

November/December 2012 Newsletter



Dr. Hassell & Dale at the 38th Annual Blue Lake Championship Run in October. We may not tackle a 15-k at age 88 like Dale, but we're more likely to have the option if we start moving now.

Exercise – the gift that keeps giving

The risk-reducing benefits of regular exercise are hardly news, but it keeps getting better. According to an NIH study¹ published this month, more “leisure-time physical activity” is associated with longer life expectancy. The study examined data on more than 650,000 adults (mostly over 40) and found that we can add as many as 4.5 years to life with exercise alone. The official recommendation is for 2.5 hours of regular aerobic physical activity at moderate intensity or 1.25 hours at vigorous intensity each week. (The study defines “moderate intensity” as being able to talk but not sing, and “vigorous intensity” as being able to only say a few words without stopping for a breath.)

However, we were happy to read that there was benefit seen at even “low levels” of physical activity. “Low level” is not defined in the study, but it probably means we can sing a verse and chorus of a song without running out of breath. What a relief! Who needs marathons? Who needs a gym? Push-ups against the kitchen counter, climbing stairs, knee bends while we're on the phone, lunges when no-one is looking, walks after dinner – hey, it's physical activity **and it works!** (Singing is optional. Thankfully, so is spandex.)

Lose weight this holiday – eat butter

Actually, that headline was just to get your attention, but perhaps we could use it to make a point: it may seem counter-intuitive, but healthy fat is underrated as a factor in sustainable weight loss. This helps explain why low-fat diets are not as effective as the relatively high-fat Mediterranean diet for weight loss.² One reason is that the fat in food satisfies the appetite more effectively than carbohydrates. Also, proteins and fats that are eaten with carbohydrates – which the body turns into sugar – will tend to slow the rise of blood sugar and keep you satisfied longer.

The perception that reducing dietary fat is more important than reducing refined carbohydrates is especially confusing this time of year, when tables are groaning under the weight of both. There is more concern about the crispy skin (yum!) on a piece of juicy turkey than the plateful of sugar-and-refined-grain-laden dessert that follows. If that's what you're thinking – stop! Whether your concern is your heart, waistline, or blood sugar, you are better off going back for another slice of standing rib roast and vegetables than a slice of pie. (Choose protein + vegetables + healthy fat!)

But beware of sugar and refined grains

It is safe to say that we will succeed in controlling weight to the extent we are able to reduce our intake of sugar and refined grains – bread, dessert, sweet drinks, energy bars, crackers, chips, and so on. The decision to choose whole foods rather than processed food, as well as portion control and “leisure-time physical activity” is a combination that will move us in the right direction. It's really that simple – yet at this time of year it can be **really** challenging. But it gets easier with practice.

So, let's practice: you're standing in front of a table full of holiday food and holding an empty plate. You are determined not to gain five pounds in two months like you did last year. “How can I enjoy my favorite foods and still respect myself in the morning?” you ask yourself. Well, you can. Serve yourself generous amounts of vegetables (sorry, potatoes don't count) and meat, but only

¹ Moore, SC. Et al. PLoS Med 2012;9(11): e1001335 doi:10.1371

² Nordmann, A. Am J Med 2011;124:841-51

small portions of special-occasion carbohydrates (mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, rolls). If we enjoy the vegetables and meat first, we'll be less likely to overeat the calorie-dense options.

Holiday success strategies

- Eat protein + vegetable + healthy fat with every snack and meal
- Keep meat to less than 1/3 of plate, the rest vegetables (don't count mashed potatoes!)
- Choose whole food instead of processed food
- Real butter instead of margarine
- Real whipped cream instead of "non-fat" or "lite" cream or non-dairy whipped topping
- Fresh fruit salad instead of Jello salad
- Chilled sparkling water instead of sweet drinks
- Homemade desserts instead of store-bought

Can this holiday dinner be saved?

With the election fresh in our minds, the subject of politics can elicit some strong emotions, but if you really want to see a display of heartfelt conviction, try messing with someone's Thanksgiving recipe or Christmas cookies. Whoa! Not the ideal time for recipe makeovers, folks! It may be (and is) a great idea to add a low-starch root vegetable like a rutabaga to the mashed potatoes, but it may also be a good way to start a war if you're not careful.

Messing with the mashed potatoes

If family ties are strong, however, and the dinner table could use a little livening, you might want to think about shaking up the mashed potato tradition. Our favorite way to serve mashed potatoes is on page 145 of *Good Food, Great Medicine* (second edition) – a version of the Irish classic called *Colcannon*. It has all the comforting richness of mashed potatoes, but the nutrition value is kicked up significantly.

Green beans with *what?*

Does your holiday tradition include the green bean casserole recipe that calls for canned cream-of-mushroom soup and deep-fried onion rings? Do you think anyone would really notice if you substituted some nice Brussels sprouts? Just kidding. But while we're on the subject of green bean casserole, here is an alternative: cook a pound of fresh green beans until tender-crisp, and then toss with freshly grated Parmesan, a small amount of vinaigrette, and salt and pepper. You can serve the beans at room temperature, plus their bright green color (don't overcook them!) is more photogenic than the casserole. (See page 115 of *Good Food, Great Medicine* for a recipe.)

For anyone who is still thinking about the Brussels sprout option, try cutting them in half lengthwise (after trimming the stem flush with the sprout), tossing them in a few tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil, spreading them on a baking sheet, sprinkling with salt and freshly ground pepper, and roasting them in a 450 degree oven until they're tender and browned – about 30-40 minutes, depending on their size. Serve with a side of *Goop* (page 98 of *Good Food, Great Medicine*). That's a holiday tradition worth getting emotional over!

Marshmallows on the Mayflower?

How did marshmallows end up on the sweet potato casserole? Did pilgrims use marshmallows to symbolize snow on the sweet potato crop? Maybe some history buffs can clear this up. Meanwhile, for the sake of your pancreas, try a marshmallow-free Thanksgiving: simply drizzle the cooked and sliced sweet potatoes/ yams with a generous amount of melted butter, and then sprinkle with a bit of dark brown sugar and bake until butter is bubbling and sugar is caramelized. You'll get a lot less sugar this way. Save the marshmallows for roasting over the fire, which is why they were invented in the first place.

The bottom line

- Naturally-occurring fats are not the bad guys, but sugar and refined grains are.
- Sweet things are best paired with real fat – for instance, fruit pie with real whipped cream – to help slow the rise of blood sugar.
- Remember the formula! Protein + vegetable + healthy fat with every snack and meal.
- Whether you choose vigorous or moderate or low-level activity – just do it every day!
- Don't sacrifice holiday pleasure at the altar of healthy eating . . . but if you'll keep your marshmallows off our yams, we'll keep our hands off your mashed potatoes. It's a deal.

We wish you a merry Thanksgiving, a happy Christmas, and a New Year rich with the blessings that matter !

Speaking Events

11/03/2012 – Diabetes Prevention and Wellness

Forum: *Diet and Exercise for Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes – What Really Matters?* Miles Hassell MD; Salem Center 50+, Salem, Oregon

12/03/2012 – Pacific University School of Physician

Assistant Studies: Endocrinology Lecture – *Reversing Insulin Resistance*. Miles Hassell MD; Pacific University, Hillsboro, Oregon