

## **Nutrition of Dating**

Over 60% of the United States population struggles with maintaining a healthy weight. Results from the 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) also suggest that over 30% live sedentary lifestyles and many consistently make bad food choices. Americans also spend more than \$1.3 billion a year on weight control dietary supplements, most of which have no proof that they are safe, much less effective. And yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 20% of women and nearly 10% of men have used nonprescription weight-loss supplements. And we, as a nation, continue to grow fatter as we sit around hoping the next get-thin-quick scheme will actually work.

America should be smarter than that, though. We should know there is no miracle cure. One can't snap his or her fingers and make every hamburger and chocolate bar disappear from the collective corpulent bellies of our population. It takes, rather, a change in how we eat, what we eat and the amount of calories we expend. It's simple. Pay attention to the Food Pyramid. Eat a rainbow of foods (Skittles don't count). And make sure your calories in are not more than calories out—each day, every day.

Genetics, friends and habits all have an influence on weight, and one factor influences another and causes a domino effect on waistlines. Let's look at the worst-case scenario. A family's expenses increase, which causes the need for a better-paying job. In turn, those lead to more responsibility and more stress, which causes more long office hours. Before long, eating fast food between meetings and going out with coworkers for some high-calorie meals and drinks to get out of the office and blow off some steam becomes a daily occurrence. As a result, this hard worker is forced to let the belt out a notch or two to accommodate for the dreaded office-chair spread and a quickly rounding potbelly. And then he—or she—has to settle up his high bar

tab and face a fed-up spouse who's turned off by the newly expansive derriere. And where do we, as a nation, turn for comfort when our beloved has had enough? Well, from the ever-widening thighs, it seems to be the refrigerators.

This masochistic cycle takes more than a miracle cure to stop. With a divorce rate nearly as appalling as the obesity rate in the U.S. and with cohabitating couples twice as likely to break up as married couples, problems with relationships seem nearly as rampant as the addiction to fast food. Why is this? Is it lack of preparation for committed relationships? Or a newfound independence that wasn't as prevalent in past generations? Or is it that—like what we're putting in our stomachs—the "food" we're feeding our hearts isn't quite up to snuff?

Is America getting into relationships according to fancy packaging and a pleasing taste with little or no importance given to the health-factor of the relationship? If this is truly the case, it is no wonder so many relationships end in breakups, abuse or die from boredom. Like choosing what you put in your mouth, choosing a partner is only part about what you crave; it's also about being sensible. We know that soda pop and junk food aren't going to make our bodies healthy, despite the sugar rush, energy boost or taste bud tickle they give us. Like the food we put in our mouths, the junk we're feeding our hearts, minds and souls needs to be seriously reevaluated.

Men and women alike are guilty of listing qualities like height weight requirements, hair and eye color before ever uttering a single word about personality, morality, conversational compatibility or even congeniality. I know I'm guilty of it. The five senses—touch, taste, smell, sound and sight—are very instrumental in human judgment. I know they've helped steer me away from men with an aversion to bathing, but maybe we rely too much on the surface and too little on the qualities one discovers when getting to know a potential mate. It seems that many individuals are more concerned about how their significant other

looks on their arm rather than whether or not they actually get along with or like them. Maybe they're more interested in the fire-in-the-pants quality of new love, as opposed to long-term companionship. While physical attraction is a good and necessary element in a relationship, it's also not the entire chimichanga, so to speak. In fact, choosing a mate based solely on physical attraction is like claiming carrot cake is good for you just because it has carrots in it.

We have to retrain ourselves to veer away from the relationship candy bars in glittery wrapping. An occasional chocolate bar might taste good, but a diet comprised entirely of chocolaty goodness will pack on 10 pounds, give you gas, wreak havoc on your digestive system and leave you with a headache after the sugar rush fades. It comes down to dating nutrition. By applying what we know about healthy diet and exercise to dating and relationships, we can start to choose better partners and build healthier personal alliances. It will not be simple, but if we think about personal characteristics of our mates in terms of a nutritional pyramid, we can better visualize our nutritional dating needs versus our weaknesses and cravings.

### **PHYSICAL SWEETS, OILS & FATS**

Though each person will have individual needs, there are a few basic rules of the Nutritional Pyramid of Dating. Physical looks are the equivalent to fats, oils and sweets. While we do need a certain amount of physical attraction for relationship health, looks should be the least of our concerns. This doesn't mean dating someone you find completely repulsive. This does mean, however, not restricting yourself to mates with "dark hair, artsy glasses, athletic physique and at least 5'8" in height." However delicious that combination may sound, the description needs depth of character, personality and morality before the determination can be made that particular person will be a suitable mate.

Also, it's important to remember that just because you have an apple pie, doesn't mean it is the dietetic equivalent of an apple. Sure, it's part apple, but it is also several parts refined sugar, flour and fats. This concept translated to potential partners shows us that a glimmer of goodness in a person does not necessarily make a person who is good for you. So, choose the fresh-picked apples of partners. Not only will they help satisfy your sweet tooth, but they will also help keep you happy, healthy and energetic.

### **RELATIONSHIP WHOLE GRAINS**

Choosing whole grains in the relationship world is largely subjective. Its contents depend on what you, as an individual, truly need to be healthy and happy in your commitment. For example, I know I need someone who will meld well with my family. This doesn't mean the person needs to come from the same background or have a family just like mine, but I do look for mates that I can imagine getting along with—or at least contentedly tolerating—my boisterous family most of the time. Another trait I look for is good communication skills. I like to talk and write about my views and feelings, and my significant other needs to give me some level of reciprocation. He doesn't need to be a writer or spend hours verbally dissecting his feelings with me, but he does need to be comfortable with me writing him a long, emotional letter or rambling on for hours about my feelings without completely zoning out. Instead, he just needs to engage in the conversation. Seeing eye-to-eye on all things is not important, but mutual respect necessary. I need to feel that he is a confidante and best friend.

Relationship whole grains can vary widely depending on the person. Essentially, they are the substantial, soul-filling, hunger-abating building blocks of the bond. Choose a strong base that looks at the big picture of emotional health needs.

### **BALANCING FRUITS & VEGGIES**

When it comes to my fruits and vegetables, education and intelligence, temperament, stability, and employment rank very high. After communication and family involvement, these elements of a relationship give me balance and comfort. At the top point of this list, nearer the proteins, are qualities like compatible interests and activities. Though I prefer my significant other like art and writing, I'm happy if he freely tolerates and occasionally caters to my interests, as I will do the same for him. Case in point, even if my mate thinks museums are boring, I'd like for him to willingly wander the corridors with me and try to understand my interest in the sculptures and paintings around us. In turn, I will gladly sit by him at a hockey game, cheering and trying to learn the rules of the game. It's not about opposites attracting, and it's not about being two versions of the same person. Reciprocal curiosity and awareness of each other's interests are key in relationship compatibility and a wonderful way to expand horizons and learn the loving art of compromise.

### **COMPATIBILITY PROTEINS**

This art helps smooth out rough edges in relationships. Extreme differences of opinions on sticking points such as religion, pets, lifestyles and finances can cause irreparable damage to a union, but a large portion of the problems can be eased with compromise. It's okay to have deal breakers—which may be the relationship equivalent to my instant gag reflex when consuming cauliflower or my significant other's lips swelling up like balloons at the mere proximity to peanuts. But, like a picky child, sometimes just one bite of an unfamiliar casserole can give you a whole new favorite food. The desire to resist change and stick with the recognizable is understandable, though. With the constant pressure of our world to adapt to new jobs, new homes, new friends and new rules, it's easy to become attached to those things that we can control. Learning to create emotional stir fry with broccoli instead of cauliflower and saving the peanut butter for those lazy weekends when your partner is out of town can help any couple reach a middle ground that makes both

individuals feel understood and loved, regardless of their differences.

Compromise is not a one-way street, and by no means should one partner give in to the other partner's way of thinking on every issue. Whether they meet in the middle in every argument or take turns letting the other have his or her way, discussing views and implementing compromise is a great way to create balance, foster understanding and build a life together. Being a good partner in life doesn't mean bending to every whim. Rather both partners should develop a nurturing give and take, and each individual must remember to retain individuality, independence and intelligence even amongst the onslaught of butterflies and rainbows of fresh love.

#### **BUILDING YOUR RELATIONSHIP FOOD JOURNAL**

Much like changing food habits, changing relationship habits can be difficult. It first takes an honest look at current unhealthy cycles and a reasonable action plan to move towards a more wholesome dating nutrition. If someone were to ask you today for the qualities of your ideal mate, how would you answer, and are those answers realistic? Or are you limiting yourself to emotional cellophane and nougat? Do you foster unhealthy outlook on dating or love, and if so, how can you change those feelings?

Also, how detailed is your list? Like diets that restrict their followers to just a handful of foods and a plethora of rules, picking mates based on a finicky list of musts and cannots can leave you ravenous and malnourished. Take a look at what you realistically need as opposed to what you crave. Where do the two meet? What is most important? What are your emotional whole grains, and what are your sweets and fats? Most importantly, are you ready to stop wishing for a miracle and do the work necessary to change your bad relationship habits?

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Finally, when it's all said and done, where do the other qualities you seek out fit into the Nutritional Pyramid of Dating and Relationships? Nutritional Dating, like food tastes, is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It's about developing healthy attitudes and expectations when it comes to love. Making realistic, healthy choices will help provide a long, active life of emotional health. And what one of us out there wouldn't trade dating triple-bacon cheeseburgers for a happy and fulfilled heart?

# **Nutritional Pyramid** for Dating & Relationships

