



## In this Issue

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## Nutrition

### Produce of the Month:

#### Rutabaga

A cross between a cabbage and a turnip, the rutabaga is a root vegetable and one of the cruciferous vegetables, known for their cancer fighting compounds. High in vitamin C, zinc, and fiber – rutabagas are a great addition to your cool weather menu.

**The Basics:** The rutabaga looks like a large yellow turnip. Choose a rutabaga that is firm with no soft spots, cracks, or bruises. Store unwrapped in your refrigerator until ready to use. When ready, wash and dry the rutabaga then peel the thick skin with either a

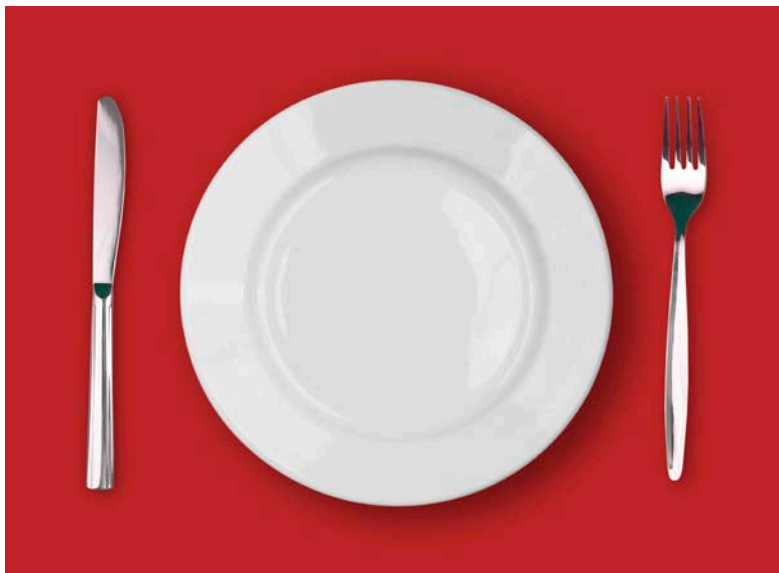
pairing knife or vegetable peeler. It’s important that the rutabaga is dry when you peel it so it doesn’t slip. To make chopping or slicing easier, cut the bottom of the rutabaga so you have a flat surface and it is more stable. Now you can continue cutting your rutabaga according to your recipe. Boiling and mashing rutabagas (like a potato) is a common way to prepare but you can also roast or grill.

**Try This:** Add caramelized onions to mashed rutabagas for added sweetness and depth of flavor. If



you roast rutabagas, toss your vegetables in a mixture of olive oil and apple juice then sprinkle with a little salt. Add chopped rutabagas to any winter soup or stew recipe that calls for potatoes.

**The Facts:** A medium rutabaga is about 145 calories and an excellent source of vitamin C, potassium, and fiber. It has trace amounts of sodium and is considered fat free.



## The What, Where, When, and Why of Eating.

You've read it all and probably tried it all: don't eat after 8 p.m.; eliminate white foods; this food is the enemy and that food is a lifesaver. It's confusing. So, it's time to break it down and understand the basics of good eating.

**What:** Nutritional science tells us over and over that the best diet – the one that provides the most energy with the best health benefits – is a diet built on whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. What does that mean? It means that rather than thinking of these foods as side dishes and snacks, we are to build our meals around them and consider them our go-to foods throughout the day. If you choose to include meat and poultry, choose lean cuts and smaller portions.

**Where:** Science again confirms that the best place to eat is at a table with little to no distractions. Eating in front of a television, iPad, while driving, at your computer, etc. can add significant calories to your day. When we are distracted while eating, we stop paying attention to our hunger. We eat mindlessly and often well past the point of being satisfied.

**When:** There is less agreement concerning the best times to eat but this we know. Eating causes a reaction in the body. Blood sugars rise, insulin levels rise in response to the blood sugars, the digestive process begins, body temperature rises, and a number

of hormones are activated that have to do with feeling “full.” The body continues to work, converting food into energy for cellular use. Understanding that, it is only logical to think that eating late can create sleeping problems. It is also logical to think that eating in the morning can help create needed energy for the day. Given that, eating regular meals – but not just before bed – makes sense.

**Why:** This is the simplest question: because we're hungry. But it is also the most difficult question. While we may know that food is a natural response to hunger and a need for energy, the real reasons we eat are significantly more complicated. They are related to emotions, stress, habits, family traditions, celebrations, expectations, and more. What we eat, where we eat, and when we eat are often less about food and more about our lives and how we are feeling. To begin to separate food from all of the non-food reasons we eat, we must first be willing to look at what we are doing and how we are feeling. Take time to write down what you eat, when, where – and most importantly – why you are eating. Are you hungry? Stressed? Sad? Because the clock says you have to? With this information, you can begin to respond to the demands and emotions of the day without using food. And that is a healthy choice.



## Preventive

### Understanding Inflammation

Inflammation is a physical response. It is a defensive response by the body to something it considers as dangerous or to a foreign substance that must be fought off. When we have an injury or get sick (bacteria, virus, etc.), inflammation is the immediate response, creating symptoms such as pain, swelling, and redness. These symptoms are all part of our immune system's healing process.

The pain associated with inflammation is due to an increased sensitivity in nerve endings. Swelling occurs when the body sends extra fluid to the location of the injury (if there is one). Redness indicates that the injury is receiving more blood, all part of the healing process. Additional symptoms – heat, pus, and stiffness – can all be signs of inflammation and the immune system at work. Minor inflammation – such as a cut, blister, or other superficial injury –

will heal on its own if kept clean. Inflammation that does not heal quickly or is not minor can require medical care.

Chronic inflammation is a bigger problem. Chronic inflammation – such as inflammation from arthritis, asthma, inflammatory bowel disease, and other autoimmune diseases – can damage tissue. There is a link between long-term inflammation and heart disease, certain cancers, and Alzheimer's. Research continues in order to understand the relationship between inflammation and these diseases, but, in the meantime, it is important to manage all conditions that increase inflammation. Seeing your doctor regularly and taking any prescribed medication to manage a condition helps to keep inflammation to a minimum.

There has been a lot written about anti-inflammatory diets and the role of lifestyle in inflammation.

There is enough evidence to say that not getting regular sleep – 7-8 hours a night – can increase chronic inflammation. Also, eating a diet high in refined carbohydrates (sugar, processed foods, white flour, etc.) increases inflammation. Being overweight or obese is associated with increased inflammatory markers and risks as well. Stress is also known to increase inflammation. Eating a diet low in sugar and high in complex carbohydrates, getting plenty of sleep, maintaining a healthy weight, and reducing stress are all ways to reduce chronic inflammation.

The body's immune system is a complex mechanism. Inflammation can be a normal part of that process. Chronic inflammation, however, needs to be addressed. See your medical professional regularly and discuss your risk for chronic inflammation with him or her.

## Lifestyle: Demystifying Meditation

Think meditation is not for you? Think again! Meditation is not prayer, a part of yoga (though it can be) or any other stereotype you may associate with it. Meditation is defined as *directed concentration* or a *focused state of relaxation*. Meditation may make you think of faraway places and foreign spiritual practices, but meditation is used by many people for spiritual and non-spiritual reasons. Though many religions include meditation, it is not a religious exercise, and it is not about unusual visions or contacting some other dimension. At its foundation, meditation is the practice of focusing on something external (candle, sound, mantra) or internal (breath, mental image, uplifting thought) in order to quiet the mind and allow all of the processes of the body to relax, repair and reboot.

The health benefits of meditation are many. One of the first benefits of meditation is reduced blood pressure. Studies published in 2004 and 2008 in the *American Journal of Hypertension* both found that meditation (in this case, transcendental meditation) reduced blood pressure readings more than other types of stress management and relaxation. This reduction in blood pressure also reduced the risk of subsequent heart disease. Meditation is used by many to promote healing, reduce anxiety, improve mood and increase pain tolerance for those who have chronic pain.

There are many types of meditation. Some require twice a day practice for 20-30 minutes. Others ask for a few minutes a day to focus on your breathing. Breath focus is at the heart of all meditation practices and is a good place to start for someone not familiar or comfortable with meditation. Try this: Sitting comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor, close your eyes and take 1 - 2 minutes and pay attention to your breathing. Don't worry if your mind wanders. Just watch the thoughts pass by (much like clouds that move across the sky) and refocus your attention to your breath. Try this once or twice a day for a week and see if the practice gets easier and you find yourself generally less stressed after doing this.

If you are interested in learning more about meditation or trying one of the many methods of meditation, begin by doing some research online or at your local library. You may find a type of meditation that interests you and resources on where to find an instructor. Also, many park districts and community colleges are now offering classes in meditation. Make sure you check out the instructor's qualifications before signing up. The benefits you receive from regular meditation can improve both your physical and mental health. Find one of the ways to meditate that works for you and make it part of your healthy habits!

### Still need some help with meditation? Try this:

- Can't just watch your thoughts pass by? Make a mental note about your thoughts. Keeping track of what you are thinking about can help you identify what is worrying you and you can then take action.
- Can't sit still? Some people like to meditate while walking. Choose a quiet path or route and walk! Focus on your breathing, the impact of your feet on the ground, the temperature on your skin, and the sounds around you.
- Can't find time? Just as you get in bed, take 2 minutes to quiet your mind and focus on your breathing. Relaxing in this way just before bed can help you sleep more soundly.
- Try an app! There are a number of meditation apps that will provide you with instruction, music, and a timer. Give one a try!





## Fitness

### Fitness Monitors

Fitness monitors have flooded the market and for good reason. They provide immediate and real feedback on your fitness activity. Here are some things to think about –

**The Tried and True:** A scale and tape measure can help you keep track of your weight and waistline, 2 indicators of fitness. There are also scales that will measure your body mass index and body fat.

**The No Tech for Me:** You can monitor your fitness by keeping a journal. Write down every time you exercise, for how long, what intensity, and how you feel. Take your pulse after a mile to see how fit you are aerobically. Touch your toes to determine flexibility. See how many reps you can lift of a light or moderate free weight!

**Bring on the Apps:** Fitness monitors - such as those from Fitbit, Jawbone, Garmin, and Nike – are activity monitors that have apps and can be integrated into other health-focused apps. Great for people who like to “tech it up,” these activity monitors can put some fun in getting fit!

## Less is More: Volunteering *by Marie McFadden, CHES*

Volunteering is definitely a way to get more out of life, a truly rewarding and beneficial experience for both you and the group or organization you are working with. Volunteering creates positive physical, mental and emotional changes. Stepping outside your comfort zone and allowing yourself to build relationships with others through service can be one of the most rewarding experiences a person can have. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, one in four adults volunteered in the United States during 2012. It can be hard to get started at first, but once you do, the benefits are endless!

Volunteer newbies can start small. Think locally as this will have a huge impact on the community in which you live, work, and play. Local communities have dozens of organizations that help underserved populations, new businesses, local parks, and animals. Serving meals at a local soup kitchen, spending one Saturday a month at the animal shelter, or helping out at a community event are all common ways to become involved. Remember, it is important to choose something that gets you excited and makes you want to go because you will not be paid financially for the work you are doing. It will also be a much more rewarding experience for everyone involved if you find work that you are passionate about. For example, teachers can offer to tutor children at the local Boys and Girls clubs during the summer or start a reading club at nursing home.

You can also think globally about volunteering. Many churches and schools help to raise money to send overseas for a variety of projects such as building schools, AIDS education and relief, clean water projects, and even veterinary services. You do not have to travel to be useful; simply supporting those that are is help enough.

Also consider organizing a company volunteer project. 81% of employees who volunteered with their co-workers reported that the experience strengthened their relationships according to a study by United Health Group on Volunteering. This can lead to a more positive work environment.

Volunteering also has many health benefits from stress reduction, providing a sense of purpose, and socialization. In fact, a study by Carnegie Mellon University in June 2013 found that people who volunteered on a regular basis were less likely to develop hypertension. Keep in mind that volunteering can be done at any age. According to a study by the Corporation for National and Community Service from 2007, elderly volunteers had a 44% lower mortality rate than non-volunteers.

I encourage all of you to step outside your box and look around. Find what you're passionate about and bring that to others. You will quickly notice a change in perspective and a change in your health!

Ask the Trainer *by Erin M. Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT*  
Finding Time to Work Out

**Question:** I am a 30-year-old woman who works long days. How do you find the willpower to go to the gym and do a workout after a long day at work?

**Answer:** JUST GO! Easier said than done I know, but you need to take it one day at a time and create a habit. Make it a part of your day and schedule the time. Before a long workweek, look at your schedule and see where you could fit something in. It doesn't necessarily have to be after work. I have found that after working a long day, sometimes the last thing on a lot of people's minds is to go workout. They would rather go home and relax. If this is you, then let's relook at things. Could you get up 30 minutes earlier and get a workout in? Could you squeeze in a quick walk at lunch? If you are really committed to getting back in shape, you will find the time. If the only time you have is after work, then take the first step. Put it into your schedule and do it. And then do it again the next day, and the next and if you make it a priority. It will become a habit and will get easier as time goes on. It will become part of your daily routine. And know that it doesn't have to be an hour-long workout. You can get an amazing workout in just 20-30 minutes a day. You can even start with 10 or 15 minutes and work your way up. Have a day that's completely booked? Try a 15-minute walk twice a day. You'd be amazed at how that short amount of time can show results quickly. And remember, anytime you are working out, you need to be eating correctly as well. Stay focused on your goal, and good luck!

**Want to know more?**

**Contact TCU Insurance for information on wellness programs. We can help you reduce healthcare costs and improve employee well being.**



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