

COMPLETELY WELL

March 2017

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

- Are You Getting Enough Sleep?, Artichokes 2
- The Benefits of Bodyweight Exercises 3
- The Truth About Dietary Cholesterol 4
- Ask the Trainer 5



Insurance Agency

National Nutrition Month

“Put Your Best Fork Forward” is the theme for this year’s National Nutrition Month®, sponsored by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The focus this month is that better nutrition is accomplished through small steps, and each bite matters. In other words, over time, small changes can produce big results for your health.

Our lifestyle has an impact on how we eat as well. Whether we are working with a tight budget or a busy schedule, the impact on our food choices is real and sometimes problematic. If a restricted budget makes it difficult to spend more at the store, choose in season foods as much as possible. They should be your least expensive options. Beans and legumes are also very affordable foods, high in fiber and quality protein. Then be sure to look for sales on lean protein, frozen fruits and veggies, and whole grains to stock your pantry and freezer.

For individuals on the run, creating your own single serving packages of food can help. Go for portable, non-perishable foods like nuts, whole grain crackers, raisins, and whole fruit. When you do have time to cook, make a double recipe to freeze for later. Even if you make one of these changes a week, you will be improving your diet and enhancing your health.

Article continued on page 3.



Are You Getting Enough Sleep?

To get healthy, we improve our diet, plan our workouts, and work to reduce our stress. But do we put this kind of thought and effort into sleep, an equally important aspect of our overall health? Both the quality and quantity of our sleep is directly connected to our physical health and emotional wellbeing.

Being well rested could make or break your day.

Getting enough sleep helps to reduce stress and improve memory where a lack of sleep can make you irritable and increase your risk for depression. Sleep works with the natural serotonin cycle in your brain, and a lack of sleep could disturb the cycle causing decreased serotonin levels. Low serotonin levels are related to increased carbohydrate cravings and depression. Sleep is also essential for processing memory. A recent study reported in *Psychological Science* (2008) found that sleep helped the brain preserve memories with the greatest emotional connection and diminish the details that were not emotionally important.

Sleep is also important for your physical health.

- Cells produce more protein when you sleep, helping your body to heal from injury or the day's exposure to pollution, ultraviolet rays and environmental chemicals.
- Not getting enough sleep is associated with high blood pressure and increased cholesterol levels, both risks for heart disease and stroke. Lack of sleep is also associated with an increase in inflammation, another risk for heart disease.
- Another risk from insufficient sleep is diabetes. Not getting enough sleep raises your risk of diabetes by 40%. A 1999 University of Chicago study found that after only 6 nights of reduced sleep, otherwise healthy young men had higher than normal blood sugar levels. Once the men returned to a regular sleep schedule (7-8 hours a night), their blood sugar levels returned to normal.
- Getting enough sleep can also help you lose weight. Sleep balances many of the natural hormones that control appetite and cravings.
- Finally, getting enough sleep can help keep you safe, reducing the likelihood of auto accidents. Approximately 71,000 injuries and 1500 fatalities are attributed to drivers who have fallen asleep at the wheel each year.

To be healthy, aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night. Create a night time routine that relaxes you, including a regular bedtime. Steer clear of the TV and other electronics at least an hour before your bedtime and adopt bedtime rituals like stretching, reading or journaling that help you relax. Sleep is as important to your health as diet and exercise. Improve your sleep habits with a plan that improves your overall health.

Produce of the Month

Artichokes

By the beginning of April, artichoke season is in full swing. Mostly grown in California, artichokes should be increasingly available at your local grocery store and offer an impressive menu item for a dinner party or terrific vegetable for any weeknight.

The Basics: In the United States, California is responsible for almost 100% of our artichokes. When purchasing, select an artichoke that feels heavy for its size. It may also “squeak” when you squeeze the leaves together. Brown tips and gray streaks can indicate frost damage but is not a reason not to buy the artichoke since the inside is protected. Wash your artichoke in cold water, pull off the lower petals and cut off the stem. Cut off the tip of the artichoke (about 1/2 - 1 inch) and use kitchen scissors to cut off the thorns. You may now dip it in lemon juice to preserve the color. At this point you may boil, steam or microwave the artichoke. (Check your favorite artichoke recipes for the best cooking method.)

Try This: Many people like to eat artichokes dipped in butter but other dips can work as well and be a nice change. Another option is a dip made with mayonnaise and Dijon mustard (2:1 ratio) with a little dill to taste.

The Facts: One medium artichoke has about 60 calories, 0 grams of fat and 6 grams of fiber. It is also a good source of vitamin C.

The Benefits of Bodyweight Exercises

Hopefully, the New Year's resolution you made to get fit is still going strong. Working out is great for your heart, your bones, your mind, and your mood. And an important part of working out is strength training. If you exercise at a gym or fitness facility, you are probably using free weights or weight machines. But what if you are working out at home? If you haven't heard, bodyweight exercise is an excellent choice for anyone looking to increase strength and improve flexibility.

Body weight exercises use your body weight as a means for building strength. These exercises include pushups, squats, lunges, planks, and leg raises. Any time you engage your muscles to lift or stabilize your body weight for an extended period of time, you are doing a bodyweight exercise!

So what are the benefits?

- No additional cost for weights or fitness membership
- Can be done almost anywhere with no equipment
- Challenging for all fitness levels
- Requires balance and flexibility to complete each exercise
- Supports strong, flexible joints
- Help prevent back pain and injury



Be sure you are including strength training in your workout program. Start slow, and don't push yourself to the point of pain. Work different muscle groups each time (legs, arms, core, etc.) Combined with aerobic exercise and stretching, your overall fitness level will improve!

National Nutrition Month *continued from page 1.*

We all have our favorite flavors and foods. Trying to stick to a diet that eliminates all of our favorites can lead to breaking our diet or binging. Instead of a temporary diet, find ways to incorporate your likes into a healthy food plan. If you like the saltiness of chips, choose 100% whole grain baked crackers, popcorn made with coconut or avocado oil, or chips or crackers made from almonds or quinoa for a gluten-free snack. Pair with a serving of hummus, all natural peanut butter, or slice of sharp cheese for a filling snack.

Do you have a sweet tooth? A little dark chocolate is both delicious and heart healthy especially when paired with almonds, sliced apples, oranges, or fresh berries. Try a whole grain muffin recipe and swap out any added sugar for berries, grated carrot or zucchini or pureed pumpkin! No matter what your favorite flavors are, there are always healthier options made with vegetables, fruits and whole grains that still satisfy.

For those with strong connections to foods from a certain culture or ethnic background, doing your homework can make it easier to find the healthy options. Nearly all traditional ethnic foods have their foundation in whole foods – versus processed foods. Whether it's Middle Eastern, Oriental, or European fare, a recipe built on plenty of vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains is a healthy option.

No matter what your tastes are, you can eat healthy. Every day. One bite at a time.

The Truth About Dietary Cholesterol

Most adults have been taught that cholesterol in our diet is bad. According to the latest research, this is NOT necessarily true. Health experts are now saying that eating cholesterol doesn't actually raise our cholesterol. If the research holds true, recommendations will change from avoiding foods with cholesterol to an emphasis on getting enough healthy fats and dietary cholesterol to support a healthy heart, a healthy brain, and a healthy metabolism.

New research tells that saturated fat isn't the culprit for bad cholesterol and that refined carbohydrates and sugars are what we should be paying attention to help get our levels in check. It is still true that you should always avoid trans fats (those found in fried foods, processed foods, and many baked products) which are known to increase levels of LDL and decrease levels of HDL. It is okay to consume cholesterol from healthy whole foods like eggs, shrimp, or organic dairy as a part of a balanced diet (The New England Journal of Medicine, 2010).

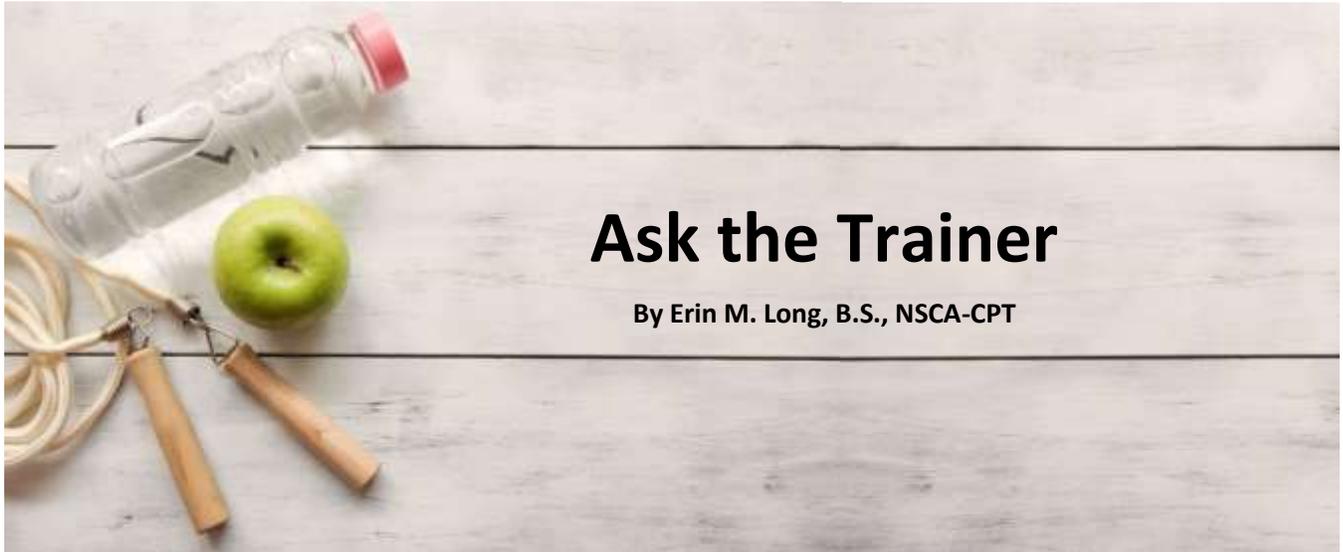
A study published in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2014), did not find that people who ate higher levels of saturated fat had more heart disease than those who ate less. Nor did it find less disease in those eating higher amounts of unsaturated fat, including monounsaturated fat like olive oil or polyunsaturated fat like corn, peanut or safflower oil. Instead, this and other studies revealed that when we eat too many refined carbohydrates and sugars, our body actually produces "bad" cholesterol or low-density lipoprotein (LDL) that acts like a magnet, causing cholesterol (a waxy substance) to stick to artery walls, creating dangerous plaque that is the hallmark of heart disease.



Control Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is actually necessary for cellular function and for healthy hormones. Popular low-fat diets can lead to hormone imbalance, weight gain, and high cholesterol readings. On the other hand, when we lead an active lifestyle and we eat a balanced diet filled with healthy fats and colorful vegetables, our "good" cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein HDL) naturally increases, helping move cholesterol away from artery walls.

To control your cholesterol levels, it is important to understand that 85% of your cholesterol level is made in your body and not from the amount of cholesterol we eat (Cleveland Clinic). This means that in order for your body to make the right amount of cholesterol, you have to support your body with nutrition and regular exercise, in addition to avoiding trans fats. To support a healthy heart and health hormones, exercise regularly to increase the HDL levels. Then eat plenty of healthy fats from coconut oil, olive oil, nuts, fish and avocados and choose a diet that emphasizes whole plant foods (vegetables, legumes, fruits, and whole grains). Remember, eggs are okay! The quality protein, fat, and cholesterol contained in the yolk of an egg will help you be healthy and feel full.



Ask the Trainer

By Erin M. Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

Q: Hello Erin! A friend of mine and I have been keeping each other accountable in trying to lose weight the last few months. We both have the goal of losing 30lbs. Each of us are tracking our food and working out a few days a week. She has lost 10lbs since we started and I have only lost 5lbs. We are pretty much doing the same thing so I was wondering why you think she may be losing faster than I am? Any suggestions or ideas help. Thank you! -Tabitha G.

A: Hello Tabitha! Thank you for reaching out, I appreciate the question. Let me start by saying great job on losing 5lbs! It may not be the 10lbs that your friend has taken off but it's a great start. There could be numerous possibilities on why she has lost faster than you, but it shouldn't take away from what you have accomplished.

Some people just naturally lose weight faster than others. This could be that their metabolism is different from our own. Our metabolism is influenced by the types of foods we eat, the types of activities we do, our age, our gender, and even our family history. Environmental pollutants found in plastics, pesticides, household cleaners and more can affect our body's ability to detox and burn fat which is key to reaching and maintain a healthy weight. By making changes to live a healthy lifestyle we can enhance our metabolism and our health.

Another factor could be the different types or the amount of stress each of you are under. Our bodies react to stress differently and we often influence this physical response by how we choose to cope with stress in our lives. Some people eat when they are stressed, and some people don't eat. Some people workout to deal with stress while others lie around to create feelings of comfort. If you feel you are dealing with a lot of stress right now, I recommend taking a look at how you are managing it and what you could be doing differently.

My last thing would be not to think too much of it! Try not to let this be a stress for you as well. Don't worry or compare yourself to others in your weight loss journey. It's your journey and no one else's! You are losing so that is a good thing, keep working hard, doing what you are doing and you will see the results you are looking for.

If I can help in any other way, please let me know. Have a great day! -Erin Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

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