



The great thing about getting older is that you don't lose all the other ages you've been.
-- Madeleine L'Engle

January/February 2013: New Year's and Growing...Older...Better

We step into New Year's with another year tacked to our age, but no matter our circumstance, it is never too early or too late to lay the groundwork for better health. What you do now may help prevent chronic disease in the future. And, if you are older, altering dietary and lifestyle habits may help you feel even better in the future than you did in stress-filled earlier decades.

This newsletter outlines strategies for maintaining health throughout the life span, so it applies to all ages, but it also gives special emphasis to issues that affect people as they age. The opening paragraphs explore some of the advantages of aging, particularly today when there are many wholesome food and lifestyle options available.

Enjoying the Later Years

When I was growing up, New Year's Day was bittersweet, because it marked the end of winter vacation and the imminent return to the constraints of school, schedules, and homework demands. But now in my early "retirement" years, time has transformed my sense of New Year's dread into a feeling of anticipation for the freedom, growth, and adventure presented by the freshness of a new year. No longer with the demands of a 24/7 career and childrearing, I love January and the return to "ordinary time." To me it symbolizes choice and an energizing sense of possibility.

For those of us who have entered the golden fall/winter season of life and are free from past demands, each New Year brings greater flexibility—the ability to say "no" when before we may have had to say "yes;" to choose our friends and how we spend our time; and to transition more and more from life's phase of "doing, moving, and shaking" to "being," a period when we can act as a resource for others. At this season of life and in contrast perhaps to our earlier years when we may have relied on the benevolence of others to help us along the way, we are better able to extend our own mentoring, helping hand, with all the gratification and joy that comes in assisting those in need.

With more unstructured time, we can engage in relationships and activities that we find rewarding. It may be the first time that we can plumb our deepest talents and explore our true interests, those that the demands of life previously shunted to the sidelines.

With many of our critical life choices set, the older life chapters may feel less stressful, since having to make key life-altering decisions itself creates worry and stress. And, in our later years when life does

send challenges and traumas our way, we are better able to view them through a tempered lens, well-honed by time, seasoning, wisdom, and perspective.

As we age, it is true that time may have sapped some of our youthful vitality, but as a partial offset, our energy may be less fractured by outside demands. No longer so scattered by the pressures of daily life, we can focus our inner strength to be perhaps even more effective in the end. We may also find that we are able to “cast away stones” and simplify our lives; we need fewer things; we can streamline and devote energy where it can be best spent. The gift of more unstructured time and greater vision means that in these later life chapters we can endow our lives with greater meaning; we can try new activities; we can make new contributions; and we can continue to grow in the process.

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.
-- Mark Twain

Growing, Older, Better... Some General Comments

No matter our genetic endowment and our past dietary and lifestyle history, there are many ways that we can support our future health. Some require time—whether shopping and cooking healthy meals; exercising for aerobic endurance and strength; finding ways to reduce stress; or bolstering the immune system via a good night's sleep. Others require money—to buy nutrient-dense foods; high-quality fats and oils to curb inflammation and pain; and, perhaps some natural dietary supplements and professional services/healing modalities provided by a physical trainer or licensed acupuncturist.

Investing time and money in good health and prevention throughout the life span is empowering and may save us time, money, and productivity in the end. Hardly “selfish,” these are good investments if they also save our loved ones, who might otherwise be burdened by our care needs.

Of course, everyone comes with their own genetic heritage and life history. In the autumn/winter phase of life, our body's weakest links surface and begin to scream for attention. Because we are only as good as our weakest links, developing awareness and taking time to support our weak systems is an important element in maintaining general health.

The Mind-Body-Spirit Trilogy. When we think of preserving vitality, we usually think of food and exercise, but they are not the only ingredients in good health. Mental and emotional states alter body chemistry and disrupt the natural flow of energy throughout the organ systems of the body, factors that can lead to pain and disease. Healing modalities, such as acupuncture, Qi Gong, Reiki, and aromatherapy can address our own unique issues and weaknesses. Healing arts in combination with food and exercise are powerful tools to support vitality and health.

Food and Nutrition. Whole foods are complex systems of vitamins, minerals, water, fiber, and life force energy that grow in a magical kaleidoscope of fractal patterns. As systems, whole foods are uniquely designed to feed the body, which is also a system. An apple or a whole grain oat grown sustainably in nutrient-rich soil is quite different, both in nutrition and life force energy, from commercial, pesticide-laden apple juice or a fractured, puffed oat made into a Cheerio.

Foods that agree with us depend somewhat on genetics, age, lifestyle, and what a person has eaten previously. For example, a raw foods diet might work well for someone who has lived on heavy meats and fats and/or fast foods, but only for so long.

Because “digestive fire” weakens with age, over time raw foods may need to be replaced more and more with cooked food, since cooking is a form of “pre-digestion.” Cooked foods are easier to assimilate and require less energy to process: a raw carrot, for example, has fewer calories than one that is cooked, because more calorie energy is required for its digestion.

No diet will forever serve a person well. Throughout life, it is important to continue to pay attention to the information we gain everyday from our food choices and make adjustments.

Growing, Older, Better...Specific Strategies

- **When Possible, Consume Whole Foods, Grown Locally, Seasonally, With All Their Edible Parts.** As mentioned above, the body is programmed to assimilate whole foods, which are balanced, complex packages of vitamins, minerals, trace minerals, phyto-nutrients, water, and fiber that work synergistically in the body. In addition, whole foods, with their life force energy, feed and restore the body’s own energy in ways that fractured, denatured, calorie-laden commercial foods created for a long shelf life cannot. Fractured foods do not satisfy in the same way as whole foods: they leave us craving for the missing parts.
- **Portion Control: Think Thirds and Quarters:** Try to balance meals in thirds, 1/3 protein; 1/3 healthy fats; and 1/3 carbohydrate. Consuming proteins and fats first to avoid metabolic stress/blood sugar spikes, insulin resistance, and inflammation associated with eating only carbohydrates. Also, think of balancing your plate in quarters, generous quarter servings of vegetables and fruits, with scant quarters of proteins and carbohydrates. Multi-colored vegetables and fruits provide a variety of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants for good health.
- **Avoid Inflammatory Foods:** refined sugar, high fructose corn syrup, refined vegetable oils, and refined flour. Inflammation underpins pain and chronic disease. Many inflammatory foods, such as corn and grain derivatives, are also genetically modified (GMOs). Avoid GMOs; most corn and soy products are GMOs. Also avoid food additives like MSG which can upset metabolism and contribute to weight gain.

“Nothing from a box” is a good guideline. Foods in a box or package created for a long shelf life such as refined sugar, refined flour, breakfast cereals, and finger snacks are stripped of life force energy, vital oils and nutrients to prevent rancidity. These are fractured, unbalanced foods that can leave us feeling unsatisfied, searching for more. Read food labels for preservatives and additives. Processed foods that taste too good to be true probably are.

- **Consume Healthy Fats, for Brain Health and Mental Activity, Metabolism and Weight Control, Hormonal Health, and to Control Inflammation.** Good fats are important at any age, but especially for older people entering the “winter,” drying out phase of life. Traditional fats are

moisturizing; they satisfy hunger; help the body assimilate minerals such as calcium and magnesium; and provide warmth and boost metabolism to help regulate the body thermostat as we age. A blend of natural saturated and unsaturated fats and oils provide the body with materials for proper cell membrane permeability, an important factor for appropriate cell functioning and replication. Avoid refined, denatured omega-6 vegetable oils which are inflammatory and feed chronic disease. Instead, include a healthy mix of fish oils and natural, saturated fats:

- Omega-3 Oils which fight inflammation and, with their double-bond “hot spots,” provide fuel for proper and effective neurological activity;
- Fermented Cod Liver Oil for vitamin D, with complementary vitamin A. Science tells us that there is a vitamin D receptor on every cell of the body. Adequate vitamin D helps to fight depression and “winter blues,” osteoporosis, and a variety of chronic diseases.
- Unrefined, Virgin Coconut Oil, a cholesterol-free saturated fat that can withstand the heat of cooking. Coconut oil is a medium-chain fatty acid (MCFA), high in anti-microbial lauric acid. As a MCFA, coconut oil is metabolized quickly to provide warmth and energy. By boosting metabolism and providing satiety, it can assist in weight loss, unlike long-chain vegetable oils that stay in the blood stream longer and whose calories are more likely to be stored as fat. Coconut oil has also been linked to the prevention of dementia. [Unrefined coconut oil should be distinguished from hydrogenated coconut and palm oil as food additives. These were an invention of the food industry to extend product shelf life... something that gave coconut oil a bad name.]
- Butter from Grass-Fed Animals, for a healthy 1:1 balance of omega-3:omega-6 fatty acids, as well as vitamins A and K. Vitamins A and K pair with vitamin D for balanced nutrition, particularly to support healthy bones and teeth.
- **Protect The Digestive System, for Good Nutrient Absorption/Assimilation.** Have you ever stopped to think about nature’s amazing protective shield—the skin, a layer covering our outside that transitions in continuous fashion inside to the mucous membranes of the nose, mouth, and the digestive system? Nature intended for nothing to enter the body without passing through these porous sentries. (Modern science, of course, overrides these protections with vacations, IVs, etc.)

Just as we protect our skin from the sun and wind, we want to protect our digestive system to assure that we are assimilating nutrients from the foods that we eat. This is particularly true as we age, a time when we have exhausted much of our vital store of digestive enzymes. Protecting the mucous lining of our digestive system can help prevent “leaking gut” syndrome, something linked to inflammatory and autoimmune issues. To safeguard the delicate digestive system and encourage a welcoming environment for healthy intestinal bacteria:

- *Consider supplementing your diet with probiotics and prebiotic foods.* Fermented foods provide enzymes and support good intestinal flora.
- *Chew well,* something especially important for the proper digestion of carbohydrates. Starches are broken down and mixed with digestive juices in the mouth; they then lay dormant in the stomach until they pass along to the intestinal tract.
- **Preserve Kidney Essence,** the store of energy endowed at birth. The kidney, much like a dry cell battery, represents the backup store of reserve energy to help us run from danger; meet emergencies; and deal with stress. Stress hormones and stimulants like caffeine and tobacco allow us to tap into this store, but often with the longer-term price of adrenal fatigue and weakened kidneys. We need to be suspicious of “something for nothing:” coffee and cigarettes may get people through the work day when there is little time to eat, but there is a long-term price.

The kidneys and adrenals are associated with the element water; the season winter; and with the ears and hearing; bones, marrow, and teeth; and head hair. By the winter season of life, our dry cell, our store of kidney essence is depleted—we may experience this not only in weakened adrenal vitality and a general lack of energy compared to our youth, but also in a loss of hearing, bone strength and dental health, and a graying and thinning of the hair on our head.

As we age, we can protect our kidney essence by covering our ears on cold, windy days and by keeping the small of our back, where the kidneys are located, protected against the cold. Have you noticed how exposing your lower back to cold seems to penetrate deep into your bones?

On cold winter nights, I like sleeping with a hot water bottle warming my lower back, and in cold weather, I make sure to I cover my ears. We can also protect our kidneys by consuming nutrient-dense, nourishing foods, especially bone stocks and organ meats; we can also add marrow bones to soups and stews.

- **Reduce Stress.** Without the boundless energy stores of our youth, preserving strength becomes more important as we age. Try saying “no” to non-essentials so that you have strength to handle the unexpected. Program downtime into the week to reduce stress and cortisol which encourages belly fat. And take time for aerobic exercise and relaxation in whatever forms you find enjoyable. High cholesterol and belly fat (through the stress hormone cortisol) are both linked to chronic stress.
- **Exercise and Lift Weights, to Build Aerobic Capacity and Strength.** Choose an aerobic exercise, but make sure that it is one you enjoy: Exercise that you dislike and find stressful can make weight-loss difficult. Moderate, enjoyable exercise helps mental focus, relieves stress, and boosts metabolism.

Develop a weight-lifting routine to prevent the muscle atrophy normally associated with aging: The average person loses 30% of their muscle mass between age 20 and age 70, but this need not happen: Someone aged 70 can regain as much muscle mass, measured in percentage terms, as a young person in their 20s. Because muscle requires more calories than fat cells, strength-training can help burn calories throughout the day, even while a person is at rest. Weight-training also builds bone strength and helps prevent falls and broken bones: Lifting weights stresses both muscle and bones, thus building not only muscle but also bone strength. In addition, weight-training directed to the lower extremities improves balance, builds leg strength and diminishes the risk of falls.

- **Allow Time for Sleep.** Sleep restores the body, the mind, and the immune system. It preserves the body's natural balance of hormones that helps us wake in the morning with spring in our step, while it also helps us focus and feel alert all day. Adequate sleep not only keeps us well; it can also prevent weight gain associated with sugar cravings that nag us when we are tired. Also, to sleep well avoid consuming "fire foods" at night—alcohol; caffeinated drinks; and chocolate. And, to sleep well and avoid acid reflux, eat your last meal a good three hours before bed.
- **Limit Alcohol.** Alcohol interferes with sleep, particularly as we age. It is hard for older people to drink and feel good, because the number of nephrons (filters that compose the kidneys) decreases with age. With fewer nephrons, the kidneys shrink in size and begin to lose function, so that extra fluid and wastes are no longer filtered and efficiently excreted from the body as before. If we drink too much, we may wake between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. and have trouble returning to sleep. This is when the liver goes to work each night to cleanse and filter the blood. It is an indication of how drinking alcohol unnecessarily taxes our system.

Crowd out alcohol, and sugar for that matter, by getting enough sleep and eating nutrient-dense foods. You will then crave less the temporary lift provided by these expansive fallbacks.

- **Avoid Food Mistakes.** We all make food mistakes—these provide information for adjusting our behavior—but mistakes cost more with time. Age weakens our digestive fire and our body's filtering/excreting system, so our body becomes less forgiving and more sensitive to poor treatment. Instead of living on coffee and snacks, saving up for a big meal at night, we may find that we need to eat smaller, more frequent meals, earlier in the day to catch the peak of our digestive power. Eating little during the day and saving up for a big evening meal taxes digestion, which is at its lowest ebb at night; it throws off metabolism and hormones, especially cortisol; and prevents us from gauging how much food in a 24-hour period we really need.

Food mistakes are best prevented by planning ahead and by eating "upside-down."

- **Planning:** Think about shopping and cooking ahead, on weekends, and over breakfast or dinner. This is easier than you think. Root vegetables can be oven roasted and grains or beans can be cooked on the stove, virtually unattended, when you go about your

morning or evening chores. Buy a slow cooker and let meals cook overnight or during the day when you are out of the house. A rice cooker can cook grains and hot cereals. It can be set at night, so that a piping hot bowl of oats awaits you in the morning. What is required most is simply the planning to prepare ingredients that can be combined in infinite combinations to create “instant” healthy meals.

Take time to shop; soak beans and grains overnight in advance of cooking; steam or sauté greens to be kept on hand in the refrigerator; roast winter round and root vegetables in their own skins; stew dried fruits with cinnamon sticks. Grains and beans are versatile; they can be added to soups, salads, served as side dishes, or made into dips; and they last for days in the refrigerator. Let a rice or slow cooker help you.

- Eating “Upside-Down” to synchronize the body to digestive energy and the “cortisol body clock.” Eating early—with a good breakfast that includes quality protein and fats—and throughout the day when you are hungry supports metabolism, hormones such as cortisol, and helps regulate the body’s thermostat. Eating early and frequently also feeds a steady stream of glucose to the brain and allows us to better gauge how much we really need to eat, so we often eat less in a 24-hour period. And, by eating early, we take advantage of our peak noon-time digestive fire and have a better chance to prevent acid reflux. [Repeated ideas from above which deserve emphasis.]

One of the best ways to enjoy front-loading meals is to shop and cook ahead so that you have delicious food on hand. Create a favorite breakfast for yourself. Breakfast is now my favorite meal and the thought of enjoying eggs or soup with artisanal sourdough bread and butter, makes the extra piece of pie over dinner less enticing. [How often do we tell ourselves at dinner that we can eat the extra sweet and make up for it by skipping breakfast the next day?]

One of the best ways to break the habit of late-night over-eating is to allow enough time to eat a good breakfast every morning. More than 80% of retirees eat breakfast, presumably because they have time and appreciate its importance.

- **Nourish Gratitude and a Spiritual Life.** Gratitude and a spiritual life, in whatever form you choose, are important ingredients of health. This is true for everyone, no matter what age, but it rightfully comes to the fore in our later years when material considerations fade and we must ponder the legacy to society that we will leave behind.

In our early years, perhaps we could balance like a bicycle, peddling fast with mind/body pursuits, but as we age and are forced to slowdown and look inward, we need a third wheel, the stability offered by a spiritual component. Gratitude and a the ballast afforded by a spiritual life can help us stay centered and content in the golden, winter years, as we continue to grow in new, meaningful, and better ways.

Reading Resources

Healing Modalities:

Fundamentals of Complementary and Integrative Medicine, Marc S. Micozzi

Food as Systems:

Food and Healing, and *Wholist Nutrition*, Doctoral Dissertation, Annemarie Colbin, Ph.D.

Leadership and the New Science, Margaret Wheatley

Gut Health:

Gut and Psychology Syndrome, Natasha Campbell-McBride, M.D.

Inflammation:

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/12/18/dietary-and-lifestyle-ways-to-manage-inflammation/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2011/07/23/managing-inflammation/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2012/02/28/controlling-blood-sugar/>

Fats and Oils:

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/03/22/a-primer-on-good-fats-and-oils-essential-fatty-acids-for-cellular-communication-neurological-function-and-the-immune-system-and-stable-oils-for-cell-integrity-and-cooking/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/03/20/fats-to-choose-and-to-avoid-for-weight-loss-and-healthy-metabolism/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2012/02/25/cod-liver-oil/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2011/01/08/unsaturated-oils-structure-and-food-sources/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/03/27/omega-6s-dominance-over-omega-3s-in-salad-and-cooking-oils/>

The Body Clock:

<http://pathways4health.org/2011/01/10/ayurveda-energy-the-life-cycle/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2012/03/05/honoring-our-energy-clock/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/11/29/december-2010-stress-sleep-and-the-cortisol-connection-honoring-the-body%E2%80%99s-cortisol-clock/>

Stress:

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/12/05/stress-cortisol-and-belly-fat/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/12/18/strategies-to-lower-stress/>

Recipes: Marrow Bones

Bone marrow can be roasted or used to thicken and enhance the nutrition of soups, stews, and sauces. Throughout time, cultures have used bone marrow to support nutrition and health. Marrow is easy to digest and assimilate and is a rich source of protein, healthy, monounsaturated fat, and minerals. Buy marrow bones from grass-fed, hormone-free animals. Bones keep several days in the refrigerator and are best rinsed and soaked in salt water before using.

See February and March 2010 Newsletters for discussion of the health benefits of bone stocks and cooking with bones,

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/02/05/february-2010-investing-in-stocks/>

<http://pathways4health.org/2010/03/04/march-2010-%E2%80%9Cputting-some-bones-upon-your-meat%E2%80%9D%E2%80%A6cooking-with-bones/>

or, think about the following quick ideas from *Livestrong.com*:

Roast marrow bones in a 450 F oven until the marrow begins to sizzle inside the bones. Serve the hot marrow bones alongside toasted bread. Scoop the marrow out of the bone and onto the bread with a tiny spoon and top the marrow with salt, fresh herbs of your choice and lemon juice.

Add raw marrow-filled bones to a pot of soup to infuse the final dish with flavor and protein. Cook the bones in the soup while it simmers, until the marrow melts and escapes from the bones. Remove and discard the bones before serving the soup. Or, from one reader's suggestion—Put marrow bones in the pot when making navy bean and barley soup. Add dill, black pepper, and sea salt.

Roasted Bone Marrow Crostini, from the Reluctant Gourmet

1 baguette or other long, thin loaf of bread

Extra virgin olive oil

Beef marrow bones, cut to approximately two inches.

Salt and pepper, to taste

Parsley

Lemon juice, (optional)

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Slice the bread into thin rounds. Arrange them on a baking sheet and generously drizzle them with extra virgin olive oil. Place them in the oven and toast until golden and crisp.
- Remove the crostini and raise the oven temperature to 450. Make sure it is fully heated before adding the bones.
- Rinse the marrow bones and pat dry with paper towels. Lay them flat on a baking sheet or roasting pan. Drizzle with olive oil. Place them in the oven and roast for 15 minutes.
- Remove the bone and allow them to cool somewhat. Remove the marrow, add salt, pepper, and parsley and mash with a fork. Spread the mixture on the crostini.

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