



Healthy eating can help prevent disease, but it can't replace medical care.

Is Food Medicine?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

A nutritious diet and an active lifestyle can help reduce the risk of several diseases. In fact, about 90% of diabetes, 80% of heart disease and 40% of cancers can be prevented through healthy behaviors such as eating well. That's probably why the phrase **food is medicine** has gained popularity in recent years. But is it accurate?

What is medicine?

To decide if food is medicine, let's start by defining medicine, since it has two meanings:

- ① The practice of preventing, diagnosing and treating disease.
- ② A compound used for preventing or treating disease, such as a drug.

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats can play a role in preventing and managing some diseases. In this sense, "food is medicine" fits the first definition.

But calling food *medicine* has its limits.

Food supports health, but it doesn't replace medical treatment, per the second definition. Doctors may prescribe medications that provide treatment far beyond what can be done by food alone. Food is one tool that can help prevent and manage some medical conditions, but food alone cannot cure diseases that require medication.

Medical nutrition therapy can be a part of medicine. This is personalized nutrition registered dietitians provide. It is an evidence-based complementary therapy to help people manage conditions, such as:

- Type 2 diabetes.
- Heart disease.
- Some types of cancer.
- Osteoporosis.

In medical settings, dietitians use evidence-based nutrition interventions to help improve outcomes and enhance quality of life. But dietitians work in tandem with health care providers and pharmacists who also use medicine as part of treatment plans.

Maybe a better phrase is "food is part of medicine." It plays a role in both preventing and treating disease, but it works best as part of your health plan, not a replacement for conventional medical treatment.

What is Reach?

Submitted by: Dr. Marcus Dayhoff, Clinical Director

REACH is your employee assistance program and work/life service benefit.

Because we all experience personal and work-related stressors one time or another, your employer cares that you get the right type of assistance for these problems. That's why REACH is contracted by your employer as a pre-paid benefit for you and your immediate family.

REACH professional staff provides short-term counseling, assessment and referral services and will assist you toward problem

resolution. All services are confidential by law and the REACH staff will only ask for information necessary to assist you with your concern.

You can contact REACH by calling our 800 number or emailing us through our web site both mentioned below. REACH can assist you with all kinds of personal and work-related concerns, such as:

- Relationships: Family, Marital, Child
- Addictions: Substance Abuse, Gambling, Sex, Smoking
- Emotional: Depression, Anxiety, Stress

- Workplace: Co-worker, Supervisor, Coaching
- Legal: Family, Personal Injury, Trust
- Financial: Credit and Planning
- Career: Planning, Guidance
- Elder Care: Caregiver Support, Retirement, Placement
- Parenting: Single, Step



REACH
Employee Assistance & Work Life Services

REACHline: 1-800-273-5273
Web Site: www.reachline.com

tip OF THE month

Whole, low-fat and skim milk — which should you drink?

Whole, low-fat and skim milk all provide the same amount of beneficial nutrients, including protein, calcium and vitamin D. The main difference is the fat and calorie content. Choosing the right type depends on your health goals and preferences.

Here's how they compare per cup:

Whole milk:

150 calories, 8g fat

Low-fat 2% milk:

122 calories, 5g fat

Low-fat 1% milk:

102 calories, 2.5g fat

Skim milk:

83 calories, 0g fat

Whole milk is thicker and richer, while lower-fat options are lighter and thinner. If you're watching calories or saturated fat intake, low-fat or skim milk are better options.

Healthful Breakfast Cereals

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Breakfast cereal is a convenient option, but not all of them are equally nutritious. With so many choices, it's important to know what to look for when selecting this morning staple. Here are five tips.

- 1 Look for whole grains:** Many cereals are made with refined corn, rice or wheat, which offer little fiber. Instead, choose cereal with a whole grain or bran as the first ingredient, such as oats, whole wheat or brown rice. Whole grains provide fiber, which supports digestive health and helps keep you full longer.
- 2 Aim for fiber:** Check the Nutrition Facts table and choose cereal with at least three grams of fiber per 30-gram serving. Fiber comes from whole grains but can also come from the bran, nuts, seeds or dried fruit that's added to some cereals.
- 3 Opt for lower sugar:** Breakfast cereal can range from zero grams of sugar to more than 15 grams (four teaspoons) per serving. Try to keep added sugars under six grams (about 1½ teaspoons) per serving. Natural sweetness from fruit can make up the difference if you prefer something a little sweeter.
- 4 Choose protein:** It's important to get enough protein at breakfast, since it helps control hunger and balance blood sugar. Some cereals are made with added whey or soy protein. If your cereal is low in protein (fewer than three grams), pair it with milk or Greek yogurt to create a more satisfying meal.
- 5 Be sodium cautious:** Do sweet cereals contain salt? Surprisingly, yes. Sodium is used as a preservative. Aim for cereals with less than 200 milligrams of sodium per serving.

Many cereals are beneficially enriched with a long list of vitamins and minerals, which add essential nutrients to your day. They can also be a good base for a balanced breakfast. Combine your favorite high-fiber, low-sugar cereal with fruit and milk (or a fortified, protein-rich, plant-based alternative) to create a complete meal.



easy recipe

Crunchy Granola

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 cups old-fashioned oats | 3 tbsp olive oil |
| ½ cup sliced almonds | ¼ cup real maple syrup |
| ½ cup unsalted sunflower seeds | 1 tsp vanilla extract |
| 1 tsp ground cinnamon | <i>Optional:</i> ¼ cup raisins |

Preheat oven to 350°F. **Line** baking sheet with parchment. **In** a large mixing bowl, stir together oats, almonds, sunflower seeds, cinnamon, oil, maple syrup and vanilla. **Stir** to combine. **Spread** granola evenly over baking sheet. **Bake** 20-25 minutes, stirring once halfway through. **Remove** from oven and let cool. **Stir** in raisins, if using. **Store** in an airtight container for up to 1 month.



Makes 8 servings. Per serving:

173 calories | 4g protein | 9g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 5g mono fat | 2g poly fat | 20g carbohydrate | 6g sugar (0g added sugar) | 3g fiber | 4mg sodium

Avoid Assuming the Worst

By Eric Endlich, PhD

It's human nature to fill in the blanks when we don't have all the facts — but too often, we default to the worst possible scenario. A friend doesn't text back, and we assume they're angry. A coworker seems distracted, and we think we've done something wrong. These negative assumptions heighten stress, strain relationships, and sometimes lead us to make poor decisions.



This mental habit — called **catastrophizing** — is more common than you might think. Our brains evolved to detect threats, which once kept us alive in dangerous environments. Today, that same survival pattern can turn harmless uncertainties into imaginary disasters.

Here are some steps you can take to kick the catastrophizing habit:

Recognize when you're jumping to conclusions and label the thought: I'm assuming the worst.

Ask yourself: *What's the evidence? What proof do I have of my negative interpretations?*

Consider other explanations. What are some other possible reasons for the events in question?

Get another perspective. Ask a trusted friend how they might view the situation.

Play the scenario all the way through in your mind. In other words, if your worst fear came to pass, how might you deal with it? What coping strategies or solutions could you employ?

Remind yourself that uncertainty is part of life. Not knowing the future doesn't mean something bad will always happen. By cultivating more balanced, rational thinking, you can replace fear-driven assumptions with curiosity and calm.

If you are still struggling to break this pattern, consider seeking professional help.



Be wise, and keep your brain alive.

Your lifestyle choices are key to healthy brain function.

What you eat and drink, how much you exercise and sleep, the way you socialize and manage stress and how well you follow your health care provider's advice are all key to sustaining brain health. Learn more at health.clevelandclinic.org/brain-health. **Brain Awareness Week is March 16 to 22**, uniting worldwide efforts to promote brain education.



Massage to Ease Stress

Many people like massages. It relaxes you, improves circulation and often relieves pain that can come with tight muscles. But massage has more than the physical benefits of easing sore muscles; it can also relieve stress and anxiety.

In a randomized pilot study, researchers enrolled adults ages 60 and older to receive 50-minute, twice weekly massage therapy or guided relaxation sessions. The study showed that massage participants had significantly better outcomes on anxiety, depression, vitality and perceived stress compared to the guided relaxation control group.



Of course, not all massages are the same. Different massage techniques target specific needs. For example, a Swedish massage is known for relaxation and reducing stress, using light, flowing strokes. One of the biggest perks of massage is its ability to naturally lift your mood by boosting endorphins. In addition, it can improve sleep quality.

Here's what a good, one-hour massage can do for you:

- ➔ Increase neurotransmitters, such as endorphins, serotonin and dopamine, that carry signals between nerves and your body and reduce depression.
- ➔ Lower your heart rate and blood pressure.
- ➔ Improve circulation and relax tense muscles.
- ➔ Lower cortisol, alleviating symptoms of anxiety and stress and boosting your body's immune system.
- ➔ Fulfill the need for human contact and comfort.
- ➔ Allow you to focus on your mind-body connection instead of what's stressing you.
- ➔ Provide much needed rest and relaxation, reducing the fatigue that often accompanies stress.
- ➔ Improve your sleep.

Caution: If you have a chronic health condition, check with your health care provider before getting a massage.

Q: What is progressive muscle relaxation?

A: Progressive muscle relaxation is a simple yet effective technique for easing stress and tension. PMR trains you to recognize the contrast between muscle tightness and relaxation, allowing you to calm your body as needed.

The practice involves deliberately tensing and then releasing different muscle groups in sequence, typically starting with one end of your body (head or toes) and gradually moving to the other end. For example, you might clench your fists for five to ten seconds, notice the tension, and then release for ten to 20 seconds before moving on to the next set of muscles.

Studies suggest that PMR can be beneficial for:

- Anxiety.
- Sleep.
- Headaches.
- Backaches.
- Stomach upset.
- High blood pressure.

Plan to practice regularly — daily if possible — for at least 15 to 20 minutes. If you don't see the benefits you're seeking, consider trying other calming practices such as guided imagery, meditation, massage, yoga or tai chi.

— Eric Endlich, PhD



Earwax is part of your body's self-cleaning system.

It's secreted from glands in your skin to keep your ears lubricated and to trap dirt and bacteria that enter your ear canals. Using cotton swabs can pack earwax so deeply into your ears that it gets stuck and remains there, affecting hearing and trapping water in your ears. When that happens, your health care provider may have to use special tools, including suction devices, to restore your normal hearing. Audiologists advise cleaning the outside of your ears with a dry cloth or tissue on your fingertip.

Teens and Sleep: What Parents Need to Know

If you have a teen at home, you know the struggle — convincing them to go to bed on time, then coaxing them to get up the next morning. So, why do teens stay up so late and how much sleep do they need? You might be surprised, but underneath the midnight energy and sleepy mornings lies real science.

Teenagers need eight to ten hours of sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation. The natural body or circadian clock changes during the teen years. This means teens often don't feel sleepy until late at night and have a harder time feeling alert early in the morning, which conflicts with school and work schedules.

Help your teens develop healthy sleep habits by:

Making screen time off limits the hour before bedtime. Light from the screen may suppress the production of melatonin, the body's sleep-inducing hormone. Social media also can induce anxiety, which can prevent sleepiness.

Reducing chaos. If a teen's day is packed with sports, activities, work and homework, it may be time to think about trimming down the schedule.

Scheduling a checkup with a health care provider to educate them on the importance of sleep and to screen them for teen sleep disorders, including sleep apnea and insomnia.



Using black out screens that eliminate light, making it easier for teens to fall asleep.

Asking them to share their goals and think about healthy sleep habits to help them achieve those goals. If it's playing a sport or taking an exam, ask them if they felt better after a good night's sleep — let them draw their own conclusions.

Q: What is lymphedema?

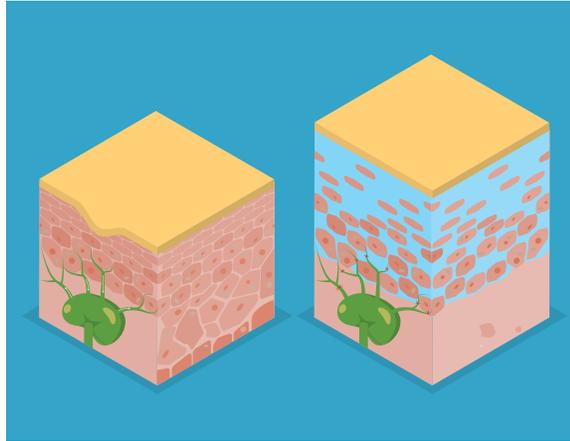
A: Lymphedema is the swelling that results from a blockage within the lymphatic system.

This system consists of the lymph nodes and lymph vessels that carry fluid throughout your body. While lymphedema most often affects the arms or legs, other areas such as the neck, abdomen or genitals may be involved.

Symptoms and signs: Swelling of an arm or leg, reduced range of motion, recurrent infections or thickening of the skin are common signs of lymphedema. Consult with your health care provider if you notice persistent swelling in any part of your body.

Risk factors and causes: Several health conditions may lead to lymphedema. Cancer, radiation therapy, surgery and parasitic infections are among the most common ones. Genetic disorders in which the lymphatic system fails to form normally may also cause the condition. In addition, older people and those with excess weight, rheumatoid arthritis or psoriatic arthritis are at higher risk for developing lymphedema.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



Climbing stairs may boost heart health and lifespan.

That's the conclusion of University of East Anglia research involving more than 480,000 people between the ages of 34 and 84, according to the European Society of Cardiology. Frequent stair climbing was associated with a 24% reduced risk of dying from any cause and a 39% reduced risk of dying from heart disease and stroke. Of course, not everyone can climb stairs. However, most people can incorporate some stair climbing into daily life and even short bursts of climbing stairs can have significant health benefits, according to the study. **Note:** Association does not prove cause. Just because two factors happen together doesn't automatically mean one causes the other. This study provides data for further research.

Kidney Stones 101



March is Kidney Month.

Kidney stones are hard objects formed inside kidneys. Kidney stones can be extremely small and can pass through the urinary tract with little or no discomfort.

However, a kidney stone can grow to pea-size and larger, causing pain as it moves within the kidneys or passes into one of the ureters (the tubes connecting kidneys and bladder) and making urination difficult and sometimes excruciating. Kidney stones can also stick together, becoming pebble-sized and causing urine blockage and severe pain requiring an urgent medical procedure to break up or remove the blockage.

Types of kidney stones:

Calcium stones: Most kidney stones are made of calcium oxalate, a chemical compound produced by the liver and absorbed from fruits, vegetables, nuts and chocolate. Type 2 diabetes increases the risk of kidney stones because it lowers levels of citrate (a stone-preventing chemical) and boosts high levels of calcium in the urine. Intestinal bypass surgery and very high doses of vitamin D also raise calcium stone risk.

Uric acid stones: Dehydration from frequent diarrhea increases stone risk. Eating a high-protein diet (especially large amounts of organ meats and shellfish) also increases risk, particularly if you have type 2 diabetes and/or metabolic syndrome.

Struvite stones: Caused by urinary tract infections, struvite kidney stones grow quickly and large.

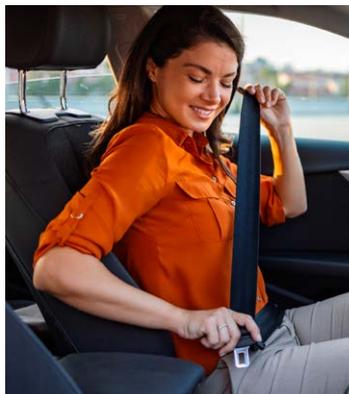
Cystine stones: This rare genetic condition causes the kidneys to leak too much of a protein-building block called cystine, leading to kidney stones.



If you have experienced kidney stones or have risks, talk to your health care provider about kidney stone prevention.

Buckle Up

Every year, thousands of lives are lost because a seat belt wasn't buckled. In 2023 alone, nearly half of the 23,959 passenger vehicle occupants killed weren't wearing a seat belt. A single click could mean the difference between life or death. Don't take the chance — always wear your seat belt.



Here are some facts and tips on buckling up:

- 1 **Always use your seat belt.** It's your best protection in a crash and your top defense against impaired, distracted and aggressive drivers. Staying buckled keeps you inside the vehicle; being ejected is almost always fatal.
- 2 **Air bags are designed to work with seat belts,** not instead of them. In fact, without wearing a seat belt, the air bag's force could seriously injure or kill you.
- 3 **You need to buckle up correctly** for seat belts to work. Here's how:
 - Use the shoulder belt across your chest, not your neck.
 - Use the lap belt across your hips, not your stomach.
 - Never tuck the belt behind your back or under your arm.
- 4 **Check that seat belts fit correctly before buying a vehicle.** If not, ask for extenders or adjusters. **Note:** Modern seat belts can be installed in older vehicles.

Scents at Work: Use Some Sense

That new perfume might smell great to you, but it could irritate the skin or sinuses in sensitive coworkers or cause an allergic reaction (immune system is triggered). And that fresh-smelling cleanser you used to scrub your workspace? That could also cause problems for someone who reacts to scents.

Symptoms caused by scents are more common than you might think. In a recent survey, 30% of adults reported being negatively affected by fragrances. Symptoms include brain fog, nausea, dizziness, burning eyes, severe headaches, rashes and asthma. **Note:** If you experience these at work, and they disappear after you leave work, this can indicate you are sensitive or allergic to scented products.

If your employer doesn't have a policy, you can:

- ✓ Ask your coworkers if they have any sensitivities or allergies before using scented products.
- ✓ Opt for using unscented cleaners and lotions, especially when sharing a workspace. **Note:** The terms fragrance-free, unscented and hypoallergenic aren't regulated by the FDA. This means that products with these labels could contain fragrances. Contact the manufacturer for more information.
- ✓ Support coworkers and a fragrance-free workplace.



While a pleasant scent may brighten your day, less (or none) is more in the workplace.

dollars & sense

Q: Should I use AI for finances?

A: **Yes and no.** Artificial intelligence is everywhere, especially in finance. AI is integrated with personal finance tools, investment platforms, banking systems and fraud detection, making financial services faster, smarter and more personalized.

Pros:

AI can help you organize by automating bill payments and tracking expenses, which in turn reduces user error.

AI can detect fraud in seconds, serving as another layer of protection.

AI can analyze your spending habits, income and goals to provide tailored budgeting tips and savings plans.

Cons:

AI pulls its information from public datasets, meaning it can make mistakes. Check any sources the AI provides; don't accept its advice without question. Also double-check your calculations. Technical glitches or misinterpretations can result in incorrect budgeting advice.

Guard your privacy. AI often requires access to personal financial information which increases the risk of data breaches.

AI tools do not understand nuanced personal circumstances. You may receive bad advice because the AI doesn't understand your specific needs. Investing is a great example — the AI doesn't know how to factor in your risk tolerance, debts and other assets when providing advice.

Artificial intelligence has a place in personal financial management. As with anything, using common sense is key.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, RSSA

Back Pain Myths and Truths

Many of us have experienced back pain in some way. And there are many back pain myths circulating about what you can and cannot do to relieve or prevent back pain. Here are some common myths and the truths behind them:

Myth: You need bed rest if you have back pain.

Truth: Unless your health care provider prescribes bed rest for your back pain, mild to moderate movement is fine. In fact, depending on your type of pain, inactivity can worsen the pain.

Myth: You shouldn't exercise when you have back pain.

Truth: While it's fine to take it easy, keep moving. Consider switching to low-impact exercises, such as swimming or walking. Avoid any type of exercise that requires heavy lifting, twisting or bending.

Tip: Exercises that strengthen your core muscles and increase your flexibility can help you manage as well as prevent pain. Know your limits and start slowly by stretching. Talk with your health care provider before trying a new exercise routine.



Strengthen your core muscles to help improve flexibility and support your back.

Myth: Lifting heavy objects causes most back pain.

Truth: While lifting something heavy the wrong way can cause back pain, it can be caused by a variety of factors, such as non-ergonomic workspaces, a sedentary lifestyle, obesity and even genetic factors.

Myth: Surgery is the only option for chronic back pain.

Truth: Before you undergo surgery, explore all options. Most chronic back pain can be relieved through physical therapy, medications, injections and lifestyle modifications.

Myth: Back pain is usually caused by a serious underlying condition.

Truth: While you should see your provider to rule out illnesses such as cancer, most back pain is due to muscle strains and sprains.

Myth: You must sleep on a firm mattress to lessen back pain.

Truth: Mattress firmness is different for everyone. No matter your preference, make sure your mattress provides proper support based on your needs.

Myth: Sitting up straight will prevent back pain.

Truth: Even perfect posture can't make up for sitting still in one position too long. What matters is moving often. Set a timer to remind you to take a quick break every 30 minutes to stretch or walk around.

Myth: Most back pain is caused by injuries or accidents.

Truth: Over time, disc degeneration, arthritis, infections and inherited conditions can cause back pain, too.

Myth: A bra can cause back pain.

Truth: Even a poorly fitted bra can't cause back pain.

Myth: A scan will tell you the source of your pain.

Truth: Scans don't show everything and changes in your scans don't always correlate with your symptoms.



TLC for Your Hard-Working Back

Lifestyle habits can affect your back health. Here are a few good habits:

- ➔ **If you can, get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity** (e.g., brisk walking) a week. Physical activity is good for your back and for your overall health. Always lift properly: Move close to the object, use your knees to lift and don't twist or turn while lifting. If an object is too heavy for you to lift, get help or use a dolly.
- ➔ **If you are overweight**, lose weight under your health care provider's guidance. Any amount helps.
- ➔ **Stop smoking.** Smoking decreases blood flow to the back, can cause disc degeneration, inflammation and bone density loss.
- ➔ **Get regular health checkups.**
- ➔ **Make sure your work setup is ergonomically correct** by keeping elbows at a 90° angle and using a footrest to keep your hips at a 90° angle. Use a lumbar pillow or rolled-up towel to support your lower back if your chair doesn't have lumbar support.
- ➔ **Use correct posture** when sitting, standing or sleeping. The best sleeping position is on your back or side.

Zorba's corner

When Should You Get a Second Opinion?

The short answer: whenever you feel you need one — especially when something just doesn't add up. It's particularly important if you're facing a serious diagnosis or major treatment decision, such as surgery, cancer therapy, or treatment for significant heart disease. If the treatment plan is confusing, always get a second opinion. It's especially crucial if you have a rare disease, if your symptoms aren't improving as expected, or if the recommended treatment seems risky without a clear benefit. So how do you find the right person for that second opinion? Ask a trusted friend or family member in health care, talk with your health care provider, or consider a tertiary medical center — a major university hospital or a nationally recognized clinic. And one more thing: If your provider pushes back against you seeking a second opinion, find a new one if possible. — Zorba Paster, MD



Study: Tobacco Products Linked to Diabetes Risk

A new study has confirmed what many already suspected: Smoking is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes — and it affects every subtype of the disease.

Researchers examined medical data from more than 3,300 people with type 2 diabetes and nearly 3,900 people without it, grouping participants into four type 2 diabetes subtypes:

- Mild age-related diabetes.
- Mild obesity-related diabetes
- Severe insulin-deficient diabetes.
- Severe insulin-resistant diabetes.

Researchers factored in whether people were current smokers, former smokers, or had never smoked. The results? Whether participants smoked currently or in the past, they had a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes compared to those who never smoked. And for heavy smokers — about a pack a day for 15 years — the numbers jumped even higher. The study also revealed that smokeless tobacco raised the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Study: Aspirin and Colorectal Cancer Study

Aspirin may lower the risk of dying from colorectal cancer. That's the conclusion of an American Cancer Society study, published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. The results showed patients who took aspirin more than 15 times a month for two or three years before they were diagnosed with colorectal cancer were less likely to die from the disease than people who had not taken that much aspirin over time.

Why did the regular aspirin users have this advantage? To find out, the researchers examined the data and discovered the patients who regularly took aspirin before their colorectal cancer diagnoses were less likely to have distant metastases — cancer that had spread to other areas of the body. This may be due in part to the way aspirin seems to limit metastasis of colorectal tumors. And colorectal cancer that has not spread is far more likely to be treated successfully.



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