

## Beyond Nutrition: Nourishing your Body



By Desiree Nielsen, RD(t)  
The Choices Dietitian

**Food** (noun) any nutritious substance that people or animals eat or drink or that plants absorb to maintain life and growth

- Compact Oxford English Dictionary

"It is easier to change a man's religion than to change his diet."

- Margaret Mead

As a dietitian, it is my job to support people in their quest for health and encourage healthy eating. It is a great honour and responsibility to receive access to people's lives, hopes for the future and share their struggles. What drives me and inspires me in my role is the amazing complexity of our relationship with food. There is no one activity that we engage in (or disengage with, as it were) more often than eating: we make hundreds of food choices every single day. And what is most startling is that for many of us, those choices are fraught with negative emotion. We have quite literally become fearful, confused and uncertain about what should be one of our most natural activities.

If you look at the definition of food above, one could argue that more and more, what we choose to raise to our lips is no longer food but packaged goods filled with food cosmetics and little nutrition to speak of, engineered to keep us coming back for more. We are inundated with foods that market themselves under the guise of being healthy – omega 3 fatty acids added to nutritionally inferior breads and vitamins combined with what is, essentially, sugar water. No wonder we're nervous...some of us stopped eating real food a long time ago. Our bodies can't be fooled. These low quality foods do not nourish our bodies and their cries for nutrition are interpreted as hunger for which we respond with more of the sad, lifeless stuff.

We have a relationship with food, as much as we have a relationship with ourselves, our partners and our families. There is history between you and your fork. When we consider our personal histories with food, there may be many clues as to how we ended up in this state. Many of us did not learn to cook as children and the current pace of our lives makes it easy to look the other way, especially now that there are so many grab and go options ready for us to take home. Perhaps we grew up uncomfortable with our bodies, whether they were deemed too thin or too generous – and food became the battleground where we waged war with ourselves. It may even be simpler than that: we just might not ever think about our diet and consider food as function only.

Food can produce an emotional reaction due to both our own attachments to it and the actual biochemistry of the food itself. Components of food have an effect on the way we feel and the way we think. Often, when we reach for food when we are sad – we are lead to carbohydrates

which will temporarily boost our serotonin levels (the good mood hormone). Think about a favourite food you have – imagine it's aroma, the way it looks, the way it tastes, the way it makes you feel when you eat it. These are deep emotional connections to the food we eat.

We learn much about food from our families and our childhoods. My own childhood was spent in my grandmother's kitchen. My grandparents are from Portugal and the kitchen was the epicenter of our universe. I remember summer days spent lying under the raspberry bushes with a book, lazily reaching up whenever my tummy craved more of the ripe berries. I remember shelling peas with my grandmother, fingers green with evidence of the fact that I ate more than I shelled. And I remember my grandmother kneading huge volumes of bread for Christmas, and the mini loaf she made especially for me so I would stop picking at the other loaves while they rose on the kitchen table. Food was ritual, culture, pleasure and care giving – all positive associations that continue to this day.

Simple, good quality foods prepared with love nourish us far beyond that of their basic nutrition – they nourish our bodies, minds and souls. Bite into a local apple and let the juice drip down your chin. Meditate on the drizzle of honey in your tea. Buy the most beautiful cookbook you can afford and spend a rainy Sunday afternoon with a glass of wine planning your dinner. Reconnect with your fork...you may be pleasantly surprised where it leads.

*Desiree Nielsen, RD(t) is the Choices Dietitian. Desiree will be presenting the first seminar of the Choices Markets' New Year, New You series on The Power of Whole Foods at the Canadian Memorial Centre for Peace on January 8, 2009. She will also speak at our Kelowna Choices location on January 12, 2009 and our South Surrey location on January 19, 2009. You can contact her anytime at [nutrition@choicesmarket.com](mailto:nutrition@choicesmarket.com).*