

Greenwich Sentinel



Building a Strong Community Together + January 15, 2016

Eight Foods to Avoid: What Does Healthy Food Really Mean?



By Julia Chiappetta
Sentinel Contributor

I believe there are many paths to wellness and that taking steps each day is empowering. When I have had the opportunity to speak to an audience, I usually challenge them with this question: name one food that you eat that you would consider healthy. This question will quickly help me dig deeper and determine where they are in terms of diet, and help me offer a few food facts and some easy and simple suggestions.

Most people tell me they feel they are healthy and eating the right foods, and I can't blame them for thinking so, because some leaders in the food industry are sending mixed messages about food and hiding bad ingredients behind buzz words like "all-natural," "healthy," "sugar-free" and even "organic." There is so much confusion that it makes it difficult to get people to consider something other than their own beliefs, mostly built upon the slick marketing that goes into selling food products. For example, saying that something is organic doesn't necessarily mean it is good for you—so I thought I would share what I feel are some of the most misunderstood foods.

Fruit Juice. Most people will be shocked to find out that fruit juice is quite harmful. For the most part, juice is pasteurized, which means that this heating process removes most of the vitamins and minerals. Raw juice is the only way to go; otherwise you are drinking wasted calories composed of flavored fructose that will spike your blood sugar and offer no nutrients.

I've been juicing at home for years, and you can too. There are some good inexpensive juicers on the market, and it is fun to create your own juices and smoothies. Organic produce is a must, and please be sure to wash it well. In season, many of the farmer's markets offer organic, and you can also find fresh and frozen organic at the grocery store or opt to have your produce delivered to your door weekly through co-ops like Mike's Organic Delivery. Raw fruit contains both soluble and insoluble fiber that helps us digest and feed probiotics to our gut, making it a better choice.

Please consider that drinking conventional fruit juice on a regular basis can cause weight gain and hypoglycemia, which causes a sudden crash due to high amounts of fructose bombarding the blood and putting extreme stress on body systems.

Soy Protein. I used to be a believer in soy products, but contrary to popular belief, most soy products are no longer healthy. Soy milk, soy protein and edamame are in question because 100 percent of the soy grown in the U.S. is genetically modified and Roundup, the chemical pesticide used to naturally repel bugs, is sprayed on all the crops.

Another problem is that most people lack the enzymes necessary to digest unfermented soy, which then has the sort of unpleasant effects that those who are lactose intolerant experience: indigestion, gas, bloating, and a whole slew of GI issues. Recent studies show that long-term use of soy products is linked to hay fever, asthma, breast cancer, cystic fibrosis, endometrial cancer, hypothyroidism (under-active thyroid), kidney disease, and urinary bladder cancer, to name a few. All of these are good reasons to consider not eating soy and to be careful when reading labels, because food makers throw soy protein into many products, especially power bars, baby food, and many items our kids eat.

Farmed Fish. This has been a concern of mine after many years of reading studies depicting how fish is farmed. Particularly disturbing is the finding that eating farm-raised fish is like eating toxins because farmed fish are fed genetically modified feed.

One quote I would like to share was published on the website of The Environmental Working Group, a non-profit watch dog organization: "Seven of ten farmed salmon purchased at grocery stores in Washington D.C., San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon were contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) at levels that raise health concerns, according to independent laboratory tests commissioned by Environmental Working Group."

What we need to take away from this is that farmed fish is in all of our grocery stores and it likely contains high levels of PCB's—four times higher than beef. Also, farm-raised fish have been shown to contain known neurotoxins and carcinogens such as dioxin; industrial byproducts from waste treatment plants;

toxaphene, a banned pesticide since 1982; and dieldrin, another prohibited pesticide. This is not the fish we ate as kids, swinging our rods in the Sound or rivers, nor for that matter the fish we used to purchase in the markets.

Microwaved popcorn. Yes, you read that right. This is something you and your kids should never eat. Most corn is genetically modified and filled with carcinogens; even organic is not good, because the microwavable bags are coated with PFOAs, a chemical linked to cancer. They often add fake butter flavoring called diacetyl, which causes lung diseases when inhaled in large quantities. Pop the old fashioned way, like my mom used to do when we were kids, using that heavy stainless steel pan, shaking and allowed the steam to escape so you don't burn it. Use coconut oil to pop and add some toppings like sea salt, garlic powder or cayenne pepper.

Conventional meat. Genetically modified meat products are the worst of the worst, and that includes even lean meat where most of the fat is trimmed. If you eat conventional meat, you are essentially eating what the livestock have been forced to eat: Things like pesticides and hormones, which, when they enter your GI tract, get stored in your fat cells. Please read all labels carefully to purchase meat that is safe; even if it's labeled "grass-fed," still dig deeper, because there is an ongoing debate about grass-fed vs. grain-fed, and the answers aren't yet clear. Try to get to know your grocer/butcher and ask how their meat was sourced and prepared.

Margarine. It's made from vegetable oils and touted as containing no cholesterol and as being higher in "good" fats, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated, helping reduce low-density lipoprotein (LDL or bad cholesterol). Butter, on the other hand, is made from animal fat and contains cholesterol and high levels of saturated fat.

Ever since margarine was created it has been made out of trans-fat, which is known to clog arteries and cause cardiovascular disease. A study in 1997 showed that margarine, with its high trans-fat content, appeared to increase the incidence of coronary heart disease. Saturated fats, however, have been found to increase good cholesterol and lower the bad. Then Time Magazine an The New York Times reported that "butter is back, because the fat-soluble vitamins in butter far outrank margarine and

butter is loaded with Vitamins A, E, and K2 with K2 helping reduce risks associated with cardiovascular diseases, cancer and osteoporosis and it changes the structure of short chain LDL fatty acids linked to heart disease into more benign longer chain fatty acids."

In sum, if saturated fats are good and margarine is low in saturated fats, then how could it be good for us? Talk about confusing! Personally, I use organic, cold-pressed extra virgin coconut oil when possible.

Artificial sweeteners. This has long been one of my pet peeves. Think about it. The word "artificial" should raise a red flag, yet many people overlook that and use these fake sweeteners. The slick marketing of these products has surely worked, and sadly, many doctors recommend them because they are supposedly safe for diabetics due to being low on the glycemic index. New research has shown that artificial sweeteners disturb gut flora and can actually be a cause for diabetes. Sugar substitutes have been clinically linked to headaches, hypertension, lymphomas/leukemia, phenylketonuria, and obesity.

Conventional milk. The danger of conventional milk lies hidden in the genetic modification of cow feed and hormones used to boost milk production. These toxins get transferred to humans who drink milk or eat conventional dairy products. Like fruit juice, when raw milk is pasteurized, it loses nutritional content and the enzyme lactase is destroyed in the heating process, making it difficult for people to properly digest the milk sugar, or lactose. This is a common issue today. The National Institute of Health reports that "Approximately 65 percent of the human population has a reduced ability to digest lactose after infancy." Raw milk is much better, and can be found in some cheeses and yogurts.

Be good to your body and try to make one decision this week that puts you on a new path to wellness. Remember that our bodies need good fuel for optimum performance; strive to consume calories and nutrients vs. calories & chemicals.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob.