for which many of us are now victims of health conditions.

This feeling of fullness (or satiety) begins when the stretch receptors in the stomach are activated as it fills with food or water; these receptors signal the brain directly through a nerve (the vagus nerve)



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that connects the gastrointestinal track and brainstem. Hormonal signals are released as partially digested food enters the small intestine. One hormone, cholecystokinin (CCK), is released by the intestines in response to food consumed during a meal. Another hormone, leptin, produced by fat cells, communicates with the brain, passing on information about the body's energy stores. Research suggests that leptin amplifies the CCK signals, to enhance the feeling of fullness. Other research suggests that leptin also interacts with the neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain to produce a feeling of pleasure after eating. So, when we eat too quickly, we may be overriding this intricate hormonal messenger system while giving us a sense of pleasure – thereby reinforcing the practice of overeating.

As we all know, weight gain is one of the biggest dangers associated with eating too much. When you take in more calories than you're able to burn, you'll start gaining weight. And if the intake of food consists of a considerable diet of unhealthy foods, such as high-fat fast foods or sugary desserts, you'll get an initial rush of energy, but crash shortly after, leaving you feeling sluggish and fatigued. These unhealthy foods can also cause uncomfortable digestive problems such as bloating and gas. Overeating can also lead to bone and joint pain. This occurs when you gain too much weight from overeating because the excess pounds put additional pressure on your skeleton, which can lead to pain and discomfort, particularly in the lower back and hips.

Overeating, particularly when you overeat high-fat, high-calorie foods, can increase your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes. When obesity is the result of overeating, you're also at an increased risk for certain types of cancer, gallbladder disease, high cholesterol and sleep apnea. You might also develop high blood pressure, which can contribute to an elevated risk of having a stroke.

Overeating can even impact your sleep. Your circadian clock, which controls your sleep cycles, causes your sleep and hunger hormone levels to rise and fall throughout the day. Overeating can upset this rhythm, making it hard for you to sleep through the night.

To break down food, the stomach produces hydrochloric acid. If you overeat, this acid may back up into the esophagus resulting in heartburn. Consuming too much food that is high in fat, like pizza and cheeseburgers, may make you more susceptible to heartburn.

OK, so as we have all heard for years, let's eat right and watch our portion size. Easier said than done? There's a line from the song, "I'm Free," from the Who's Rock Opera, "Tommy," that states "But you've been told many times before, Messiahs pointed to the door, and no one had the guts to leave the temple." Maybe a bit morose and a little too poignant, but the idea is loud and clear. We all know what we need to do when it comes to eating too much and eating the wrong kinds of foods. But unlike our ancient ancestors, we live in a place and time where food is abundant. Yet we can watch ourselves and limit our intake of Big Macs, Cokes and Blumin' Onions and maybe even exercise about 20 minutes day. When we are young, it's easy to eat and not see any negative effects...But as we get older, poor eating habits do tend to catch up to us.

Remember this: your body is your slave; it works for you - Jack LaLanne

