

Eat the Best Foods

What we put into our mouths can determine whether we walk in good health or not.

Gardening can be a deeply spiritual experience. Many of Jesus' parables centered on plant life and agriculture. I live in the cold Midwest, and I cherish spring and summer because I get to work the soil and enjoy my garden. My greatest fulfillment comes from growing vegetables.

Witnessing firsthand how God abundantly meets our needs by providing us with food from nothing more than seeds, water, sunlight and soil fills me with a tremendous sense of humble thanksgiving.

The Bible tells us that in the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth. He told them to fill the earth and subdue it, placing them in authority over all creatures that dwelt in the land, the air and the sea.

He then told them: "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Gen. 1:29, NIV). This gift was for all mankind. The earth—as God ordained—produces foods of all kinds, and the fruit of the land is enough to meet our nutritional needs.

God provides us with food, but He doesn't dictate what we should do with it. It is up to us to use wisdom in the way we eat. Both what we put into our mouths and what we don't put into them can determine whether we walk in good health or suffer with poor health.

Of the 15 leading causes of death in this country, six are directly related to our diets and seven are associated with excessive alcohol use. So eating and drinking the wrong things (or eating and drinking too much of the right things) can wreak havoc on our bodies. If we become proactive in our health, and make the foods from the land the foundation of our diets, we take a major step in reducing our risks for many diseases.

When you think about diet and disease, you probably think of heart disease, hypertension and diabetes—illnesses that are clearly linked to the way we eat. But let's consider cancer, the second leading cause of death in this country. There are some obvious nondietary risk factors for cancer such as cigarette smoking. But what may not be so obvious is the role our diet plays in cancer.

Certain foods contain nutrients that serve to protect us against this disease. These foods come from the earth—the vegetables, fruits, beans (legumes), nuts and whole grains of the harvest are actually able to protect our bodies against cancer.

Plant-based foods contain substances known as phytonutrients. Researchers began studying these substances about 20 years ago and have found clear links between diets rich in phytonutrients and a lower risk for many diseases, including cancer.

Phytonutrients protect our bodies in many ways by repairing damaged cells, killing cancerous cells and enhancing immunity. This is one of the reasons the American Cancer Society, in its Guidelines for Nutrition and Cancer Prevention, recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each

day, and limiting the amount of meats that are high in fat.

Am I suggesting that we all become vegetarians? No. If you choose to be a vegetarian that's fine, but there is no biblical mandate for such a choice. The Bible tells us that when the flood waters receded and Noah left the ark, God granted permission for mankind to eat meat (see Gen. 9:3).

Christians have liberty, but in all things (including what we put into our mouths), God expects us to use wisdom and discretion. God grants us meat to enjoy, but I don't think He intended for it to become our primary source of nutrition.

Be mindful to give thanks to the Lord for generously providing us with nutritious foods from His bountiful earth. Whether you become a gardener or not, you'd do well to include in your diet the many fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and beans harvested from the land. God has given these foods of the earth to satisfy us, sustain us and protect us from all manner of diseases.

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