

Get Healthy / Stay Healthy

A Practical Guide for Good Health

By

Don Durrett

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Good health and good health habits usually go together.

– Don Durrett

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Introduction

I originally published a health book about life extension in 2017. However, I quickly realized that I had limited my audience. The material in my life extension book applied to everyone if I just made a few changes. So that is what I have done.

I decided to write this book for those who are concerned about their health, but do not want to use rigid methods that are required for life extension. In order to add years and vitality to your life, it requires a lifestyle of optimal health. That type of lifestyle is not easy and not for everyone. This book, however, is for everyone.

I am a layman and not a professional. You can consider any statement that I make in this book as my opinion. The only thing I know about health is from personal experience. I'm writing this book because I feel that my experience and knowledge is worth sharing. The title of this book says that it is a practical guide and that is it what it is, based on my experience.

Take what you want from it and apply it to your life. Hopefully, it will help you to make some changes that improve your health. I believe that good health is a choice and that we are all in charge of our personal health. It comes down to desire and intent. Do you want to be healthy or not? It's a choice, and this book helps you to understand what choices are available.

In many ways, this book is a condensed version of a lifetime of learning about health-related issues. I took health seriously in my early twenties and made an effort to understand which foods are healthy. I also began exercising consistently. These two focal

points led me to a holistic view of overall health. As you read this book, you will come to see this holistic view. I am constantly learning and expanding my knowledge of what choices I can take to improve or maintain my health.

As you read this book, you will be presented with numerous ideas on how to improve your health and change your health habits. The goal is for you to change your lifestyle so that good health becomes a priority and not just something you take for granted.

The book title begins with Get Healthy. However, that's not really what this book is about. It's more about getting healthier and then maintaining a high level of health. It's intended for people who are already healthy but want to maintain or improve their level of health. If that's your goal, then this book is for you.

Don Durrett 8/10/2018

Chapter One: Eat Well

The most difficult thing to do for good health is to eat well. For some people, it is impossible because of ingrained habits. It is probably the most formidable challenge you will face for improving your health. The irony is that once you change your eating habits, it becomes very easy to follow. The difficulty is in changing them.

Most of you are not going to like this chapter. That's because most of you are likely using food for satiation and not for health. If you want good health, then you will need to learn how to eat to live and to stop living to eat. There's a big difference. Ideally, everything that you consume should sustain good health. Once you achieve this attitude, the battle is won.

I didn't need to do very much research to write this chapter. I have been focusing on healthy eating for decades and I have learned quite a bit. If you take your nutrition seriously, then you will also be able to write this chapter, or something similar. Let's jump in and get started.

Eating well is all about exclusion and inclusion. You need to exclude certain foods and include others. Let's begin with what you need to exclude. Here is the list:

1. Refined sugar and sugar substitutes (except a few listed below).
2. Vegetable and plant-based oils (except a few listed below).
3. Simple carbohydrates (except infrequently).
4. Preservatives and additives (except infrequently).

You need to stop eating sugar on a regular basis, except for fruit and honey. Beet and cane sugar are not as bad as corn sugar, but they should all be avoided as much as possible. Moreover, all artificial sugar substitutes should be avoided. There are a few natural sugar substitutes, such as stevia and chicory, and it's okay to include some foods that include filtered cane sugar when done in low quantities or infrequently.

Why the exclusion of sugar? Because from a nutritional standpoint, it is clearly flawed and should be avoided as much as possible. It's like taking a drug. Sugar raises your blood sugar level, often quite dramatically, and puts stress on the body. The number one reason there is a diabetes epidemic is from the overconsumption of sugar. It's obvious that the body does not like it. In fact, some people consider sugar to be toxic.

A new book just came out called *The Case Against Sugar*. I haven't read it, but I did read some of the reviews. It's a diatribe against sugar. The story of sugar is steadily turning negative. In my opinion, the consumption of sugar is likely to decrease as more people become aware of its pitfalls.

If you exclude sugar from your diet, you will steadily come to realize that not only do you not need it, but you are glad you stopped eating it. It's kind of like stopping smoking. There is a relief that it is part of your past. This is a surefire sign that it is not good for you. In fact, it will become very difficult to eat pastries and other high sugar content foods. You will get used to saying, "No, thank you," when dessert is offered.

I do occasionally eat foods with sugar, such as at Christmas time. However, this is the rare occasion. I rarely bring sugary foods into my house, except, perhaps, some Italian cookies or banana bread given to me by a family member. On a yearly basis, these are rare events.

Many people are even more strict than me when it comes to sugar consumption. My advice is to be as strict as you can, without going crazy. Recognize sugar's flaws, but also recognize that a little bit won't make a difference to your overall health. It's okay to have dessert once in a while.

Next, exclude vegetable and plant-based oils from your regular diet. The only oils that are healthy are avocado, coconut, and cold-pressed extra-virgin olive oil. Some people even consider olive oil to be unhealthy, but not me. Although, do not heat up olive oil, and only eat it at room temperature. If you need to cook with heated oil, use coconut oil if possible, or else canola oil. I occasionally eat with heated canola oil, such as to make taco shells, but it is on an infrequent basis.

Without vegetable and plant-based oils in your regular diet, this means you can only eat fried foods on rare occasions. You may find that some of the foods you are currently consuming on a regular basis have these oils. I suggest that they be removed from your diet, or reduced to an infrequent basis. I still eat french fries, but only a few times a year.

Both olive oil and avocado oil are mono-unsaturated oils. This makes them healthy to consume at room temperature (in my opinion). Coconut oil is saturated, but has unique properties, making it less susceptible to causing cardiovascular damage, even when heated during cooking. Coconut oil consumed at room temperature is perhaps the healthiest oil. I consider raw coconut to be a superfood, and highly beneficial to the body.

Most vegetable and plant-based oils can create plaque buildup in our arteries, which can lead to heart disease. When vegetable oil is heated, it creates oxidation, which is known to create adverse effects in the body. These are the main culprits for the

thousands of heart surgeries that occur in this country. And it's not just fried foods to worry about. Hydrogenated oils, also called trans-fats, are in myriads of processed foods. These can be just as harmful as fried foods.

Whenever you read a food label and see the word oil, you can bet that it is not one of the three good oils that I have listed for regular consumption. More likely, you will see one of the vegetable or plant-based oils listed, or the term, hydrogenated oil. You want to avoid these as much as possible.

The next thing to avoid is simple carbohydrates. These are what many people call comfort foods, such as snacks, chips, pastries, and desserts. Just about every snack or dessert is made from simple carbohydrates – anything that is processed, such as chips, crackers, bread, candy, cereal (nearly all), pastries, pies, cakes, cookies, and soda pop. None of these foods is very nutritious because they are made from processed simple carbs, which generally have low nutrient levels. To make matters worse, they are immediately converted by the process of digestion into blood sugar (glucose) and, often, into fat – if you already have too much sugar in your system. The immediate conversion into blood sugar is why these are the feel-good foods. You can also call them the temptation foods. As I said earlier, sugar is like taking a drug.

Most foods now are labeled with a carbohydrate count. If you read the labels of the foods I listed as simple carbs, you will see that they all have a high carbohydrate count. This is why they can make you fat fairly quickly. Anytime you consume more than approximately 30 grams of carbs at one meal, there is the potential for your blood sugar level to get overloaded. Once you overload, your pancreas will secrete extra insulin to lower the amount of sugar in your blood. The excess sugar goes to the liver, which will

create fat from the excess sugar. Basically, your body tells your liver that it has plenty of sugar for energy, and to go ahead and create some fat, in case it needs energy later.

Now you know where nearly all of our fat comes from: the overconsumption of carbohydrates. If you consume less than 30 grams of carbohydrates for a meal, it is nearly impossible for the body to generate excess fat, although you could do it by consuming large quantities of meat or, perhaps, cheese. How people normally gain weight is from overconsuming carbohydrates, and simple carbohydrates are usually the culprits.

So, simple carbs are bad in two ways. First, they have very little nutritious content. Second, once you overload your body with too much sugar, you generate fat.

It's not bad for you to consume simple carbs once in a while. The key is to do it at infrequent times and to not go overboard. Sure, it won't be nutritious, but you will enjoy it, and I suppose it is an energy source, even though it is comprised of mostly empty calories. A little bit of popcorn at the cinema won't stop your quest for a healthy life, but try to keep it out of your pantry. In fact, it would be a good idea to keep your pantry as bare as possible of simple carbs and processed foods. I have learned that if you keep comfort food in your house, it will get eaten.

The next thing to avoid is preservatives and additives. These are mostly chemicals and not food. When you read a label and don't know what the listed ingredient is, you can bet that it is a preservative or additive. An additive is supposed to make the food either look better or taste better. The worst additive is probably MSG (monosodium glutamate), which the food industry loves, and I detest. It adds flavoring and shelf life, but has several potential negative side effects. It's amazing that this stuff is legal. Google it and find out for yourself.

If MSG is legal, then what other preservatives and additives are we ingesting with our processed foods that are unhealthy? I think we have to assume the worst and avoid them as much as possible. If you are not a label reader, it's time to start.

After you begin reading labels, preservatives and additives will become obvious because they do not sound like natural foods. Sometimes, you will find labels with literally dozens of words that you cannot pronounce. Any food ingredient that you have never heard of, or can't pronounce, is likely to be a preservative or an additive.

Some preservatives to avoid are sulfites, nitrates, BHA, BHT, bromate, and sulfur. These preservatives usually appear as longer words, such as sodium nitrate, sodium sulfite, sodium benzoate, or sulfur dioxide. Anything that has one of these words is suspicious, at best.

Are there any healthy preservatives or additives that the food industry uses? Perhaps, pectin, which is made from fruit, but I'm not aware of any others. And don't trust foods just because they are sold at a health food store, or have an organic label. Many of these foods still contain unhealthy preservatives or additives. Read all labels.

One category not on my exclusion list that many people exclude is some dairy products. There have been studies that indicate that dairy products may cause inflammation, but these studies are not definitive and people react differently. Milk does have a protein called casein that is very similar to gluten in molecular structure. I have switched from using cow's milk to almond milk because I know that almond milk is healthy, and I'm not sure about cow's milk. I've read that many cows are given pharmaceutical drugs and hormones to keep them from getting sick and to increase their milk production. Plus, I'm not ecstatic about how cows are milked by machines in

cramped quarters.

Note: Butter has a negligible amount of casein because butter contains very little protein. Also, butter made from grass-fed cows is actually one of the few healthy saturated fats. I wouldn't cook with butter, but eating it at room temperature is fine.

My suggestion is to use dairy in moderation, and it won't curtail your health. I personally would not eat cheese or any other dairy product daily, but I'm not convinced that dairy is bad for everyone. Keep it moderate and infrequent. Pizza a few times a year will not hurt your overall health.

Simple carbs are much worse for you than a little bit of dairy. Where dairy becomes a problem is when you are already consuming a lot of meat, then you tend to get too much cholesterol. Also, many people are lactose intolerant or sensitive to casein. But for the rest of us, we can eat a little bit of butter, cheese, and eggs from time to time (note that eggs are not a dairy product).

Note: There is no reason to consume cholesterol because the body can create what it needs. Cholesterol is only found in animal products and those on a vegan diet (which is free of animal products) have been tested for low cholesterol levels. Vegans have been found to have sufficient cholesterol levels.

Another food that is excluded by many is gluten, which generally is associated with wheat products, although it also is found in barley and rye. Gluten is considered to create inflammation. I personally eat wheat on occasion, and consider gluten intolerance to be genetic, and not incurred by everyone. However, it is not a bad idea to limit your gluten exposure. Since I eat a lot of pasta, I have switched to gluten-free pasta, although I'm probably wasting my time. If pasta was unhealthy for everyone, we would know. I'm

half Italian and I've known a lot of Italians who have eaten pasta all of their life. Unless you have a known gluten intolerance, I have my doubts it is unhealthy.

For men (and possibly women), exclude unfermented soy. The reason why is because unfermented soy contains estrogen-like isoflavones. For this reason, consuming too much soy can lower men's testosterone levels. If you are a woman, this shouldn't be a problem, although some research seems to indicate that unfermented soy is unhealthy for either sex. But for a man, estrogen is something better to be avoided.

When you dine out, try to avoid fried foods, as well as white and butter sauces. Many of these sauces contain MSG and hydrogenated oils. They will taste great, but your body won't like them. For this reason, try to eat out as little as possible.

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Now we get to discuss what to include in your diet. Here is the list:

1. Vegetables.
2. Fruits.
3. Complex carbohydrates.
4. Nuts.
5. Legumes and whole grains.
6. Superfoods.
7. Unsaturated and saturated fats.
8. Meat (optional).

Vegetables are probably the most important food source for a healthy life. The

reason why is because they have an abundance of vitamins and minerals that keep you healthy. In fact, vegetables are the best anti-cancer food source (fruits and some teas are a close second). If you are going to consistently obtain nutritional requirements for good health, then vegetables will be required.

Ideally, you want to eat vegetables every day, and don't be afraid to have large portions. I normally eat three vegetables with dinner. Most people would think I eat too many green beans or too much kale with dinner, but I believe that the nutritional content has diminished over the years. We now have to eat more to get the same nutrition that previous generations received.

Ideally, you want to eat vegetables raw. However, this is not always possible. For instance, I do not like green beans, broccoli, or asparagus raw and have to steam them. You want to be careful with what you put on vegetables, which I covered previously on which foods to exclude from your diet.

Experiment with different vegetables. Over the years, I have tried many different kinds to find which ones I like the best. Everyone has different taste preferences, and your taste will change over time. You will be surprised how your taste changes once you begin to eat more vegetables and exclude non-nutritious foods.

If you find that you simply do not like vegetables, then you can juice them and combine them with fruit to improve the flavor. This is an ideal way to include them in your diet because juicing can include raw vegetables.

Here is my list of preferred vegetables:

1. Broccoli.
2. Asparagus.

3. Leafy greens (green leaf, romaine, kale, chard, beetroot leaf, spinach, parsley).
4. Green beans.
5. Carrots.
6. Celery.
7. Radishes.
8. Tomatoes.
9. Red and white onions.
10. Brussel sprouts.
11. Zucchini.
12. Artichokes.
13. Cabbage.
14. Green and red bell peppers.
15. Beetroot.
16. Mushrooms.
17. Olives.
18. Cucumber.
19. Shallots.
20. Cauliflower.

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The next food source of importance is fruit. Fruits are important because of their antioxidant properties and ability to neutralize free-radicals. Fruits are also nutritious and help boost the immune system. I try to eat some type of fruit every day and most days, I

eat two or three different fruits. Do not consume mass quantities of fruit during a single meal because they are high in sugar. A single apple or a single orange is sufficient. A few slices of melon or a couple of handfuls of grapes is plenty for a single serving.

Here is my list of preferred fruits:

1. Apple.
2. Pineapple.
3. Grapefruit.
4. Lemon.
5. Grapes.
6. Melon (cantaloupe, watermelon, honeydew).
7. Dark berries (blueberry, strawberry, blackberry, raspberry).
8. Avocado.
9. Plums.
10. Cherries.
11. Peach.
12. Pear.
13. Orange, tangerine, tangelo.
14. Banana.
15. Apricot.
16. Kiwi.
17. Figs.
18. Mango.
19. Pomegranate.

20. Papaya.

It is okay to replace fresh vegetables or fresh fruit with a frozen source. It turns out that very little nutrition is lost from freezing.

Let's review, so that you have this understood. Every day you need to eat both fruits and vegetables. These are now a daily requirement. You will find that your lifestyle begins to change just from that single decision. You will begin to eat healthily, and you will plan to eat healthily. Plans become habits, and habits become lifestyles.

It's not easy to eat healthily because it requires a lifestyle change. You will find that habits are hard to break. I recommend starting with fruits and vegetables. Once you have your daily habit down of including fruits and vegetables into your diet, the rest of your diet will be easier to change.

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The third item to include in your diet is complex carbohydrates. These are the good carbohydrates when consumed in moderation. They include pasta, rice, potatoes, and oats. These are the carbohydrates that do not spike your blood sugar the way that simple carbohydrates do. Instead, the body stores these energy sources in an efficient manner, and then disburses it slowly over a period of hours. This is why marathon runners fill up on these food sources the night before a race.

When you eat complex carbohydrates for dinner, that energy source is available the next day. It is, by far, the most efficient energy source the body uses. The only thing you need to remember about complex carbohydrates is that if you overconsume the

number of grams of carbohydrates, then the pancreas releases too much insulin, and the liver can turn the excess carbs into fat. For this reason, it is smart to consume small portions.

I used to eat large portions of pasta or rice. Now I only consume about 30 or 40 grams of carbohydrates per meal, which is actually a small portion. This is about the optimal amount to avoid putting stress on the pancreas and avoiding fat creation. It is nearly impossible to generate fat if you keep your carbohydrate intake low.

If you are exercising intensely, you can double your complex carbohydrate consumption and not gain fat. The body is smart enough to “carb load” and not generate fat. The body knows that you plan to use this energy in the near term. Cyclists and long-distance runners consume large quantities of complex carbs and remain thin as a rail.

While potatoes are good carbohydrates, I consider them inferior to rice and pasta. First of all, rice and pasta are easy to cook, which makes it conducive to including them in your daily diet. Second, potatoes are part of the nightshade family (sweet potatoes are not), which are known to cause inflammation in some people. Potatoes can have the same issue as gluten and induce inflammation.

It’s okay to eat potatoes, just do it on an infrequent basis. While not all people are affected by inflammation, it’s still a possibility. Also, potatoes tend to be cooked in oil or butter. I do like baked potatoes on occasion, and I find that the skin is delicious. If you are at a restaurant and want to find something healthy to eat, a good choice is a baked potato and a salad.

I’m probably being too harsh on potatoes. They are an ideal energy source, plus they are high in iodine, which is necessary for a healthy thyroid. In fact, thyroid

hormones are important for our energy levels. There are not many food sources that are high in iodine; the other common ones are navy beans and strawberries. If you do not eat a lot of potatoes, then try to consume strawberries on a consistent basis. You can also get iodine from iodized salt, which is salt that has had an iodine additive.

For complex carbohydrates, I prefer gluten-free pasta, although I also eat brown rice. My preferred gluten-free kinds of pasta are made out of brown rice, lentils, quinoa, or chickpeas. I do occasionally eat regular wheat pasta when I eat out or at a family dinner.

Some of the longest living people are from Asia, where white rice is their daily staple. The other thing that they consistently include in their daily diet is a variety of vegetables. While I do not include rice on my superfood list, it is perhaps the best and most efficient source of energy. If there is a perfect food, it's probably rice. If I were Asian, I'm sure I would eat more rice than pasta.

My ideal serving size for rice is one-quarter cup uncooked, which is 40 grams of carbohydrates. For pasta, my ideal serving size is one-half cup of uncooked pasta, which contains 38 grams of carbs. It took me a while to adjust to these lower portions. At first, it will feel like you are not eating enough. However, if you are eating complex carbohydrates daily, you will find that is enough to give you energy.

I am five feet, ten inches tall and weigh 160 lbs., so adjust your portions accordingly. I have learned from experience that one-third of a cup of uncooked rice and three-fourths of a cup of uncooked pasta is too much, and I end up feeling too full after eating. Try to learn your ideal portions and consistently use them. Your body is smart enough to remember how to handle your portions.