



November 2007 Health Letter

Eating for your Heart

Thanksgiving is, and I think always will be, my favorite holiday. Images surrounding this wonderful day come to mind from childhood and more recent years with my own children around the table. Food, and lots of it, is always a central theme in my recollection, and it reminds me of the way that food plays such a role in family celebrations and rituals. Who carves the turkey? Who bakes the pumpkin pies? Who makes the best cranberry dressing? Whose rolls are the best? Every family knows its own traditions and stories that are passed down the generations. A family meal prepared by many hands, eaten in gratitude and with no hurry, shared around a table with special friends and family is quite a contrast to the way many of us relate to food on a daily basis. Rushed meals eaten on the way out the door, picked up at the drive-through, or eaten alone as we live disconnected and scattered lives is more typical of American eating patterns in 2007.

So my first thought about heart healthy eating at this time of year is to reconnect food with thankfulness and relationships, and slow it down so you can enjoy it. Here are some reasons why I believe this makes for good medicine in addition to good sense. Our emotions are connected to heart health. Stress, worry, constant rush and anxiety are connected to increased risk of heart disease; gratitude and strong social and family relationships are connected to better heart health. What better way to stay connected with those you love than to join more often than Thanksgiving around a family table? And the likelihood that your food will be a highly processed packaged food or fast food chock-full of unhealthy fats and sugars goes up in proportion to how much of a hurry you are in when choosing foods. Slowing down enough to plan a menu and buy fresh foods at the grocery for a family meal allows you to incorporate the health benefits of whole grains, healthier oils and fats, and nutritious vegetables into your meals. And finally, we know that mindfulness of our eating (chewing slowly, enjoying the tastes, and avoiding eating while doing other activities such as driving, TV, or chores) actually decreases the amount we eat over time: people who eat in a hurry are more likely to overeat.

So, this Thanksgiving, enjoy a wonderful meal with people you love, take the time to include healthy choices that taste good: whole grains such as brown rice; colorful vegetables such as sweet potatoes, greens, onions, red cabbage; consider a Thanksgiving fish for a change instead of poultry or beef; and put olive oil on your bread instead of butter or margarine. And after Thanksgiving? Make a promise to yourself to slow down your meals, choose your menus and enjoy cooking a little more often, and connect mealtimes to spending time with people who make you feel more alive and thankful for the good gifts of life!

Quick notes from the Aiken-Augusta Holistic Health events calendar: you can join us at Earth Fare in Martinez (368 Fury's Ferry Road, see <http://www.earthfare.com/> for more info) for two events in December: "Simple Steps to Optimize your Health" at 7:00 pm on Tuesday December 4, and "Eating Healthy Bite by Bite through the Holidays" at 3:00 pm Sunday December 9.

And while you are here, take a moment to forward this health letter to two friends. Someone will be grateful you did!

See you in December!

For health,

Robert Pendergrast, MD

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