

TURN OFF THE FAUCET EAT MORE PLANTS

Imagine if you left the water running in your house for years. Even if it started as just a trickle, over time it would create a lot of damage and the repair bills would be devastating! An unhealthy lifestyle is a lot like leaving the water running in your body, flooding it with a diet high in processed and refined foods, bombarding it with everyday pollutants, pesticides, and toxins, and taxing it with too little sleep and chronic stress. These unhealthy lifestyle factors cause inflammation in your tissues and, over years, can spread throughout your body causing all kinds of damage.

Unchecked inflammation can lead to health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and auto-immune diseases. Treating these conditions with medication is like trying to clean up your flooding household with a small bucket. Medications help control the damage, but they won't stop the flood. Cholesterol medications slow the progression of heart disease, but they don't help people recover. Diabetes medications help scoop away some of the damage of high blood sugars, but no one recovers from diabetes by taking diabetes medication.

Real health and recovery requires changing your lifestyle to stop the flood of inflammation. The best way to turn off the faucet is by eating a diet rich in plant foods. Plant foods – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds are treasure-chests full of healing properties. It is true that these foods are your major source of essential vitamins and minerals, and they give you so much more. Plants are full of colorful pigments called phyto (plant)-nutrients that give fruits and vegetables their vibrant colors; the bright ruby red found in pomegranates, sapphire blue in berries, amethyst purple in eggplant, and emerald green in dark leafy salads, to name a few.

Phytonutrients have powerful abilities to turn off inflammation and aid recovery. The bright yellow pigment found in the spice turmeric or the red/blue pigments found in berries, red grapes, and dark chocolate can quiet inflammation more effectively than prescribed anti-inflammatory medications. Nutrients found in beans, nuts, and vegetables help cleanse your liver of fat deposits, an important benefit when you consider fatty liver disease is a pre-cursor for diabetes, which affects 28 million Americans. Nutrients found in cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, and Brussels sprouts can help flush your body of excess hormones and kill cancer cells.

Eating any combination of three colorful fruits and vegetables a day lowers your chances of developing certain cancers, diabetes, and heart disease. Plant nutrients are so powerful that the Union for Concerned Scientists estimates that 40,000 lives could be saved each year if Americans ate just one more serving of fruits and vegetables a day.

Nearly 30,000 different types of phytonutrients have been identified, and there may be thousands more yet to be discovered. Any one serving of fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts, or grains may contain up to several thousand different types of phytonutrients. Collectively, these nutrients protect plants against pests, bacteria, pollutants, and UV radiation. When you eat plants, they protect you in similar ways. They digest toxins, kill cancer cells, balance hormonal levels, enhance immune function, and correct DNA damage.

Can you get the same healing properties taking a supplement? Pharmaceutical companies have spent millions of dollars and several decades trying to do just that. The problem is that when you try to isolate these healing nutrients from plants, they lose their potency.

Phytonutrients are more effective when eaten as part of the plant, and so is the absorption and utilization of vitamins and minerals. The truth is there is no supplement, vitamin, or herb, no matter

how well made, that will ever have the potent healing abilities found in nature's collection of everyday fruits, vegetables, beans, whole-grains, nuts, and seeds.

Plant foods protect your health in other ways as well. Plants are your only natural source of fiber, which is the part of plants that you are unable to digest. You need fiber to maintain a healthy gut and strong immune system. Fiber travels through your digestive tract, where most of it is broken down by bacteria living in your intestines. The rest gets excreted as stool. Fiber that gets excreted carries out toxins and excess hormones with it. It is an important pathway for eliminating harmful substances. A good example is the hormone estrogen. While the estrogen your body makes is helpful, there are estrogens that are harmful: some in foods, from pesticide residue; paint or ink fumes; and from plastics (especially when we store food in plastic). Too much estrogen may increase your risk for developing diabetes or breast cancer. A high fiber diet helps you excrete the build-up of environmental estrogens.

Another benefit from fiber is it feeds the healthy bacteria that grow in your gut. A healthy GI tract contains 100 trillion bacteria – that's equal to about three pounds of bacteria. Healthy bacteria aid digestion, produce vitamin K, digest metals, and control the growth of harmful bacteria. Healthy bacteria also produce a thick layer of mucus that coats and protects the 1000 square feet that makes up your intestines (roughly the size of a tennis court). The thick mucus layer aggressively protects you from outside offenders like viruses, pesticides, toxins, and pollutants.

The average American daily fiber intake of 15 grams is much too low. When combined with environmental factors like antibiotic use (which kills the good and bad bacteria in your gut), pesticides, toxins, etc., unhealthy bacteria can proliferate and thin the protective mucus layer. This allows harmful substances to come in direct contact with the sensitive skin of your gut and causes

inflammation. Inflammation that can cause a host of digestive problems: SIBO - small intestine bacterial overgrowth, irritable bowel, and Chron's disease, to name a few. Because the digestive tract is connected to many major organs – liver, kidneys, pancreas, spleen, and gallbladder – inflammation that starts in your gut can travel and inflame other areas of your body as well. All kinds of disorders have been linked to poor gut health. A review published by the British Journal of Nutrition documented links with autism, learning disabilities, neurological disorders, and psychiatric disorders. Most auto-immune diseases seem to have a connection to poor gut health as well.

The good news is your body has a magnificent ability to heal itself. Cardiologist and author Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn says, "Given the right nutrients, your body can begin to heal in a nano-second." Dr. Esselstyn is best known for his work in reversing terminal heart disease using a whole food, plant based diet (*Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease* or see forksoverknives.com)

This same diet has also been successful for those with type-2 diabetes. Many people with type-2 diabetes have been able to greatly reduce or discontinue medications on this type of diet. You can see a good review of the science in an easy-to-understand video on nutritionfacts.org – look for the video, *Reversing Diabetes with Food*.

The whole foods, plant based diet used to reverse heart disease and diabetes avoids all processed foods, oils, meats, and dairy and is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, beans, nuts and seeds. It may sound extreme to eliminate all processed foods, meats, dairy, and oils, but if you are sick and want to get better or you want to avoid medication, it is worth a try.

Not ready to let go of your meat or cheese? No worries. You are still going to enjoy some benefits if you do some aspects of the diet. For example, try avoiding all processed foods, greatly reducing added oils, and eating much less animal foods.

Just remember: The key is to eat a lot of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds. Plant foods should make up $\frac{3}{4}$ of your plate or more. At a minimum, eat 2 cups of fruit, 2 cups of vegetables, and 2 cups of leafy greens every day. The ideal for most people is closer to 4 cups of fruit, 3 cups of vegetables, and 3 cups of leafy greens a day. If you are active, growing, pregnant, breast-feeding, very tall, athletic, under a lot of stress, or trying to recover from a chronic illness, you may require more.

Each meal should have at least three colors. Choose foods every day of as many colors as you can: purple, red, yellow, blue, brown. Don't forget white is a color, so foods like cauliflower, garlic, and onions count.

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Schedule an Integrative Medicine Physician Appointment. This whole-body approach to healing and use of reputable alternative medicine therapies can often reduce or eliminate the need for medications, ease symptoms, and halt disease progression. Integrative Medicine Physician appointments are \$250/hr.

What does the minimum suggested amount of fruit and vegie's a day look like?

