



“Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food.”

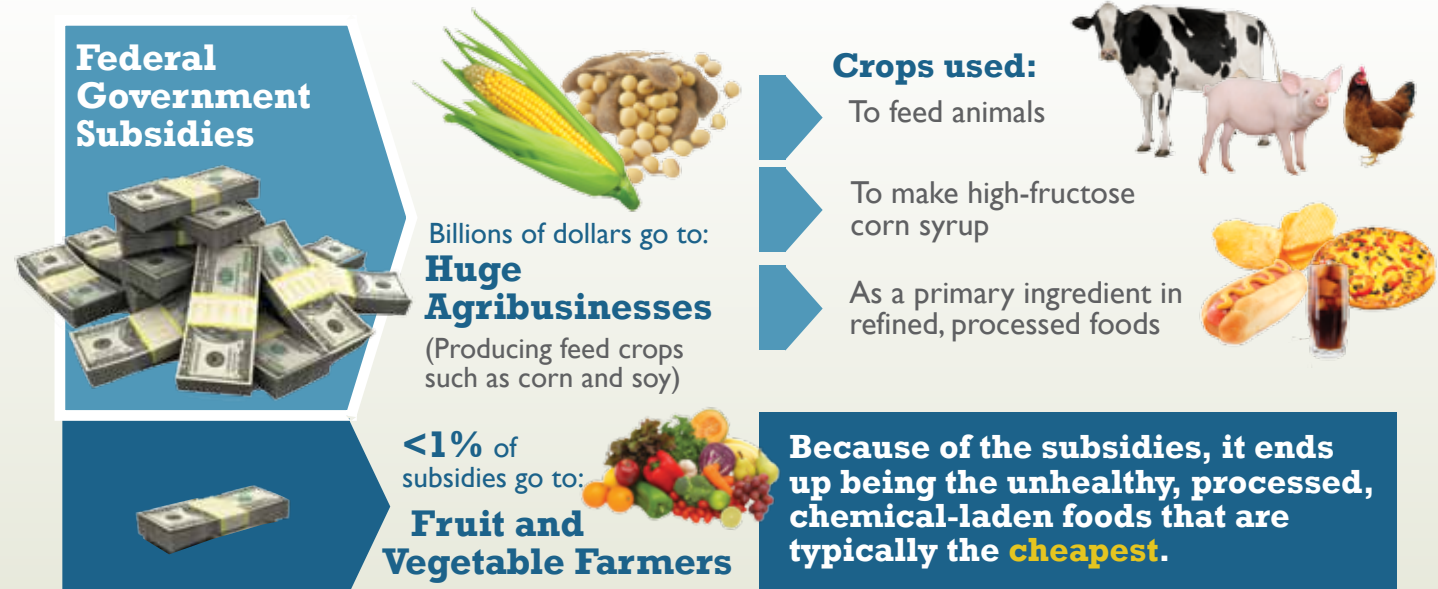
➤ Hippocrates

Strengthening the Food & Health Connection

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After many years practicing internal medicine, cardiology and cardiac electrophysiology, I have witnessed amazing advances in medical science. Despite these advances, I have seen more young people than ever before plagued by chronic illnesses. I also noticed over time that I was becoming sicker as well. My LDL cholesterol had risen to 138 by the age of 38. (It should have been less than 100.) As a cardiologist with a genetic predisposition to diabetes and heart disease, I knew this was a significant problem.

I began an intense research effort, looking for alternative ways to achieve optimal health and wellness. I discovered a simple but amazing fact—when it comes to disease reversal and prevention, nutritional excellence is everything.



Through this unequal distribution of funds, the government supports the production of the damaging foods that contribute to our growing rates of obesity and chronic disease.

We need a paradigm shift in our approach to healthcare. Our efforts need to start with removing unnatural foods from our diet, and replacing those foods with ones that are “natural,” as a way of reversing illness and facilitating health. This new approach would be a shift away from using medical and surgical interventions as our primary forms of healthcare.

Chronic Disease in America

According to the World Health Organization, the major risk factors influencing mortality today are our patterns of living and consumption. In the United States, chronic diseases—heart disease and stroke, cancer, diabetes, arthritis and obesity—cause seven in ten deaths each year. One in two American adults lives with at least one chronic illness.¹ More than 75 percent of our healthcare costs in this country are due to chronic conditions.²

The irony of chronic diseases is that they are the most common and most costly of all health problems in America, while at the same time being the most preventable. Also, many of the most damaging foods are the least expensive and therefore the most accessible to low-income individuals.

Why Does a Salad Cost More Than a Big Mac?

Even though we have the power to choose the food we eat, fresh, healthy, minimally processed foods can be more expensive than unhealthy, processed, chemical-laden foods. This is because the federal government provides billions of dollars in subsidies to huge agribusinesses producing feed crops, such as corn and soy, which are then fed to animals, used to make high-fructose corn syrup, and are a primary ingredient in refined, processed foods. By funding these crops, the government supports the production of the damaging foods that contribute to our growing rates of obesity and chronic disease.

Despite the federal government’s historic support of unhealthy foods, there are many opportunities for change: farmers markets, community supported agriculture, local grocery co-ops and farm stands. Schools and workplaces have instituted their own policies aimed at bringing fresh, local foods into their cafeterias.

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Increasing the price of sugared beverages through taxation would most likely reduce consumption, similar to the reduced usage of tobacco products after the federal government imposed a tax increase.

Developing policies that are more supportive of these initiatives is crucial for truly changing the food system. This is true on all scales, from policies at individual schools and workplaces to city and statewide policies to policies at the national level.

True Health Through Nutrition

Scientific studies have strongly indicated that individuals who live either solely or predominantly on plant-based diets are actually healthier than individuals who live on mostly animal-based diets.³ Also the over-processing of plant-based foods can be related to disease formation, and therefore, the less processing our foods go through the more valuable they are for ensuring good health.

clients, across a broad spectrum of health conditions, have been astounding.

A whole-foods, plant-based diet can prevent disease states, such as cancer, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, cataracts, macular degeneration, Alzheimer's, cognitive dysfunction, multiple sclerosis and osteoporosis. Furthermore, a plant-based diet can benefit people regardless of their genes, or personal disposition. This makes consuming whole, plant-based foods a superior diet, compared to consumption of animal-based foods, to support prevention of a majority of diseases.⁴

Data compiled from four unrelated studies showed a 26 percent reduction in heart disease and a 30 percent reduction in incidence of stroke in people who consumed no animal products compared to regular meat eaters.⁵ A later study performed by Dr. Dean Ornish compared individuals on a plant-based diet with less than 10 percent of calories from fat to individuals consuming 30 percent of calories from fat. The study showed an 82 percent regression of heart disease, a 37 percent decrease in cholesterol and a 91 percent decrease in angina of those on the lower-fat diet after one year.⁶

An estimated 18 million Americans have type 2 diabetes, which is caused by a combination of genetics and poor eating and exercise habits. In one study, researchers randomly assigned people with type 2 diabetes to either a low-fat, low-sugar vegan diet or the standard American Diabetes Association diet. After 22 weeks on the diets, 43 percent of those on the vegan diet were either able to stop taking some of their drugs, such as insulin or glucose-control medications, or lower the doses, compared to 26 percent of those on the standard diet. The vegan dieters lost 14 pounds on average, while the Diabetes Association dieters lost 6.8 pounds. LDL or "bad" cholesterol fell by 21 percent in the vegan group and 10 percent in the standard diet group.⁷

I have, as a result of my own careful research and study, developed and then systemically incorporated food prescriptions into my cardiology practice. The results I have seen first-hand from the experiences of hundreds of patients and



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Tackling Childhood Obesity

In the US, one in three kids are overweight or obese. One-third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes; many others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer and asthma.

First Lady Michelle Obama pledged to end childhood obesity within a generation so that children born today will reach adulthood at a healthy weight. It began with the White House organic garden and evolved into the Let's Move! Campaign, a series of collaborative and community-oriented strategies to address the various factors that lead to childhood obesity.

The Let's Move! Campaign focuses on four areas: empowering parents and caregivers; providing healthy food in schools; improving access to healthy, affordable foods and increasing physical activity. Tips, strategies, meal plans and physical activities are suggested on the Campaign's website and an hour per day of physical activity is recommended for all children.¹ Mrs. Obama said the campaign "has never been about the government telling people what do to."²

Launched in tandem with Let's Move!, the new Task Force on Childhood Obesity reviews every program and policy relating to child nutrition and physical activity. The Task Force oversees a national action plan that maximizes federal resources and sets concrete benchmarks toward the First Lady's national goal.

Mrs. Obama also backed the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which aims to improve school lunch nutrition and funding. The bill expands eligibility for school meals programs, establishes nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools and provides a 6-cent increase for each school lunch to help cafeterias serve healthier meals.

Childhood obesity is easier to prevent than to treat and in most cases can be prevented with lifestyle choices. We owe it to future generations to raise healthy kids.

from the editor



Encouraging consumers to switch to more healthful beverages would lead to less caloric intake and reduced weight gain.



from the editor



Photo courtesy Doug Begeth / The Oregonian

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act aims to improve school lunch nutrition. This elementary school in Portland, Oregon tested a more nutritious lunch program with great success.

Studies show that offering kids healthy foods in school leads to **long-term** healthier eating habits.

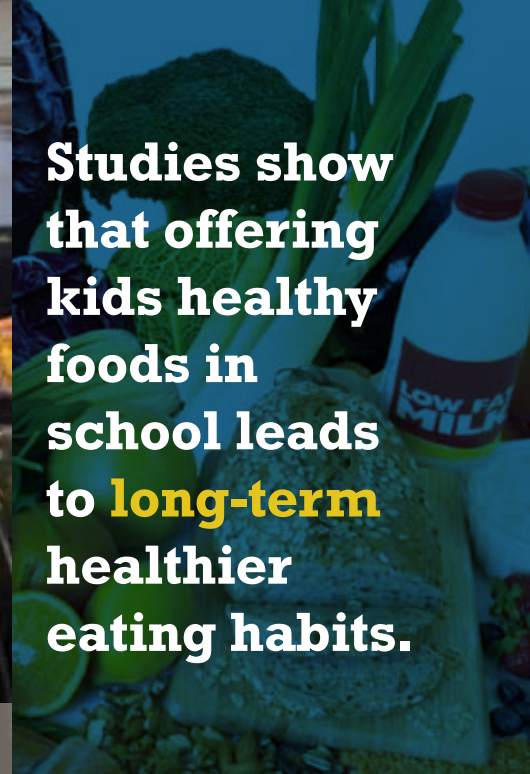


Photo courtesy Kristen Boyer Photography

Chef Ann is working to create a sustainable model to replace highly processed foods with highly nourishing, whole foods, that are procured regionally and prepared from scratch.

Chef Ann Cooper: Committed to Making School Lunches Healthy

Chef Ann Cooper, celebrated author, chef and educator, is known as “The Renegade Lunch Lady,” trumpeting the same simple fact as Dr. Montgomery: When it comes to your health, nutritional excellence is everything. Ann shifted her career from cooking in schools to advocating for a healthier food system after determining that our country could no longer ignore the environmental and health problems with our food production. Working in public K–12 school cafeterias across the nation, Chef Ann is leading the way toward a sustainable model that will replace highly processed foods with highly nourishing, whole foods, that are procured regionally and prepared from scratch. Ann founded the Food Family Farming Foundation, and her current project The Lunch Box (www.thelunchbox.org), provides free and easy to use tools, recipes and community connections to support school food reform. Adament that a food revolution is in order, Ann foresees a time when being a chef working to feed children healthy food will no longer be considered “renegade.”

The major benefit of preventing or reversing a chronic illness is the benefit of adding more life to their years, as opposed to more years to their life. Ultimately, the quality of our days is what is most important.

Signs of Progress

As part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program provides fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants. Coupons are used to purchase fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs. In 2009, 2.2 million individuals participated in the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program.⁸

In a recent push toward healthier schools, 42 states have passed regulations forbidding the high-calorie and high-sodium items that were marketed in traditional vending machines.⁹ Recognizing that these junk foods can lead to obesity, diabetes and coronary artery disease, these forward-thinking schools have replaced unhealthy vending machine snacks with healthier options such as water, juice, yogurt, crackers, fruit and granola bars. While eliminating junk food from school vending machines doesn’t guarantee the ideal healthy diet for school-aged kids, it is still progress in the right direction and more schools need to follow suit.

Studies show that offering kids healthy foods in school leads to long-term healthier eating habits. One study showed that fifth graders consumed more fruit and

vegetables when their schools restricted fatty and sugary snacks, even outside of school.¹⁰ Teachers at a high school in Los Angeles reported that students behaved better and are focused in class after the school stocked vending machines with water, juices and healthy snacks. The school also reported a 74 percent reduction in violent suspensions and a 24 percent reduction in all suspensions since before the change in school foods and beverages.¹¹

the world. Lifestyle behavior with optimal nutrition will be the central theme. By approaching chronic illness first with nutritional intervention, we will improve overall quality of life for people. We will improve their productivity at work and increase their enjoyment of day-to-day activities. We will help patients avoid costly medications and surgical procedures, allowing them to keep more money in their pockets. All it takes is the realization that true health begins in the produce section of the grocery store, not the pharmacy.

There is a need for revolutionary change in how we address chronic illnesses in this country and around

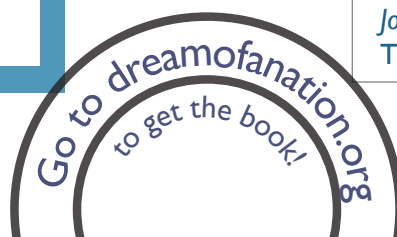
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Steps to a Healthier You

① Focus meals around minimally processed, plant-based foods.

② Purchase more of your groceries from farmers’ markets, CSAs, local co-ops.

③ Interested in nutrition policy? The Center for Science in the Public Interest is a science-based advocate for nutrition and health, food safety and alcohol policy. www.cspinet.org



Baxter Montgomery, MD, (www.dr Baxtermontgomery.com) is a busy cardiologist in Houston, Texas. As a clinical assistant professor of Medicine in the Division of Cardiology at the University of Texas and a fellow of the American College of Cardiology, he manages heart rhythm problems and coronary disease; performs angiography, heart device implants (defibrillators, pacemakers) and other hospital procedures, and teaches young physicians. Montgomery is also the executive director of the Johnsie and Aubary Montgomery Institute of Medical Education and Research and the author of The Food Prescription for Better Health.

