



July/August 2011: Summer Shorts...And Skinny Dips

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Summer Recipes: Easy, Healthy Summer Dips

"If disease has causes, so does health..."

Successful doctors in the future will do more teaching than prescribing."

...Henry Lindlahr

Of the many images that come to mind when we think of food and health, least likely perhaps is the idea of "life force." We often judge foods by the calories and macronutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, and fats) outlined on today's standardized food labels but pay little attention to a food's underlying energy and vitality. Meanwhile, when we think of health what often comes to mind are fitness, longevity, allopathic medicine, and the prevention of pain and disease, without considering ways to support and strengthen the body's natural healing powers and inherent life-force energy.

Before the days of modern medicine, naturopathic doctors viewed all disease as one disease, a product of weakened vitality. By unburdening the system and supporting the underlying life force of an individual, nature doctors believed that good health and wellness would in due course be restored. Rausse, Kneipp, Khune, Felke, Lust, Lindlahr and other naturopathic pioneers employed a variety of therapies including fresh air, sunshine, water therapies, and herbs to restore good health. Of course, they also relied upon the life force of whole foods to support the healing process.

Of the short topics covered in this summer issue, the first two concern the life force of foods. If you do not already, consider life force when shopping for food and think of foods in terms of how many steps are involved from garden to table. I also want to comment on coconut oil and soft drinks. Unrefined organic coconut oil is one of my favorite oils for cooking because it is highly saturated to hold up to heat, yet has no cholesterol. Unrefined coconut oil retains its natural antioxidants and, along with first-cold-pressed olive oil, is one of the least processed of all oils. The subject of soft drinks is also a short subject mentioned here because it is the summer season when reaching for a cold drink to restore energy is often a temptation. Caffeine and soft drinks are topics I plan to cover at greater length in newsletters this coming fall.

Attuning to the Life Force of Foods

A good friend and reader recently asked me about the health benefits of canned chickpeas. My immediate thought was to explain to her what I believe canning does to the life force of foods. If the consideration is just calories, protein, fat, and carbohydrates, a canned chickpea will be essentially equivalent to a dried chickpea that has been soaked and cooked. But the energy of a canned chickpea, which has been processed at high heat and then vacuum-sealed in an oxygen-sterile environment to withstand months or even years on the shelf, is lifeless compared to a dried chickpea that has been freshly cooked. Think of it this way, if both were planted in the ground, the dried chickpea with an intact life force would be the only one able to germinate into new life. It is the phytic acid concentrated in the outside husk of a dried chickpea that preserves the life force nestled away in its endosperm (see phytic acid discussion, below).

Across a broad spectrum, we can witness firsthand the life force of foods by simply strolling down the produce aisle of any grocery store. Beets and carrots with their fresh green tops feel alive and firm to the touch. Compare these to loose beets, turnips, and carrots. These usually look dull and “give” when squeezed, a sign of dissipating life energy. I hope you are as fortunate as I—my neighborhood grocery sells not only produce shipped from around the world but also fresh-picked-daily produce, especially local greens. If you have such an opportunity, next time compare the wilted kale shipped from California with produce picked fresh from a local garden.

Thinking of foods in terms of their life force adds a new dimension to shopping. Of course, we will continue to buy and use canned foods for their convenience and ready availability, but when the time and opportunity offer, consider buying foods that are fresh. Think of how many stages of processing and storage are involved from garden to table—the fewer will usually mean the greater vitality of a food. Also think of using dried foods such as grains, beans, and legumes, with their dormant life force intact, by preparing them from scratch.

[Interestingly, due to something called “biological transmutation,” many dried foods are more nutritious than those that are fresh-picked because the drying process removes hydrogen and oxygen to increase nutrients. For example, raisins are high in iron, but this is not true of grapes; dried peas have three times the phosphorus, magnesium, and calcium of fresh peas; and dried figs, with three times the phosphorus and magnesium, have more than five times the calcium of fresh ones.¹ Perhaps biological transmutation was part of nature’s design to support our survival during the dormant winter food season.]

To Defuse or to Use Phytic Acid?

What is phytic acid? Most of the phosphorus of plant foods is stored in the outer husk of grains, beans and legumes, nuts, and seeds in the form of phytic acid. Phytic acid protects the life force (the

¹ See Louis Kervran, *Biological Transmutations*, 104.

endosperm) of a seed from germinating until it is planted in soil and watered. Phytic acid, then, like biological transmutation, is a rather miraculous gift of nature to support our survival: Phytic acid allows us to store grains and legumes for years and be assured that the inner life force of a seed food will be preserved. Then, whenever a seed is planted, all that is required are soil and water to break down the phytic acid to allow the endosperm, fed by the starch stored in the seed, to unfold into new plant life.

Phytate as a nutrient and enzyme inhibitor. Phytic acid (phytate) blocks the absorption of calcium, magnesium, iron, copper, and zinc as well as the digestive enzymes pepsin and amylase. Because some phytate is water soluble, we usually try to diminish its effects by soaking beans and grains before cooking. Soaking grains and legumes is especially appropriate for modern vegetarians and people in Third World countries where an over-reliance upon phytate-rich grains, beans and seeds can lead to serious vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Curbing phytic acid for people who rely upon beans, legumes, and grains for protein can prevent serious mineral deficiencies that include folate (birth defects); iodine (neurological development and growth); iron (brain development and child mortality); vitamin A (immune function); zinc (growth, healing); and vitamin B-12 (neurological development).

Phytate as an antioxidant, a moderator of metabolic stress, and a chelator of heavy metals. Phytic acid's positive role is not just as the protector of plant life. While phytic acid presents a problem for mineral absorption and can lead to deficiency, it also performs several positive functions in the body—working as an antioxidant to offset free-radical damage; lowering the glycemic index of carbohydrates; and binding toxic metals such as uranium and nickel.

Using phytic acid to personal advantage. An understanding of phytic acid and its tradeoffs means we can use or diminish it to fit our own personal health conditions. If the digestion and absorption of food generally and minerals specifically is an issue, then you will want to soak grains and beans before cooking.

However, if you are worried about blood sugar issues, you might decide not to soak grains and beans in recognition of the inverse relationship between phytic acid and the glycemic index (GI) of foods—lowering phytic acid raises the GI of carbohydrates. The same non-soaking strategy could be used if you are concerned about heavy metal toxicity.

Interestingly, using probiotics is a way to consume foods high in phytic acid while still benefiting from much of a food's mineral nutrition. This is because probiotics are rich in lactobacilli, a major source of phytase. Phytase is the enzyme that releases phosphate from phytic acid, thereby altering the structure of micronutrients to enhance mineral absorption.

In contrast to conditions in the less-developed world, most Americans have access to a wide variety of high-quality organic fruits, vegetables, and animal products that can supply rich mineral nutrition. Today, for many people, more pressing considerations than mineral deficiency may be metabolic stress, insulin resistance, and metal toxicity. Modern science, by outlining the tradeoffs and choices

surrounding phytic acid, enables us to use or to defuse phytic acid in ways that are in keeping with our own unique personal profile to support our health and vitality.

Coconut Oil—the Most Stable Oil for Cooking and a Aid to Metabolism and Weight Loss

Unrefined, extra virgin coconut oil is one of my favorite oil for cooking because, of all generally available oils, it is the most highly saturated. Coconut oil is 90 percent saturated, which means it holds up well to high heat, thus limiting the risk of free radical damage. Coconut oil is also an extremely rich source of anti-microbial lauric acid (a protective component also found in mother’s milk). In addition, unlike animal fats, coconut oil contains no cholesterol (coconut trees, of course, have no liver, hence, no cholesterol).

**Composition of Nut and Seed Oils²:
 Saturated Fats and Omega Oils**

<u>Unsaturated:</u> <u>Name</u>	<u>Super-</u> <u>Omega-3</u> (Table Use)	<u>Poly-</u> <u>Omega-6</u> (Table Use)	<u>Mono-</u> <u>Omega-9</u> (Low-temp).	<u>Saturated</u> (Cooking)	<u>Lauric</u> <u>Acid</u>
Flax	58%	14%	19%	9%	0
Evening Primrose	0	81	11	8	0
Sesame	0	45	42	13	0
Peanut	0	31	49	20	0
Rape (Canola)	7	30	54	7	0
Almond	0	17	78	5	0
Olive	0	8	76	16	0
Avocado	0	10	70	20	0
Coconut*	0	3	6	91	44
Palm Kernel*	0	2	13	85	47
Safflower	0	75	13	12	0
Sunflower	0	65	23	12	0
Corn	0	59	24	17	0
Soybean	7	50	26	15	0
Wheat Germ	5	50	25	18	0
Pumpkin	7	50	34	9	0
Pecan	0	20	63	7	0
Cashew	0	6	70	18	0

² Many of these oils are not available in healthy, unrefined versions. Listing them here does not suggest we recommend their use.

Why is it that coconut oil so highly saturated? Most likely in hot tropical climates nature had to design the coconut tree for the leaf to have sufficient body to withstand intense heat. Tropical oils—coconut and palm kernel oil—are, therefore, in a category all their own:

Of all fats and oils, coconut and palm kernel oils are the only available sources of medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs). In contrast to long chain fatty acids (LCFAs) found in most animal fats and in seed oils like corn, soy, and canola, MCFAs metabolize rapidly as a quick source of energy, so their calories are less likely to be stored as fat. Studies show that MCFAs aid in weight loss because they boost energy and metabolism.³ Because coconut oil can increase energy, body temperature, and metabolism, it can be an effective therapy for people who are hypothyroid. A tablespoon can also be added to a cup of hot water to provide heat and energy, an especially soothing remedy for cold winter days or in over-chilled buildings during the summer months. Apart from cooking, coconut oil can be used at the table—simply drizzle it over vegetables, grains, and soups to boost metabolism, sustain energy, and add extra flavor.

Coconut and palm kernel oil were given bad names by the food industry in the early decades of the postwar period when food companies wanted to switch to cheaper hydrogenated vegetable oils. Palm kernel oil is still used by the food industry, usually as hydrogenated palm kernel oil. When you purchase coconut oil, be sure to select unrefined, extra virgin coconut oil. Reliable brands are available at most health food stores.

Summer, Soft Drinks, and Children

Caffeine and soft drinks are topics that are too lengthy for a short summer newsletter, but they deserve a brief comment here because during the hot, “on-the-go” summer season, it is especially tempting to reach for a chilled soft drink for ourselves and our children. The short message here, for further elaboration in the fall, is that soft drinks are not benign, particularly for children and teens...

In recent decades, the greatest increase, some 70 percent, in caffeine use has been by children and teens. Caffeinated sodas are not just the ones that are brown in color such as Coke and Pepsi. Twelve ounces of Mountain Dew (a favorite of three and four-year-olds) has 54 mg of caffeine and a Sunkist Orange has 41 mg—both exceed the 35 mg in a 12 ounce Coke Classic.

Caffeine, a psychoactive drug that excites the central nervous system, is the most popular of all neuro-stimulants. *Studies illustrate that consuming caffeine during periods of rapid brain development in the childhood and teen years can have long-lasting effects on brain function. Caffeine, by exciting the central nervous system, can act as a gateway to addictive drugs and other stimulants such as nicotine.* The caffeine in soft drinks is also to be avoided because of its heavy pesticide load: it is the residual

³ St-Onge, M.P., & Jones, P.J.H., 2002. Physiological effects of medium-chain triglycerides: potential agents in the prevention of obesity. *Journal of Nutrition*, 132 (3): 329-332

product from decaffeinating coffee, with coffee being the most heavily sprayed food/beverage commodity in the world.

Caffeine and sugar, as delivered in soft drinks, are self-reinforcing. Have you noticed how a donut or a piece of pie demands a cup of coffee? Children and adults prefer caffeinated to non-caffeinated beverages—from an early age, we teach our children to seek the “buzz” delivered by the combination of sugar and caffeine. Soft drinks not only disrupt sleep, but also make children more jittery, anxious, and impulsive, to say nothing of the implications for diabetes, obesity, and the health of bones and teeth.

Sugar activates the “natural reward” centers in the brain in a similar fashion to nicotine and cocaine. Caffeine in combination with sugar works to stimulate the release of dopamine, thus reinforcing the natural reward of consuming sugar in combination with caffeine. When we give caffeinated, sweetened soft drinks to children and teens in the years when the brain is developing rapidly, we program them to rely upon the psychoactive “lift” of caffeine and sugar.

Preliminary research suggests that soft drinks may be a gateway to substance abuse (more research on caffeine, sugar, and teens is now underway). What we do know already is that soft drinks pave the way in later years to diabetes and obesity. It is alarming that the typical American drinks more than 600 12-ounce servings a year (almost 2 cans per day), while the average male teenager daily consumes over one-half gallon of soft drinks.⁴

This summer, think of giving your children water when they are thirsty and pack juicy fresh fruits for energy. My empirical experience when shopping suggests that water is actually more expensive than soft drinks—what does that tell us of the cheap ingredients in soft drinks and the efforts of soft drink companies to “lock us in” to a habit that can be debilitating? Soft drinks are not benign. When you and your children are on the go and thirsty, if you do not bring water from home, it is well worth the greater price to buy bottled water. *Drinking water is a one of the best investments in long-term health.*

Reading Resources:

Friedhelm Kirchfeld & Wade Boyle, *Nature Doctors: Pioneers in Naturopathic Medicine*

Henry Lindlahr, *Philosophy of Natural Therapeutics*

Matthew Wood, *Vitalism*

Louis Kervan, *Biological Transmutations*

Stephen Cherniske, *Caffeine Blues*

Jennifer L. Temple (2009). Caffeine Use in Children: What we know, what we have left to learn, and why we should worry. *Neuroscience Bio-behavior Review*, 33 (6), 793-806.

Merideth Addicott, Lucie Yang, et al. (2009). The effect of daily caffeine use on cerebral blood flow: how much caffeine can we tolerate? *Human Brain Mapping*. 30 (10): 3102-3114.

⁴ National Soft Drink Association

Summer Recipes: Healthy Dips

Guacamole

3 ripe avocados, preferably Haas
1-2 T. freshly squeezed lime juice
1/3 cup finely diced scallion, including some greens
1/3 cup cilantro
Salt to taste

Scoop the flesh from the skins of halved avocados and mash thoroughly. Reserve 1T. each cilantro and scallion for garnish. Add remaining ingredients. Cover with plastic wrap and chill if you are not serving immediately. To serve, place guacamole in a bowl and sprinkle top with reserved cilantro and scallion.

Black Bean Hummus

2 cups cooked black beans
¼ cup tahini
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 t. ground cumin
½ t. salt
3 T. olive oil
3 T. warm water
Juice of one lime
Juice of one lemon

Soak and cook ¾ cup of dried beans to make 2 cups. Set aside a few whole beans for garnish. Put all the ingredients in a food processor and blend until a smooth paste. Place in a small bowl. Garnish with parsley or cilantro and a few black beans. Serve with pita.

Source: Trish Ross

For more dip recipes, see: **Vacation Dips**, <http://pathways4health.org/2010/07/14/healthy-dips/>