

Nutrition Question and Answer Archives

Disclaimer: The information provided herein is intended for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment; always consult your own physician or other health care professional for recommendations regarding your symptoms or medical condition.

Q: My sister tells me I should not give my daughter juice, which it is not a good food. I am surprised to hear this. My child is 2 ½ years old and healthy.

A: Although eating the whole fruit is more nutritious, small amounts of fruit juice is fine.

However, excessive juice intake is a cause of diarrhea or chronic loose bowel movements, especially in young children. This can lead to decreased absorption of nutrients, and in some cases will cause poor growth.

Excess juice also displaces other foods, and can lead to dietary imbalances. It provides relatively “empty” calories and lessens a child’s appetite for nutritious meals.

How much juice is too much? I recommend no more than 4 to 8 ounces of juice per day.

Q: My teen-age daughter is now a vegetarian. The rest of the family is not. Please put our minds to rest regarding the safety of this and how to go about mealtimes with her.

A: If done right a vegetarian diet can be as good as, or even better than, one that includes meats. So you really don’t need to be overly concerned.

For starters, most of us get more protein than we need, even vegetarians!

Some good sources of protein that your daughter can include are soy milk, tofu, nuts and seeds, beans, peas and lentils, peanut butter, milk, cheese and eggs. Additionally, a healthy vegetarian diet has grain products (preferably whole grain), vegetables and fruits. If she eats a variety of foods she will be well-nourished.

To get sufficient calcium, she should have at least 3 calcium-rich foods a day. Choices here can include cow’s milk, fortified soymilk (check the label), cheeses, green leafy vegetables, and calcium-fortified orange juice.

Your teenage daughter can meet her high iron needs by eating a variety of foods like broccoli, spinach, beans, iron-fortified cereals, raisins, other dried fruits, and nutritional yeast. If she includes a vitamin-C food at the same meal (orange juice, citrus fruits, strawberries, broccoli, peppers, and tomatoes are rich in C) it will increase the amount of iron absorbed.

You may have heard that only animal foods contain vitamin B12, and this is true. If she does not eat eggs or dairy foods, she will need to find a way to get B12.

Some cereals, and some brands of nutritional yeast and fortified soy milks contain B12; you need to check the labels. A vitamin/mineral supplement is always helpful as well.

According to the American Dietetic Association, a well-planned vegetarian diet is a healthful choice, and is associated with decreased risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. I hope this serves to put your mind at rest.

Q: How long can I continue breastfeeding my son? He is 10 months old and is taking only small tastes of solid foods. I have no problem with allowing him to continue nursing if this is okay for him.

A: Congratulations on your successful breastfeeding! Typically, full-term babies get all the nutrition they need from breast milk, for at least the first 6 months. Most babies will require more iron after 6 – 9 months of age. The easiest way to get that iron is by offering meat or infant cereal.

You may want to discuss with your physician whether your child should be receiving supplements such as iron or vitamin D.

If your son is growing well he is probably getting sufficient calories. The calories from breast milk may become inadequate after 8 to 9 months of age.

Continue to breast feed, as long as the two of you want. It is common for mothers around the world to breastfeed a child for much longer than people do in this country. But also continue to offer other foods to ensure he gets adequate calories.

There is no one specific food that your child really requires, so if he doesn't like a certain food, don't push it. Try different foods, encourage self-feeding (finger foods and messy eating are to be expected!), and your child will thrive!

Q: Should I be giving my 3 month old baby extra water, in addition to what is in the formula she gets? I have gotten conflicting advice about this.

A: You need to be careful how much plain water you give a baby. Babies under 4 months who are given too much water on a regular basis can suffer harmful effects.

After 4 months of age, it's okay if you give her a couple of ounces of water between feedings. But she shouldn't drink more than 6 ounces of water per day.

Formula (or breast milk) should be an infant's main source of nourishment, and too much water will displace what the infant needs. At the same time you don't want to overfeed her by giving a bottle every time she cries. A little water can be used to soothe a baby who is not truly hungry.

After one year of age keep your child well hydrated. Her kidneys will be mature enough to handle more water. Plain water, diluted juices and milk are good to drink, in order to prevent constipation and other symptoms of dehydration.

Q: Our family has a question about healthy after-school snacks. The kids and I disagree on what types of foods are good snacks and what is junk! Please help us settle this one!

A: While there are no hard and fast rules defining "junk" foods and healthier ones, in general if you choose those containing less sugar and fats/oils you are getting a healthier food. In addition, "whole grain" is better than white flour.

A tip: remind the kids about what they undoubtedly learned in school about the Food Guide Pyramid, and how the items at the top are what we want to limit: excessive sugar, fats and salt.

Some quick snacks to try:

- Crackers with reduced-fat cheese
 - Breakfast cereal, with or without milk PB & Banana Burrito - Spread peanut butter and jelly on a flour tortilla, lay a peeled banana across one edge, roll up and microwave on high for about 30 second
 - Trail mix - Throw together your favorites- almonds, raisins, dried cranberries, soy nuts, dried cereal, etc. Keep a container handy for quick snacking.
 - Mini-pizzas - Put some tomato sauce and any cheese on an English muffin or pita bread. Bake until cheese is melted.
 - Apple slices with peanut butter
 - Baby carrots dipped in salad dressing (reduced fat)
 - Tortilla chips (the baked or lower fat kind) with salsa
 - Fig Newtons, graham crackers, breadsticks or pretzels.
 - Blender shake- Milk or juice, a ripe banana, a scoop of light ice cream
 - Quick quesadillas - Put a tortilla on a plate. Add a layer of shredded cheese, top with a 2nd tortilla, microwave for a minute. This can be done in a skillet as well; just flip it halfway through. Bits of leftover meat, cooked veggies, etc. are wonderful added to the filling!
-

Q: Please tell me, what is the big deal about eating sugar? If I brush my teeth often I won't get tooth decay from it. And if I eat plenty of other good stuff I am getting what my body needs, right?

No one can say what an "okay" amount of sugar is, but it certainly is wise to keep it to a minimum. In addition to tooth decay, sugar becomes a problem when it takes the place of more nutritious foods. If, for instance, you take in 20% of your days calories as sugar, that's a large amount of good food that is being eliminated that day. Remember, sugar is energy (calories) without any other nutrients.

Q: We hear all the time about not leaving foods to defrost on the counter overnight. Well, I don't do that anymore, but I used to. In the old days everyone did. Can you explain why we didn't get sick from it?

A: It is a matter of luck or chance that you did not become seriously ill. Many people do come down with symptoms of food poisoning that they do not attribute to the food they ate: belly aches, diarrhea, etc. And keep in mind that there is no such thing as a 24-hour virus...that is usually a brief bout of food poisoning!

Disease-causing bacteria grow extremely well in warm, perishable foods. Storing foods at room temperature gives them just the right conditions to grow like crazy! It is now recommended that any perishable food be thrown out if it has been held between 40 and 140 degrees F for more than 3 hours. Perishable foods include meat, poultry, fish, cooked vegetables, dairy products and eggs.

Q: I think I am finally ready to stop smoking. The only thing I am really concerned about is the weight that I may gain. Any help here would be appreciated.

A: You are doing yourself such a tremendous favor by choosing a healthier lifestyle! But keep in mind, that not everyone gains weight when they stop smoking. Some people do, and the number of pounds is usually minimal.

The fear of putting on weight often prevents people from quitting smoking. Please remember this: You would have to gain at least 100 lbs. to do the damage equal to that of continuing to smoke.

To keep weight gain minimal, try the following: Before you quit, shop for healthy snacks. Instead of potato chips, buy crunchy baby carrots and celery. Dip in low-fat dressing if desired. Instead of candy, try almonds, sunflower seeds and other nuts that are good for you. Replace your soft drinks with lots of water. Or drink diluted fruit juice instead. Take bananas, oranges and apples with you when away from home. Limit yourself to low-cal choices when eating out. Avoid fast-food restaurants! Take a walk daily. Work this up to a half-hour a day. Instead of a candy bar, try a slice of toasted whole wheat bread topped with fruit spread. If you haven't already done so, start taking a multivitamin supplement daily.

A wonderful resource to assist you in stopping smoking is [New Jersey QuitNet](#) an online personalized support program tailored to meet your specific needs. You may also want to call the New Jersey Quit Line at 1-866-NJ-STOPS or contact our local "Quit Center" at 908-685-2442. New Jersey Quit Centers provide low-cost counseling, medications, patches and other stop-smoking aids.

Q: What do you recommend in the way of margarine-type products. I know that butter is out!

A: You are right to be concerned about the amount of butter you eat. Too much of that yummy stuff would be doing your heart a disservice. On the other hand the old type margarines are not any better because they used hydrogenated oils. Hydrogenation of the oils results in formation of trans fats. We now know that trans fats are something to be avoided.

Many newer products - light tub, squeeze or sprays have little or no hydrogenated oil, and therefore can boast "No trans fats" on the label. This is good.

Another bit of advice- try to substitute liquid oils when possible, for example in cooking. Olive oil is still tops, but any other liquid vegetable oil is fine. Just don't use too much of ANY fat... they all have considerable calories!

Q: Does my son really need sports drinks? I say that plain water is just as good. Who is right?

A: For most of us, the main advantage of a sport drink is that it tastes good and encourages us to drink more, giving us the water we need. If your son is exercising for less than one hour, plain water will probably be just fine. But some people do not enjoy drinking plain water, so the flavored stuff comes in handy. And the big goal here is to prevent dehydration.

The carbohydrates (sugars) and electrolytes in sports drinks may be less important than we are led to believe by product advertisers. A bit of extra sugars may help some athletes during very strenuous events, but too much sugar (as in plain fruit juice) can be detrimental.

In short, a good-tasting sports drink is fine, as long as it does not cause cramping or other digestive upset, and contains no more than 8 percent carbohydrate (50 to 70 calories per 8 ounces).

Q: I am trying to eat more beans. Are there any kinds that will give me less gas?

A: There is not much difference in the gas-producing effect of beans. But there are ways to minimize this problem. If you do follow through on your plan to eat more of them, your body will adjust and you will start getting less gassy after a bean meal.

Also, if you discard the soaking water when preparing beans you will eliminate some of the gas-producing carbohydrates that beans contain.

If you need further “gas relief” you can try a product such as Beano™, which is a natural enzyme that reduces the gas-forming substances in beans.

By the way, I am glad to hear that you want to eat more of these nutritional super-foods! They are extremely healthful and under-appreciated!

Q: I like to take vitamin C. Am I just wasting my money?

A: Taking vitamin C supplements is not a bad idea. The currently recommended amounts will prevent scurvy (a classic vitamin C deficiency disease), but those amounts may not be optimal. On-going studies of vitamin C show that it has many benefits and the actual levels needed are still being determined.

We know that Vitamin C may help prevent gall bladder disease, some cancers, atherosclerosis, and cataracts. And, of course, it seems to reduce the duration and severity of cold symptoms.

An intake of about 200 mg. per day is probably sufficient to achieve most of these benefits. It is possible to reach this amount by choosing your fruit and vegetables wisely, but many of us do not.

So, to answer your question, it wouldn't hurt to also take a vitamin C supplement to guarantee you are getting your 200 mg. per day

Q: Will eating Jello™ help to strengthen my nails? They seem to split easily and my mother always took gelatin for her nails.

A: Sorry, but Jell-O™ or gelatin) will not help. While it is true that nails are made of protein, eating gelatin protein will not make them stronger. Most of us already get more than enough protein in our diets, and gelatin is not even a good quality protein.

It is more likely that dishwashing, physical trauma, or something else is affecting your nails. Try using rubber gloves when doing dishes. Avoid nail polish (and nail polish removers) and other harsh substances. And eat a nutritious, varied diet that contains enough (but not excessive!) protein.