

Chronic Health, LLC

# A Few Helpful Notes on Foods



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## A Few Notes on Foods

What we eat should be joyous and support our bodies by providing the nutrients we need to function well *and* giving us the building blocks we need to build and repair our bodies.

Over a few million years, human bodies have evolved to utilize the foods available in the world around us, which not only includes the content, but also the *timing* of when foods are ripe and available.

On top of that, the conditions that food develops within has a great deal to do with the nutrients that are in the food – for example: a healthy chicken and a sickly chicken do not produce eggs or meat with the same nutritional profile, a healthy cow and a sickly cow do not produce the same type of milk, produce grown in over-farmed soil does not have the same level of vitamins or nutrients as produce grown in rich, healthy, fertile soil does – also referred to as soil that has “Good Tilth.”

### Timing: everything is cyclical

Timing is something we don't hear much about, but it's very important when it comes to understanding how our bodies use different foods. Think about when certain foods are available in our natural environment. Many vegetables grow throughout the spring, summer, and fall, with the starchiest ones being available later in the season, when preparing our bodies for winter or storing to eat over the winter. Vegetables tend to be plentiful and different ones are available on a fairly ongoing basis. Animals should be mature before eating, and would generally be killed, processed, and the entire animal used for various things, so it's highly unusual to eat the quantity of meat that we do as often as we do. Consider how many chickens a typical American family may eat in a week, without making or consuming any bone broth or organ meats, or using the feathers for anything. Slaughtering that many chickens per household every week would be wasteful and unsustainable if they were managing it themselves. (Note: it's still wasteful and unsustainable, we just don't have to see it close up at the moment.) And fruits, those lovely treats that, for any given variety, are only ripe and available for a few weeks out of the year, usually

toward the end of summer or in the fall, when sugar is useful because we'll either use it up in the short term or store it for use over the winter.

Notice how different food availability occurs in seasons. For three of those four seasons, we're mostly operating in a ketogenic state, with one season of a glucogenic state.

What we've seen in western cultures is an over-emphasis of one particular season, which leaves our bodies desperate for a break so that we can use up what we've stored.

Frequently, people on a strictly keto diet will argue that this is simply the best way to eat and that it should be followed for one's entire lifetime, mostly because of how much better they look and feel after changing their own diets – which is a definite step in the right direction, but it's also incomplete. Yes, the glucogenic diet we grew up on was overkill and we've raised a few generations of people who are now sick, battling mysterious health conditions, or just unable to manage their weight, which means that the ketogenic change is the break the body needed – and may need for *years* in order to make up for the first few decades of abuse – but that doesn't mean that it is the one and only way we should be nourishing our bodies.

## So, how did we get here, anyway?

In the 1960s, the sugar industry funded research that fraudulently claimed that ['fat makes you fat, and sugar just gives you energy.'](#) We initially learned about it because those who worked on the initiative came-clean about it in their old age (then we conducted some research into the documentation).

This is interesting for a number of reasons:

- 1) It informed the “food pyramid” that has been used since the mid-70s to influence food choices at home, in restaurants, and in institutions, like schools and prisons.
- 2) Prior to the broad adoption of the food pyramid, western cultures did not have rampant obesity issues, and ailments such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, digestive issues, and cancer were far less common.

- 3) The rest of the world saw this claim as the nonsense it was and wondered how we fell for it. It's well known throughout the world that indulging in sugar is harmful to the body.

Some byproducts of this shift in dietary theory are:  
All carbs and all fats were painted as 'essentially the same.'

**Carbs:** starches (like potatoes and such) are chains of glucose. Glucose is usable by nearly every cell in the body and requires very little processing by the body to make it usable. While we don't need a lot of it, glucose is very easy for the body to use.

Fructose (like fruit, granulated sugar, honey, etc.) does eventually become glucose in the bloodstream, but requires a two-stage breakdown in the GI tract, driven by liver enzymes, and is absorbed through the intestines. This is more work for the body. (Those with fructose sensitivities and/or allergies are usually missing one of those liver enzymes or the uptake pathways in the GI tract – both of which can be issues since birth or simply get worn out with overuse.) If you've heard of 'non-alcoholic fatty liver' or 'cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver,' this is the type of thing that leads to it: unnecessarily overworking the liver.

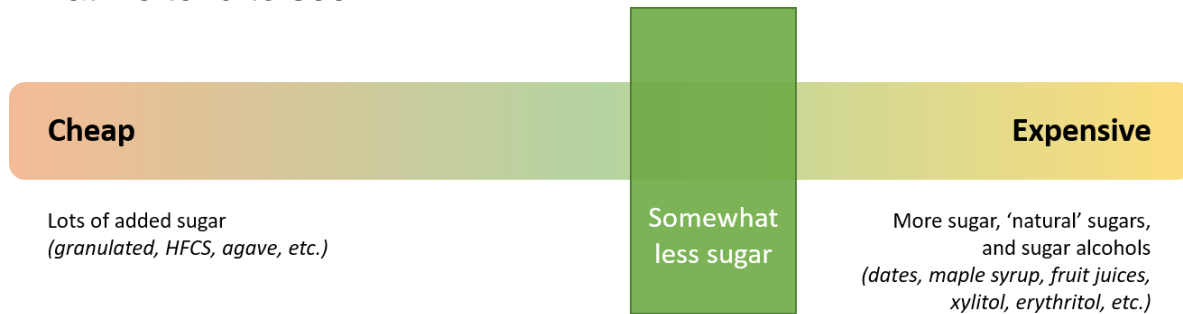
Also: sugar (especially fructose) is incredibly addictive, is a known inflammatory, and has been used in packaged products for decades as a way to increase consumption. This is used as a weapon, in general, but is especially targeted toward vulnerable socio-economic groups with fewer options. Sugar is a subsidized crop in the US, making it incredibly cost effective to add it to foods that don't need it.

The next time you get the chance, as an example, compare the peanut butter options in a high-end/premium grocery store vs any general supermarket chain.

- How many varieties can you find without added sugars?
- What are the price points on those products?

This is only an example, and I'd encourage you to look at other categories as well.

What we tend to see:



**Fats:** when ‘all fats’ got painted as ‘bad for you,’ we generally stopped consuming the types of fats that are necessary for a healthy personal ecosystem. Vegetable fats, fish fats, nut fats, animal fats, and fats we create with a generous amount of processing, are not the same – and our bodies know this.

Some fats, especially unsaturated (poly- and mono-), are needed to create the insulating sheath called myelin in the brain, they reduce inflammation (which, in turn, reduces chronic pain and cholesterol levels), help build stronger cell membranes, and help our bodies use fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K.

While trans-fats are entirely avoidable and not needed for a healthy body, a closer look should be taken at saturated fats. Saturated fats that aren’t excessively processed – like coconut oil, butter, cheese, yogurt – also contain medium chain triglycerides (MCTs), which are very easily used by the body for energy. (Most fat isn’t used for energy until the body has run out of glucose = ketogenic, but MCTs don’t have to wait in line to get used.) There is no need to go overboard on butter, cheese, and bacon, but there’s no nutritional need to avoid them either.

Side note: your body will not release fat stores if you are not consuming any fats, so if you’re interested in clearing out some storage, please be sure that poly- and mono-unsaturated fats are a part of the mix, and don’t be afraid of a little butter (*real* butter).

**Alcohol** is an interesting topic. Yes, alcohol (like fructose) requires the liver’s intervention in order to metabolize it. Yes, alcohol also gets converted to glucose in the bloodstream, so those with blood sugar

regulation issues need to be especially careful about how much they consume.

What's also true: fructose exacerbates the effects of alcohol – both in the experience of consuming alcohol (how quickly you feel tipsy), and in the affects on the liver and blood sugar levels.

If you enjoy having an alcoholic beverage, be mindful of the fructose content and aim for the lowest levels you can find (this includes mixers).

- Club soda > tonic water (though, diet tonic water may be an acceptable option).
- Using real ingredients instead of pre-mixed ones (like Margaritas) will cut out a lot of the sugar (tastes better, too).
- And If wine is your thing, there are quite a few very low sugar wines available – Argentinian Malbecs and Spanish Tempranillos (not blends) are generally dryer than typically available red wines, but there's also a company that specializes in sourcing high quality, small production, very low residual sugar, naturally produced wines (both red and white): [Dry Farm Wines](#) (They've got [individual-box](#) options, or you can sign up for a [subscription](#) – and if they send you one that you especially like, you can request a special order of that one, too. This is a small business with excellent customer service.)

## Simply put: marketing is not your friend.

The purpose of packaging is not to help you make good choices, it's intended to convince you to buy the product. Period.

When the food industry realizes we want to avoid certain ingredients, they negotiate thresholds for when they *have to* disclose the info on the packaging – for example: take a look at “sugar free” non-dairy creamer or “sugar free” whipped topping. The packaging will tell you it's sugar-free, the nutritional label will say 0 grams of sugar, but if you read the ingredient list... some form of sugar will be within the top 3 ingredients. It's worth reading the ingredients. I know it's the tiniest print they could possibly use, but legally, they're allowed to hide a lot of information in the labeling requirements that have been negotiated.

## Flavor and color enhancers tend to affect the body in unsavory ways.

One of the things that makes this topic controversial is that it's cheaper to add a few drops of something we've created in concentrated form than it is to use a substance that grows in real life. (Saffron: expensive. Yellow and red food coloring: cheap.) This leads to a lot of arguments from companies who want to continue using the cheaper, readily available, alternative.

Here's where that goes sideways: medically speaking, we know many of these substances have significant negative affects on portions of the population. For example, we know that red food colorings exacerbate the symptoms of ADHD in children. This is not yet considered widespread enough to warrant removing the additive from foods (especially those marketed for children) and it is not generally disclosed to parents of kids with ADHD. There are a lot of substances like this – colorings, flavorings, preservatives, etc.

Speaking of preservatives: a note on salt >> many times, when someone's sodium levels are high or their blood pressure is concerning, they will be advised to cut salt from their diet. This is terrible advice. Salt is necessary for the body to function well. Better advice: cut processed foods out of your diet. Most preservatives are sodium-based, but your body doesn't have a use for them, so they hang out and cause other drama. Use high quality / minimally processed table salt and toss the packaged foods.

*(It's worth pointing out at this stage that medical doctors – unless they're passionate about the topic and learn about it on their own – do not receive even 1 hour of education on the topic of nutrition. Not one. Be very, very cautious when taking nutritional advice from a medical doctor.)*

## Speaking of colors!

When color-enhancers aren't part of the mix, the colors of food can tell you a lot about what's in the food.

Since the colors we see are the wavelengths of light that are reflected, rather than absorbed, by the food we're looking at, different colors tell us that the light is coming into contact with different elements. The more

(naturally occurring) colors you consume, the broader the nutrient spectrum is that you're taking in, and this is very good news.

## What about supplements?

### *Excellent question!*

There are some things we struggle to get from our western lifestyles – like safe amounts of natural sunlight – and these may require us to add a little something to the mix now and then.

What I will say is that getting something in its natural, whole form is preferable whenever possible.

One of the things we aren't good at is understanding ecosystems – but we're getting better. What this means is that we understand things like "vitamin c is incredibly important" but miss the part where the other substances that tend to get packaged along with this vitamin work together for the processing and usage of the vitamin.

Everything the body does requires a buddy-system. Want to process something (like iron or calcium)? You need a buddy substance (like folic acid or magnesium). And this stands for digestion, incorporation into the body, use by organs, and expelling waste products. The unfortunate way we've been told things work is that if you "add x, y is the result," but we are ecosystems, not machines, so when we add x, the result will depend on what condition the ecosystem is already in, what else is added with it, as well as how the ecosystem is used after the addition of x. Everything matters. It all works together. And since it all works together, consuming x *along with all the other things it's supposed to come with*, is proving to be really important.

## A note on protein:

One misconception many of us have is that "protein means meat" and that if we're not eating meat, we have to find ways to manipulate food in a way that tricks our bodies into thinking something's protein.



What protein really is: a combination of 7-9 amino acids.

There are about 20 amino acids that our bodies need to work well, most of these can be created by the body (as long as we're eating enough broad spectrum nutrients), but there are 9 essential amino acids that we cannot create ourselves. These are the ones we're looking for in 'proteins,' which can include meat, but also includes eggs, dairy, fish, legumes and beans, grains (like quinoa), nuts and seeds.

So, if a plant-based diet is something you're interested in or you are concerned that cutting back on factory-farmed meats might leave you without enough protein in your diet, fret not. You've got lots of options, many of which are easier for your body to digest.

## What about food allergies / sensitivities?

These are no joke and affect your entire body, not just your GI tract.

There are a number of things that can lead to allergies or sensitivities, too. One such thing is over-exposure to a substance – when something is in just about everything you eat or apply to your body, your body will protest. Is gluten added to everything you eat and all of your soaps / lotions / cosmetics? You may be overdosing on it. Is sugar added to everything you eat and drink? You may be overdosing on it. Is soy added to everything you eat and absorb? You may be overdosing on it.

Notice how the things we're seeing sensitivities to tend to be the same substances that are being added to way more products than they really should be. This is another reason that dialing things back to whole foods and reducing the amount of processed foods in your diet can significantly affect your wellbeing, even if you don't have an allergy yet, or have one but don't know which thing you're reacting to.

## This is a lot to keep up with – what now?

What this means is that quality is super important, content matters, and we may want to bring our reading glasses to the store with us.

### Some general guidelines:

- Factory-farmed ingredients will not be as nutritious as small-farmed ingredients – this goes for produce, animals, and dairy products. Make those trade-offs whenever you can.
- The more processing something goes through, the less of the original item is still present. (Salt\* is a really good example of this.)
- Marketing is not your friend – read the ingredients.
- The more (naturally occurring) colors, the better.
- Keto is fine, as long as the foods selected are high quality, a wide variety, and that once in a while, you give yourself a ‘fall break.’

### A note about *not* eating:

You may be familiar with a trend called “intermittent fasting.”

What it means is that you give your body a break from digesting food 24/7. Digesting food takes a good bit of energy, and there are several processes that your body cannot undertake while you’re digesting, so digesting *all the time* is not ideal. That’s essentially all it means.

My personal ideal digestion window is about 8-10 hours per day, so I eat my first meal about 2 hours after I get up, and I stop eating and drinking (except for water) about 3-4 hours before I go to sleep. Giving yourself a break before bed is the most important part of the process because digestion disrupts sleep (and doesn’t work as efficiently while you’re sleeping).

Just remember to be kind to yourself. This is about giving your body what it needs – both the nutrition it needs and the breaks that it needs – this is *not* about punishing yourself for eating.



### \*Notes on specific ingredients (from recipes):

Chicken Breasts: thighs/legs/wings can be used as well, they are just more difficult to cut up. Boneless options are very easy to work with, though

using a cut that still has the bones in it will give your meal a little more flavor and the added benefit of all that bone marrow. << So good!

Chicken Broth: I prefer the Organic Free Range chicken broths available in cartons – generally either in the same aisle with the canned chicken broth or in the organic section of your grocery store. These have a lot more flavor than the canned broths, and likely have more ‘chicken soup’ properties to them. Check the ingredients to ensure it’s sugar-free.

Chili Base: I use a pre-mixed ‘chili base’ by “Better Than Bouillon”. It’s generally available next to the other bouillon cubes in your grocery store, but if this variety is not available, you can order it from the company: <https://amzn.to/36jHI3e> The basic ingredients, however, are Chili Peppers, Dried Onions, Dried Garlic, Salt, Paprika, and Beef Extract. And, while I don’t know their proportions, I’m sure you can still use these ingredients on their own to produce a very similar flavor!

Dairy: a good **milk** substitute is [Almond Breeze Unsweetened Vanilla Almond Milk](#) -- there are also lots of dairy-free **cheese** options available, and more coming to market all the time. A few **parmesan** substitutes: [Go Veggie](#), [NOOCH IT!](#), [Parma!](#), [Violife](#) -- alternatives to goat cheese **crumbles** could be diced firm tofu or a vegan cheese substitute. Admittedly, I haven’t found a good crumbly vegan cheese, but would love to know if you have!

Eggs: shopping for eggs can be confusing. “Cage-free” just means *chicken house*, and “free-range” means that they must have ‘access’ to the outside (not that they spend time out there), according to USDA rules. The Humane Farm Animal Care’s **(HFAC) Certified Humane program**, however, has standards:  
**Free-range** = at least 6 hrs a day outdoors (weather permitting) and at least 2 sq ft of space per bird.  
**Pasture-raised** = 108 sq ft per bird and they are outdoors year-round in rotating fields (shelter is provided for protection, but not containment).  
 If you can’t find HFAC certified eggs, “organic” is a good place to start. *Remember: nutritious animal products can only come from healthy animals.*

Flour: a 1:1 substitution can be made with any [gluten-free flour](#)

Hot Sauce: Again, I have a favorite – Nando’s Peri Peri (Medium):  
<https://amzn.to/3420V8g> (I can usually find this in my grocery store.)  
But, just about any flavorful hot sauce that is *not very vinegar-y* and is sugar-free will do just fine.

Liquid Aminos: this is usually a [soy product](#), so if you’re avoiding soy, there is a [coconut-based version](#), also by Bragg’s.

Liquid Smoke: some versions contain gluten, so be sure to read the label if you’re avoiding gluten. This is a good one that only has two ingredients: [Wright’s Liquid Smoke](#)

Maple syrup: a sugar-free option with great flavor is made by [Choc-Zero](#) (there are options at grocery stores, too, but they tend to have lots of sugar-alcohols and/or artificial sweeteners, and we’re looking to avoid GI upset)

Monk fruit sweetener: [monk fruit substitute for cooking](#) is also not the same as monk fruit syrup. This is formulated so that it’s a 1:1 substitution and can be used in recipes that call for granulated sugar.

Monk fruit syrup: [monk fruit simple syrup](#) is a 1:1 simple syrup substitute that works well in cocktails, coffee, whipped dairy, chocolate concoctions, and no-bake deserts.

Oil: if you can squeeze the object (olive, sunflower seed, etc.) and oil comes out, that’s generally fine oil to eat. If we need to break it down, convert it into something else, etc., in order to make it into an oil, maybe don’t eat that.

Onion: onions are absorbent, so cutting them up freshly is great, but pre-prepped onions will absorb anything that’s around them – it’s one of the reasons they can trigger migraines and GI upset. If you have an onion that’s already cut, ensure that it’s kept in an airtight container, so it doesn’t absorb anything else.

Pasta: there are a number of good substitutions for standard pastas. Some are gluten-free, but still contain carbs (like [these](#)), and some are made with non-flours (I'm partial to zucchini noodles or [heart of palm](#) noodles, which are shelf-stable and keep well).

Rice: if you'd like a low-carb substitute, riced cauliflower works well for this. Use the same amount you'd use if it were rice.

Salt: not all salt is the same. If you have to grind it yourself, the mineral profile is going to be richer than if it's already been processed to the point where each granule is tiny and uniform. Different colors of salt have different flavors, too: [white salt rocks](#) tend to have a very sharp saltiness, while [pink salt rocks](#) have a softer saltiness. If you're trying to reduce your salt intake, focus on sodium-based preservatives in processed foods (since those are harder for your body to eliminate) and use freshly ground rock salts to taste.

Sausage: this can be hard to find in some stores, but we're looking for sugar-free sausages. There are two really good options by Applegate: chicken and pork. (Sugar-free bacon is easier to find. Check out the low-sodium versions of the store-brand bacon and/or the Applegate or naked bacon sugar-free bacon.) Remember: it's not just keto because it's meat... it needs to be sugar-free, including fruit and maple syrup.

Seasoning Blends: the aim for seasoning blends is to add flavor, without adding things you don't want to consume. Here are two good options: [Bragg's Organic Sprinkle](#) or [Cavender's Salt-Free Greek Seasoning](#) (the salt-free version is also MSG-free)

Stevia: [stevia sugar substitute for cooking](#) is not the same as liquid stevia drops. This is formulated so that it's a 1:1 substitution and can be used in recipes that call for granulated sugar.

Vanilla Extract: high-quality vanilla extract should smell lovely, even at full-strength, and doesn't need sugar added. Cheaper extracts will add sugar in order to make it palatable. [Rodelle](#) makes a good one, but there are many more options, too – especially imported products.

Vinegar: we're aiming for a bright flavor without adding sugar, like white vinegar or apple cider vinegar (cloudy, like [Bragg's](#)), but steer clear of balsamic vinegar and other sweetened vinegars.



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***More sources & further reading:***

[The Nutrition of Color](#), Andrea J Burns, Chronic Health, LLC

[Bookshop.org](#), Evolving book list curated by Chronic Health, LLC

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/>

<https://healthyeating.sfgate.com/>

<https://foodinsight.org/>

<https://www.healthcastle.com/>

