

Nutrition Nuggets: The Magic of Micronutrients

by Delisa Renideo



We have all heard (or asked), “Where do you get your protein?” In addition to Americans’ misguided fear of protein deficiency, many are afraid of carbs, and others debate how much fat is appropriate for a healthy diet. But as important as these issues may be, they miss the MOST IMPORTANT nutritional point. I’ll talk about that in a minute, but first. . .

Fats, proteins, and carbohydrates are all necessary. They are called “macronutrients.” In the U.S., almost everyone eats an excess of all three of these macronutrients. Macronutrients supply us with calories, which are necessary to fuel our bodies. But as we know, when we consume more calories than we burn, whether from protein, carbohydrates, or fat, the excess is stored as fat. And as we can all see, most Americans have stored a lot!

What we don’t hear enough about is the importance of micronutrients, and these jewels are the key to optimal health and super-immunity through super-nutrition. Micronutrients include vitamins and minerals, but they also include the hundreds, and probably thousands, of other plant compounds called phytochemicals, (or phytonutrients, if you don’t like the word chemical.) Amazingly, these powerhouses have NO CALORIES, so no matter how many of them we consume, they will not make us fat! However, since they are found in food, they are mixed in with the proteins, carbohydrates, and fats we eat which DO have calories and CAN make us fat.

Phytochemicals have names like alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, allium compounds, anthocyanins, betalains, flavonoids, glucosinolates, indoles, lignans, and many

others. There are many hundreds of compounds within each category. And it is not any of these phytochemicals consumed in isolation that does the magic. It is the combination of these micronutrients eaten together that provide for maximum health and optimal immunity. That’s why we need to consume them IN FOOD, rather than trying to achieve good nutrition through supplements.

Americans are sick and overweight because we consume too many macro-nutrients and not enough micronutrients. But if micronutrients are found in the food we eat, and we are eating too many calories, why aren’t we getting enough micronutrients?

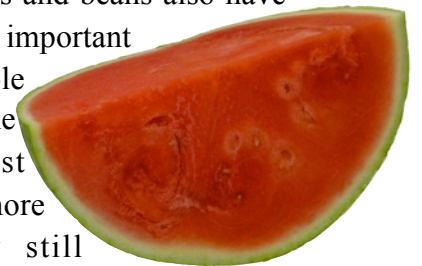
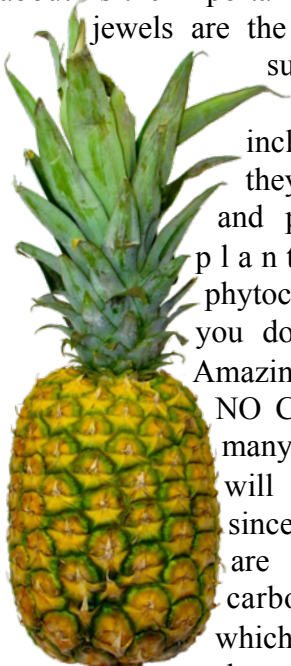
The key to good nutrition is eating foods with a high nutrient density. This means foods with a lot of micronutrients and not a lot of calories. This allows us to lose weight and maintain a healthy, lean weight while still consuming an abundance of healthy nutrients.

Vegetables are powerhouses of nutrient density. They are loaded with micro-nutrients and have very few calories. Green leafy vegetables are at the top of this list, and eating some every day, both raw and cooked, provides us with high levels of phytochemicals. Fruits and beans also have large quantities of important micronutrients. Whole grains are lower on the nutrient density list because they have more calories, but they still contain healthful micronutrients. Nuts and seeds are high in calories, but they also contain healthy phytochemicals.

White flour products, sugar, oil, and animal products all contain calories, but with almost no micronutrients. Basically, they all qualify as junk



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food. Sure, they have macronutrients, but they are essentially empty calories. And animal products have NO phytochemicals because “phyto” means plant. So phytochemicals are compounds found only in plants.

I’ll continue this discussion in future Nutrition Nuggets columns. In the meantime, just focus on eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits and



berries, beans, mushrooms, some whole grains, and some seeds and nuts, and avoid animal products and processed foods made from white flour, oil, and sugar.

Next month, you’ll learn some amazing and wonderful things about mushrooms.

See you then!

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