



Till Death Do Us Part

Getting Healthy – Part 3 of 6

My intent for this article was to discuss nutrition because we all eat. But in typical fashion I've been strongly influenced by a local event and a new book. Last week I took my son to hear a lecture by Bill McKibben. Bill has written over a dozen books; my son (13) and I are reading "Eaarth" together and he's scared. The reason it's relevant to the topic of getting healthy and the subtopic of nutrition is this: food production as we know it is over, forever. Wet regions worldwide are getting wetter and dry regions are getting drier. Think mold and drought. Everywhere is getting warmer. Think pests that no longer die. Storms are getting stormier – ok, not a scientific term – with an impact to herds, soil erosion, crops, salt water intrusion into fresh water supplies, and infrastructure. Between 2000 and 2012, the World Bank global food price index increased 104.5%. Rising energy prices (up 183.6%) and fertilizer prices (up 104.8%) drove up food prices by adding to production, processing, transportation, and storage costs. Food commodity prices will likely be both higher and more volatile in coming decades; as climate change increases the incidence of extreme weather events, production shocks will become more frequent. Social chaos due to starvation and environmental refugees is increasing. (Winter is coming!)

So I wanted to discuss nutrition but like everything else these days, nothing is simple. Nutrition has an individual element (we make choices), a national element (our country sets policy), and an international element (the globe is subject to a variety of economic, political, and environmental pressures.) Regarding the individual element, many of us are either uninformed or misinformed when it comes to walking down the aisle – the grocery aisle. Given the deluge of information, misinformation, and conflicting recommendations based on subtle or not-so-subtle (national) agendas it is not surprising we are confused.

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Written by Jamie Wolf

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Here's an example: 1) the US (unlike many other countries) permits food marketers to target children – think cereal commercials; 2) politicians make the laws governing marketers; 3) big ag(ricultural) corporations fund election campaigns for politicians... 4) so when you see a rosy image on your screen telling you that good mothers should start their child's day with product "Y" you can bet there is a strategic agenda behind the "information" being delivered directly into your home! Another example: why is milk a staple in public school lunches? The answer? Economics and big government contracts. If health were a criterion in the decision, milk (as we know it today) would be outlawed (as would fluoridated water!)

Meanwhile there are as many experts as diets. Some gurus swear by the "Paleo Diet." They counsel us to eat as our ancestors did which would be great if we got the exercise our ancestors did, only wanted a lifespan of 20-30 years, and the quality of nutrients was the same as a millennia ago without any of the toxins, drugs, and disease that today's mass produced meat contains. Other experts recommend we eat only raw foods but to receive the same level of nutrition from uncooked fruit and vegetables that our ancestors did we'd have to consume absurd quantities daily. Not a realistic option.

Additionally, large corporations employ floors of scientists using MRI's and other expensive tools to create what is called "food" that targets pleasure centers in our brains to keep us eating more. More processed items that come in all sorts of convenient packaging and are about as far removed from what used to be 'food' as can be.

What does this have to do with getting healthy, with nutrition, with business? It's important that you are making conscious, informed decisions about what you put in your body – and how often and how much. Lead by example so your children and grandchildren have a fighting chance. In the US, almost 24 million children are overweight or obese (70% of their parents – US adults over the age of 20 – are overweight or obese) and children as young as 6 are suffering from obesity-related strokes! It is increasingly common for children as young as 12 to be prescribed medication for high cholesterol and blood pressure. There is something VERY wrong with these statistics! We get "food" from the grocery store, we get "food" at restaurants, or from fast food joints. And we 'graze' our way through the landscape of convenience stores, vending machines, and ubiquitous strip malls – not to mention the array of snacks we have stored at home. Gone are the days that nutrition was sustenance only (and perhaps in the not too distant future, gone are the days when food is affordable and easily accessible.)

Through much trial and error I have found what works for me. At a broad brush, however, here are some things for you to research for yourself: the benefits of eating breakfast; the benefits of intermittent fasting; the difference between omegas 6 and 3; foods that cause inflammation

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(hint: this relates to a dramatic rise in severe food allergies and asthma); nutrient dense food; genetically modified food (and the impact of corn and soy which are now in almost every processed item you consume); soil depletion, what that means to the nutrient value of even "good" organic food and the quantity you now need to consume to receive decent nutrition (in other words the recommendation to "just eat healthy food and you'll be fine" is flawed); the source of your beef, pork, poultry, and fish – what they are fed, how they are raised, and how sick they are prior to becoming your breakfast, lunch, or dinner; how packaging leaches chemicals into what you eat and drink, especially when storing or microwaving the contents (studies have linked bottled water to breast cancer, for example.) Finally, learn the facts (not media hearsay) about what carbohydrates, proteins, fats, fiber, and calories are and what balance of each you should target in your daily consumption. (Again, I have a simple and proven method of achieving good nutrition that I'd be more than happy to share should you decide to ask me.)

I know it feels overwhelming to navigate something as basic as life-supporting nutrients. Don't be the person who throws your hands up saying, "Oh, well, we're all going to die anyway so I might as well just enjoy myself." It's not enjoyable to spend the last several years of your existence bedridden or on dialysis. It's not enjoyable to be at the mercy of total strangers, not all of them competent or caring, in a hospital or nursing facility. It's not enjoyable to watch loved ones struggle, especially if they are too young. And medication, long-term care, hospitalization – even home help – is far from cheap! Very few are prepared for the financial implications of sustained ill health and state coffers are already struggling with items other than healthcare for those who can't pay for themselves.

Decide to get healthy. Take action. When it doesn't work the first time, learn from your mistakes and keep trying. Understand that getting healthy is not just about hitting a number on a scale. (You can be "skinny fat" and still subject to disease.) Health is about getting lean so you aren't holding onto toxin-storing fat and it's about bolstering your immune system so you are better able to ward off the increasingly complex array of insults our environment subjects us to – not the least of which is stress. Regardless of your view on climate change, we all need the stamina to dodge increasingly frequent economic and societal curveballs. Do yourself and your family a favor; understand nutrition to live your healthiest and most productive life. Don't let nutritional ignorance or indifference cost you years or quality until death do you part.

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