

- Minerals in the body

Why you should prioritize nutrition in solving your health problems

Nutrition and its major role in disease prevention, management, and recovery

Manila Bulletin · 9 Jul 2024 · B-9 · CHESHIRE QUE, RND, RN, RD

Cancer patients don't perish because of cancer. They die because their immune system can no longer fight the cancer cells in their body, despite state of the art cancer treatment. What is needed to build immune cells? Protein, folate, vitamins B6 and B12, and more. Where do we get these nutrients? From food. Don't say from supplements because chemically derived and isolated nutrients are not meant to replace food. There is a reason why they are called supplements and not replacements.



Why can dehydration kill a child so fast? Because water and electrolytes are vital to our existence. The heart will stop beating when these electrolytes go haywire. Where do we get nutrients to keep well hydrated? Water, which is also a major component of food. Where do electrolytes like sodium, potassium, chromium, and magnesium come from? Food. You don't need electrolyte drinks or salts unless you are already dehydrated and require concentrated sources. These aren't recommended to be taken as a daily source of electrolytes.

Too much will damage your organs, especially your kidneys and heart.

In my over two decades of private practice as a registered nutritionist dietitian, I know for a fact that a patient's prognosis becomes worse when the patient can no longer eat or take in nourishment. That is the reason why some doctors need to order enteral nutrition via tube feeding, or worse, parenteral feeding via venous route or through the veins. Imagine being fed through your veins because your digestive system isn't working as it should. When one cannot eat, organ systems will fail and eventually lead to death. You die from lack of nourishment, not from the disease. The medications and medical interventions may be managing your diseases but what is keeping your body strong to withstand side effects and the like? What will make your body fight? Food and nutrition. Take these two out of the picture and you don't stand a chance to live a long quality life. When you are first diagnosed with elevated blood pressure, doctors will recommend weight loss, a low sodium diet, and sometimes medications. While you initially need drugs to keep your blood pressure at bay, you need food and nutrients to prevent your blood pressure from increasing. This will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight range to normalize blood pressure in the hopes that you will get off medications for life. Unfortunately, many think that hypertension comes with age. It shouldn't. Nor should your genes be blamed at all. Reflect on your lifestyle. What you eat, what you're not eating, your physical activity, sleep and how you cope with stress. Do you have vices that stiffen your arteries and prevent efficient blood flow? Alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, and smoking are the culprits. These are modifiable factors that impact your blood pressure and overall heart health. While drugs

will help save you during emergency cases, it can only do so much. Otherwise, why do people on antihypertensive medications still get fluctuations in their blood pressure when there are temperature changes, when they lack sleep, or when they eat salty and fried food? Medications aren't enough. Did you know that within a few minutes of eating salty and fried food, your arteries stiffen, thus increasing blood pressure? What could lower sodium? Potassium. We get that from leafy vegetables, bananas, calamansi, and oranges. In short, from wholesome plant food sources.

A call for a change in mindset is in order. July is Nutrition Month in the Philippines. We won't be putting so much effort into creating awareness for a month each year if nutrition is immaterial to our existence. Stop turning solely to medications if you want to heal. It is not the only solution to your health problem. I am not saying that you go against medical advice and discontinue your prescribed medications. Instead, you should get serious with your diet and nutrition to repair your body while you are on medication or under treatment. Better yet, if you aren't prescribed anything but want to prevent getting sick or making your medical condition worse, it is best to get properly nourished.

Medications may prevent your blood vessels from clogging but what will repair your blood vessels? Medications cannot repair and generate new cells. Only the nutrients from food have the power to make your body produce new cells and repair damages in your body including your blood vessels to make your blood flow more efficiently. This applies to all types of diseases.

This nutrition month, why don't you take time to reflect on the quality of your daily diet? Ask yourself these questions:

Do I eat at least two servings of fruits a day?

Do I eat at least one to two cups of vegetables a day?

Do I eat soy and other legumes, nuts, and seeds daily?

Do I drink at least eight to 10 glasses of water a day?

Do I choose whole grains like oats, quinoa, black/red/brown rice over refined carbs like white rice and white bread?

Do I avoid fried food and fast food?

Do I drink plain tea or black coffee instead of milk tea or instant coffee with sugar and dairy?

Do I drink sugary beverages instead of 100 percent fruit and vegetable smoothies, slushies, or fresh juice?

Do I eat processed meat and ultraprocessed snacks each day?

Does my diet make me feel nourished and healthy?

If you answered no to most of these questions, then you are in big trouble. No matter how much pill popping you do each day, you will not have the wholesome food sources that contain not only carbohydrates, protein, and good fat but also fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, plant chemicals, or phytochemicals that are needed to help you repair and heal.

Don't be a pill popper. Make nutrition a major part of your healing or wellness journey.

Did you know that within a few minutes of eating salty and fried food, your arteries stiffen, thus increasing blood pressure?