April 2017 Newsletter

Use the Mediterranean diet to fight depression with a knock-out punch

One of the most powerful antidepressants available doesn’t even need a prescription! Those of us who love to eat will be delighted to learn that the Mediterranean diet appears to be effective in treating moderate to severe depression. In a recent randomized controlled trial, patients randomized to a Mediterranean diet (with red meat 3 to 4 times a week and red wine with meals) had a significantly greater remission of their depression than the control group who received no dietary instruction. Considering the fact that antidepressant medications often have very limited benefit, this recent finding is especially significant. Just think! If the whole food Mediterranean diet was a drug, we’d probably all be taking it, most physicians would be recommending it, and there would be no need for two pages of fine-print warnings about the side effects!

Fire up a few health transformation tools for your heart, mind, and body

Eat an omnivorous whole food Mediterranean-style diet with plenty of vegetables, high-quality protein (including red meat), and good fat. (See pages 20-33, Good Food, Great Medicine, 3rd edition.)

- Remember to eat good fat! This is important; fat makes food taste better, satisfies hunger longer, and makes it easier to reduce our intake of sugar and refined grains without feeling deprived.

- Avoid sugar and refined grains! These are the bad boys of the food world and have strong links to depression, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

Prepare food from scratch where possible. This may seem persnickety, but it’s a game changer. When any food is commercially processed its nutritional profile is usually downgraded and its calorie-density upgraded. Heat, time, and chemical processing can destroy, alter, or remove valuable fats, fiber, and nutrients, and this process can be completely invisible to the consumer.

Make room daily for some kind of activity: a brisk walk, vigorous gardening, a flight or two of stairs – whatever we can manage. (See pages 50-55.) There is added benefit (especially for mood) when exercise is combined with fresh air and natural light.

Good Food, Great Medicine’s 4-week observational study results

Well, it’s admittedly an unofficial study with anecdotal evidence but the results are impressive nonetheless. Participants in the March-April Good Food, Great Medicine BASECAMP Cardiac Prevention + Wellness class series were asked, “Over the last 4 weeks have you noticed any personal health improvement?”

- Yes – my GERD is much improved.
- I have more energy and less hunger.
- My HbA1c dropped a full point.
- I’ve lost four pounds.
- I’ve lost five pounds.
- I’m more even tempered.
- My depression is better.
- Jeans are looser!
- Yes, a significant reduction in heartburn.
- No, but we’re eating better!
- I’ve dropped a few pounds – my stomach is flatter and I’ve cinched up my belt a notch.
- My mood is lighter, my brain is clicking better at work, and my brain fog has lifted.
- My energy dropped initially when I stopped eating sugar but then came back better than before.
- I’m more alert and energetic. Encouraged that it’s possible at any age with diet and lifestyle changes.

These are just some of the immediate rewards we expect to see when food and activity choices improve. And that’s after only one month! Want to join in on the food fun? Stay tuned for the next 4-part class series dates which will be announced soon!

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Quinoa Salad with corn and radish

Quinoa (KEEN-wah) is a South American grain that looks like ivory-colored millet. (Actually, it is not technically a grain but is generally used like one.) It is particularly high in protein and is often a good alternative to brown rice, especially since it cooks in about half the time. In this salad (adapted from page 216 of Good Food, Great Medicine, 3rd edition) the quinoa partners nicely with corn and roasted walnuts, and the chopped fresh radishes give crunch, color, and pep in one fell swoop. This dish was a crowd favorite at the Good Food, Great Medicine summit club potluck this month.

(Serves about 6)

¼ cup fresh lemon juice or apple cider vinegar
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon freshly crushed garlic
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½–1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
4 cups cooked quinoa (cooking directions on page 208)
1 cup frozen petite corn
1½ cups ¼-inch diced radishes (or 1 bunch)
1 bunch green onions finely sliced (1 – 1½ cups)
½ cup walnut pieces, toasted if possible
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro

1. Combine lemon juice or vinegar, oil, garlic, cumin, salt, and pepper in a mixing bowl.
2. Add cooked quinoa, corn, radishes, green onions, walnuts, and cilantro. Toss to blend thoroughly. Serve at any temperature. Keeps nicely in the refrigerator for several days.

Note:
- To thaw frozen corn, place in a colander and run under hot water for a couple of seconds, then toss with paper towels until corn is no longer wet.
- Quinoa is naturally gluten-free. (See page 40 for a discussion on the subject of gluten.)

Health transformation toolbox

In addition to the short-term benefits that Good Food, Great Medicine class participants reported earlier, adopting a whole food Mediterranean-style diet is also associated with many long-term benefits, including:

- Improvement in markers of insulin resistance – low HDL cholesterol, high triglycerides, high blood sugar, high blood pressure
- Improved control or reversal of type 2 diabetes
- Less cancer, dementia, and depression
- Fewer medications and doctor visits
- Improved well-being

Here are five tools to get you started:

1. Go to our website (goodfoodgreatmedicine.com) and download one of our handouts: for example, An Evidence-based Guide to Successful Waist Loss and Preventing or Reversing Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes; Fat is Good, Bagels are Bad - some (Mediterranean) principles to eat by. (Click on the resources tab.)
3. Register for the next Good Food, Great Medicine 4-part class series. (Call the Providence Resource line at 503.574.6595 to join the waiting list for the next BASECAMP series which will be announced shortly.)
4. Schedule a consultation with Dr. Hassell to address solutions for your particular situation.
5. Sign up for a one-year health transformation program, a 12-month intensive doctor-patient partnership customized to your specific situation.

Dr. Hassell’s speaking events


*COMING SOON* Providence Heart Institute BASECAMP Cardiac Prevention + Wellness 4-part Series: Good Food, Great Medicine: Portland, OR. Call the Providence Resource Line at 503.574.6595 to join the waiting list.

Sign up for this free monthly medical + lifestyle newsletter at Goodfoodgreatmedicine.com

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”
1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)