

Rewire Your Taste Buds God's Way

Imagine eating a scrumptious dinner of pesto-crusted salmon, sweet potato fries, roasted vegetables and chocolate peanut butter balls for dessert. Now give credit to God for such a yummy meal. With a little rewiring, you can learn to seek out and appreciate these kinds of healthy and delicious foods.

When it comes to our physical fitness and enjoyment, we trust God's design: The intimacy shared by a husband and wife. The adrenaline you feel after an invigorating run along the beach. The peace you have after waking up from a good night's sleep. These simple pleasures help us experience God's goodness.

Why are our attitudes with food different? Most people don't trust God to provide incredibly delicious food that is also healthy. Many people, especially Christians, assume that God is a cosmic killjoy when it comes to food. They think eating natural, God-designed foods couldn't taste near as good as a stack of pancakes dripping in artificial maple syrup or a double cheeseburger and fries.

If this sounds like you, I have good news: For God so loved the world, He gave us sun-dried tomatoes, honeycrisp apples and a myriad of other delectable foods that meet all of our nutritional needs.

What, exactly, are God's foods?

"In the beginning," God gave us plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and grains. Later in the Bible, we see that God identified certain meats that are both healthy and flavorful.

In general, if there are only one or two ingredients on a food's label, then you are close to God's food plan. (For

example, only peanuts or peanuts and salt are listed on your peanut butter.) Better still are foods that don't have labels, like parsley or watermelon. Labels that list dozens of multisyllabic words that you cannot pronounce are generally man-made, not from God.

Salivating over God's foods does not happen overnight. Just as transforming from couch potato to spin-class junkie is a process that takes desire and commitment, rewiring your taste buds is no different. It is a step-by-step daily process. Runners know that training for a race provides physical invigoration and deep satisfaction. In the same way, you too can quickly discover the benefits of submitting to God's design for eating. You will sleep better. You will have more energy during the day. You might even notice a change in your disposition and attitude.

Here are some ways that you can fall in love with God's natural foods:

Bread

Bread often receives a bad rap from health-conscious consumers. Yet whole-grain, minimally processed bread is a nutritious staple featured throughout the Bible. It is delicious to eat—especially when it is freshly baked and topped with a little organic butter.

Recently, I started baking my own bread. I bought a bread machine and now enjoy fresh, homemade, whole-grain bread throughout the week. If you can't make your own, find a source for more naturally produced bread. In the grocery or health food stores, you can find hearty Ezekiel bread or organic and minimally processed breads. Then indulge in a turkey and avocado sandwich with lettuce, tomato, Dijon mustard and a pickle.

Vegetables

There is little debate about the health benefits of God-given vegetables. But do you consider them tasty? You might be surprised at how appetizing they can be, with the right preparation.

- Roasted or grilled vegetables, such as bell peppers, zucchini and onions, taste delicious folded into omelets, layered on sandwiches, tossed into cooked rice or served alone.
- Dress up a salad with healthy yet flavorful toppings, such as dried fruit (cranberries, raisins, chopped dates), nuts (pecans or walnuts) or even diced fruit, like pears. Toss it with balsamic salad dressing and top it with feta cheese; you'll think you're at a gourmet restaurant.
- Homemade salad dressing often tastes better than mass-produced, store-bought dressing, and it's cheaper too. Since you make it fresh, it will be free of preservatives and other unnecessary ingredients.

Beans

One of God's biggest gifts to mankind, beans are low in fat and calories, and they are high in protein and fiber. You may be skeptical, though, of how beans can be tasty and satisfying. Combined with God's other natural ingredients (for example, onions, rice, fresh herbs and lemon juice), you can create a main-course taste sensation that rivals the best restaurants.

Sweets

Do you have a sweet tooth? Here is a different way of thinking: God gave you that craving! Most of us have a body designed to enjoy sweet treats that He created. Like what?

- The most obvious is fresh fruits. Fresh summer fruits like strawberries, raspberries and blueberries are pleasing to the eye and bursting with flavor and cancer-

fighting anti-oxidants. Eat them alone, in a smoothie or on top of a yogurt parfait.

- Sweeter still are dried fruits. Grapes become raisins. Figs, apricots and plums all become super-sweet versions of their fresh counterparts.
- Of course, God also made the cocoa bean, from which we get cocoa and chocolate, and He made a myriad of sweeteners, like honey, maple syrup and sugar cane. Wholesome desserts made with these ingredients can satisfy your sweet tooth and your tummy, so you won't crave more an hour later.

Nuts

Nuts are God's ultimate hunger filler. They include peanuts, walnuts, pecans, cashews and almonds. Roasted or raw, they are easy to grab when you're in a hurry. They taste delicious alone or mixed with dried fruit in a trail mix or protein bar. Nut butters are available for many of these—spread them on whole grain bread with all-fruit jam for a delicious lunch sandwich.

God's design for eating and *incredibly delicious* are two phrases you won't often hear together. Yet with a little effort, patience and creativity, your perspective on food can be "born again" and more in line with how God intended you to eat.

Here are a few tips:

Patience. Shifting your taste buds from a regimen of fat-filled, sugar-laden, grab-and-go food to healthier, more natural foods will probably not happen overnight. But in my experience, everyone who sets out with this as a goal will achieve it. Remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint.

Creativity. If you're used to just ordering off a menu or pulling prepared meals off the deli's shelf or grocer's freezer, your brain cells will need to stop being couch

potatoes. Get in the habit of perusing cookbooks, websites and other healthy eating resources for satisfying recipes, tips and inspiration.

Effort. God gives you natural, unprocessed foods. He also gives you the wisdom to transform those foods into amazing meals. If you want to start eating more of God's foods and less of man's highly-processed foods, then you are going to need to "process" some of that food yourself. Get ready to put some effort into preparing the food you eat.

By shifting your thinking from "God's food is boring" to "God  gave us delicious foods that look good, smell good and taste delicious," you will look forward to enjoying God's food—and staying healthy because of it.

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Hope Egan is the author of the *What the Bible Says about Healthy Living Cookbook: Simple and Tasty Recipes Featuring God's Ingredients (Heart of Wisdom, 2009)*.

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