Halal Consumer
A Publication of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America

28 Realign Your Mind and Body with Pilates
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CHEESE TORTELLINI: Cheese-filled tortellini are simply delicious in a well-seasoned tomato sauce, with the added protein and texture of pinto beans.

FLORENTINE LASAGNA: A meal influenced by the tastes of Florence. Savor the combination of small lasagna noodles in a tomato sauce with Ricotta and Parmesan cheeses, spinach and pinto bean pieces which add texture and protein.
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Editor’s Note

Assalaamu alaikum,

As winter arrives in the Midwest, we’ll try to keep you warm with this issue’s articles and recipes. If you are turning purple from cold, warm up with a “Plethora of Purple Produce” and consider replacing the usual vegetables with heirloom and colorful varieties.

Maintaining a healthy diet might help you combat the rigors of winter. Check out “Vitamins and Minerals” for information on how these critical components support a healthy body. While you probably don’t need it, read “Weight Management...” in case you or a loved one enjoyed too much turkey over the holidays!

Meat and dairy are good sources of some important vitamins and minerals. If you follow a vegan diet, you may be missing some of these. “Going Vegan...” provides some ideas on how to make sure you consume the right foods to obtain all the necessary nutrients.

As you shop for groceries, you may notice terms on food labels that aren’t quite clear. “Natural, Organic, and Synthetic” offers some explanation of these terms and how some are regulated and others are not.

While shopping you will notice pomegranates in the fruit stands. One of the oldest known fruits, and a fruit mentioned in the Quran, pomegranates are a good source of nutrients. “Pomegranates” considers the versatility of the fruit and how it can be consumed in different forms.

In addition to diet, exercise is important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. With the colder weather, consider “Pilates...” to realign your mind and body. Of course, before beginning any new exercise or diet, consult a physician.

As I brave the frigid temperatures of the Midwest wearing a hat and hood, I notice many out there with their heads uncovered. A big difference seems to be they are not ‘hair challenged!’ “Hair...” provides some insight into the utility of hair as well as what you can do about hair loss.

Finally, be sure to try out the recipes and share your comments with us via email, Facebook, or Twitter.

Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Roger Othman editor
From the Publisher’s Desk

Assalaamu alaikum,

Proper nutrition and physical activity are two components needed to live a healthy life. The American diet has deteriorated over the past decades, resulting in an increase in chronic disease and obesity. This has led to higher medical costs, lower productivity, and a less than ideal lifestyle.

The USDA and Department of Health and Human Services issue the Dietary Guidelines every 5 years. The 2015–2020 edition reports that over 50% of Americans are overweight or obese and 35% of adults are affected by coronary heart disease. While diet and exercise may not prevent this, they go a long way in leading to a healthier life. Though the Guidelines are intended for policy makers, consumers can benefit by reviewing the report.

Americans consume more saturated fats, sodium, and sugar and less vegetables, fruits, dairy, and oils than recommended in the Dietary Guidelines. With the ample variety of foods available, it should be easy for consumers to select healthy halal options. Some key points to consider are: eat healthy all the time; limit calorie intake while meeting nutritional needs; and minimize sugar, fats, and sodium consumption. If you haven’t adopted a healthier diet, start now. The sooner you start, the better off you will be, so get your children on the right path to give them the best opportunity for a healthy life. Find substitutes for sugary drinks and snacks, minimize salt use in cooking, avoid fatty foods, consider organic options like Saffron Road products, and read nutrition labels to be sure you are making the best choices.

Also recognize that the Guidelines are based on age and gender, so each individual should determine what is best for their situation. Practice these healthy eating habits as a family so you have a support group to bring you back if you stray.

A healthy eating pattern includes consuming vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, meat and poultry, seafood, eggs, legumes, and nuts. Select a variety of vegetables in different colors, some whole grains, low-fat or non-fat dairy products, and lean meats and stay away from products with high sodium content, added sugar, and trans fats. And by all means, don’t forget to include some physical activity in your daily routine. Remember, the lifestyle of our youth impacts the lifestyle we will have in our later years, so if you aren’t doing it yet, adopt a healthier diet and don’t forget the exercise!

Sincerely,

Muhammad Munir Chaudry president

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Purple foods are seeing a resurgence from farmers and that translates to us seeing them in grocery stores. The significant number of purple foods (such as heirloom carrots, cauliflower, potatoes, purple cabbage, etc.) available at the grocery store, creates a larger selection of healthy options to put on your plate. These foods offer great health benefits, and they make a perfect addition to your daily diet. Purple berries are not unusual, but a purple cauliflower or heirloom carrot will make you stop and take a second look, and perhaps encourage you to place it in your shopping cart.

Studies, such as Soyoung Lims’ Kansas State University Study in 2009 (http://www.k-state.edu/media/newsreleases/09/sweetpotato62909.html), show the purple colored sweet potato to have higher levels of cancer fighting properties. Lim goes on to say that the high purple pigment is called anthocyanin and that one of the beneficial components of anthocyanin is antioxidants. Antioxidants help to keep us healthier and younger by inhibiting the destruction caused by oxidation (free radicals).
Antioxidants also reduce inflammation. When we reduce inflammation in the body, we excel toward exponential levels of recovery. Inflammation is one of the main roadblocks to our body’s ability to maintain a good standard of physical health and mental well-being.

Been talked out of enjoying potatoes? Well fight back and buy purple potatoes! Their high level of anti-oxidants can rival spinach, kale, and brussel sprouts.

Another benefit of purple and other dark foods is they are full of phytonutrients that keep our blood’s super highway constantly under repair, so our blood is on time for its job. Good blood flow repairs and inspires our bodies to new heights. It really is the very foods we eat, that will determine how we behave and react in any given circumstance in our day.

Ingredients matter because we are what we eat. Living a healthier lifestyle includes adding more color to your plate in the form of vegetables. Next time you have a choice to purchase purple produce, like heirloom carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, or the not so common mangosteen, go ahead and buy it. Not interested in those, then why not try the more readily available dark cherries, berries and figs, grapes and plums, red cabbage, purple asparagus, onions, potatoes, yams, corn, and peppers. We haven’t even mentioned the lettuces yet; you’ll find a plethora of purple and dark varieties available.

Taking the time to eat a well-balanced meal that is prepared from a garden variety of ingredients can be a lifestyle change in today’s world of prepared foods. Try enjoying roasted heirloom carrots which can aid in balancing glucose to help reduce diabetic symptoms. Making a change to purple cauliflower instead of broccoli one or two nights a week can increase your body’s ability to release toxins and aid in healthier cells to stave off cancer.

Dark foods such as beans and lentils and black rice also offer a wonderful benefit to your kidneys along with your taste buds. Make black bean burgers instead of meat burgers to improve overall digestion and reduce Irritable Bowel Syndrome symptoms. Or perhaps make a black rice salad with shaved black garlic and all the fixings of a corn salsa and this high fiber meal could help you see a reduction of arterial plaque.

There are so many wonderful examples of dark foods and some we too often don’t think about as being food, like chia seeds or poppy seeds. These little guys pack a mean punch and are another way to add dark ingredients in your diet. Chia seeds can be soaked to make a pudding, or ground to make a flour and poppy seeds are the perfect addition to a granola or muffin recipe. One of my favorite discoveries is a raw, dark, heirloom pumpkin seed. They are twice the size of normal pumpkin seeds and that much more flavorful.

When we talk about darker foods, those would be items grown from the ground, not dyed with food coloring. While purple produce offers levels of healing, food coloring causes degeneration, so don’t be confused about the source of color on your plate.

Nature packs nutrition into foods and while there are always exceptions to the rule, darker foods are better for us. When we talk about darker foods, those would be items grown from the ground, not dyed with food coloring. While purple produce offers levels of healing, food coloring causes degeneration, so don’t be confused about the source of color on your plate. To make sure you know the purple food you have chosen is the healthy option, make sure there is just one ingredient listed on the container if you are not shopping in the produce department.

Find it hard to get your hands on locally grown produce? Don’t give up, all of the produce we talked about can be grown around your house in pots or buckets. Enjoy planting heirloom carrot seeds or purple potatoes and watch how they grow over three months.

Whatever your level of interest, taking the time to insure you get the most nutrition you can from each bite should always be your goal. Offering the body, a plethora of purple produce changes the old saying from once on the lips, forever on the hips, to forever on my lips for the perfect hips.

MS. DEENA was coined The Deceptive Chef by her clients for making their favorite childhood dishes healthy, decadent and without gluten, dairy, sugar, or soy. She has studied the impact of ingredients in processed foods on health for two decades. She teaches deceptively delicious, healthy recipes because ingredients matter!
Going Vegan: The Push and Pull of a Plant-Based Diet

By Aysha Hussain

Gone are the days when following a vegan diet was synonymous with living a hippie lifestyle or just another fad diet made popular by celebrities. Veganism is slowly gaining a foothold amongst consumers, particularly for millennial and future generations, in large part for its health benefits, as well as its goals in protecting animal lives and the environment.

From a dietary perspective, veganism is a form of vegetarianism that eliminates the consumption of all foods produced by animals, which includes eggs, butter and milk, and honey, thereby making a vegan diet solely plant-based, consisting primarily of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. According to a recent Gallup Poll, approximately three percent of the US population reported themselves as being vegan. Although this number has not changed significantly over the last five years, the demand for more vegan and plant-based foods is rising. Retail sales data, compiled by Nielsen on behalf of the Plant Based Foods Association, showed consumers are purchasing more plant-based foods, as sales grew by twenty percent in 2018. Fast-casual restaurants along with mainstream fast food chains are also taking notice of this demand, with some adding a vegan friendly option to their menus.

For many followers of the diet, being vegan is often met with both curiosity and criticism because of the many perceptions associated with eating only plant-based foods. Among these include the notion that a vegan diet is restrictive and lacking in essential nutrients for good overall health. Many health professionals and research studies refute these claims including a series of recent findings presented during Nutrition 2018, a flagship conference organized by the American Society of Nutrition. The research found that individuals who consumed more plant proteins displayed lower risks of heart disease and diabetes, as plant food sources are lower in saturated fats—generally found in meat and dairy products. Plant-based diets are largely higher in fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants compared to the traditional ‘Western’ diet, which usually consists of animal products with a low intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. In addition, the data showed individuals on a predominantly
A plant-based diet had lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels, as well as lower body mass indexes.

For Farah Mujawar, from Illinois, her personal journey with veganism began in 2017. Initially it was a way to lose weight, she admits. One year later, not only does Mujawar attribute following a vegan diet with helping her trim down and leaving her with clear skin, she also feels happier and healthier than ever.

“I struggled with a lot of weight issues,” says Mujawar. “I was gaining weight, losing it; I could never be consistent. I always tried to fix and adjust my diet. One day I saw this documentary called Forks Over Knives, and it pretty much changed my life.”

Once she began to learn about the benefits of eating a whole-food, plant-based diet, Mujawar says she experienced a light bulb moment.

According to Lisa Young, nutritionist and author of Finally Full, Finally Slim...a common mistake that people make when attempting to eat a vegan diet for the first time is going completely cold turkey, eliminating all proteins.

“There was so much evidence on the health statistics about Americans, it was almost alarming,” says Mujawar. “I realized that all I had to do was give up meat and just switch to more fruits and vegetables. I was like, “this is the answer that I’ve been looking for.”

In spite of her success as a vegan, becoming one did not happen overnight for Mujawar. Rather it was a gradual process. Still, the idea of eliminating meat from her diet did not pose as big a challenge compared to cutting out things like cheese.

“Giving up meat was not the issue as much as it was giving up dairy,” says Mujawar. “If you order a quesadilla or pizza, it’ll always have dairy. I [had] to figure out some dairy substitutes and then slowly transition to eating meals with no dairy.”

According to Lisa Young, nutritionist and author of Finally Full, Finally Slim, the key to being a successful vegan is having a well-thought out plan to ensure you’re consuming enough nutrients like proteins, vitamins, and antioxidants. She adds that a common mistake that people make when attempting to eat a vegan diet for the first time is going completely cold turkey, eliminating all proteins.

“They’re cutting out the chicken, fish, and the meats,” says Young. “They can’t just cut that group out, and eat more broccoli. They really need to learn how to incorporate lentils, chickpeas, hummus, and tempeh.”

While Young says a vegan diet can be very healthy, it may not be for everyone as it might be hard to sustain. Instead she recommends that people reduce their meat portions and expand plant portions.

“I don’t think being a vegan is necessarily healthy for everybody,” says Young. “I think you can eat dairy and animal products in small amounts, and then [eat] eighty percent plant-based. That can be just as good.”

Rabail Velani, a self-described foodie from Texas, found that a vegan diet came with its challenges. About four years ago she tried to eat only plant-based foods, but after six months became very sick, forcing her to quit.

“I’m very anemic it’s genetic and because of that my iron would get so low,” says Velani. “I started getting really lethargic. I couldn’t work out. It just didn’t work.”

Unlike Mujawar who lost weight following a plant-based diet, Velani found herself gaining weight eating as a vegan.

“Vegetarian food gives you bulk [and] makes you satisfied, but you don’t get that satisfaction from just eating fruits and vegetables. You rely on carbohydrates a lot so I actually ended up gaining weight—I gained twenty pounds.”

Another common perception associated with veganism is that plant-based foods are too expensive. While dairy-free milks and cheeses, usually made from soybeans, cashews, and almonds, tend to be on the pricier end, eating plant-based foods does not necessarily have to break the bank. For example, one pound of dry lentils costs around two dollars and two pounds of whole grain brown rice could cost less than four dollars. When buying fruits and vegetables, experts recommend buying these in season.

For people who may want to give veganism a try, Young suggests gradually incorporating more plant-based foods into your current diet, rather than treating it as a type of cleanse.

“If you’re not ready to make the move one-hundred percent, just move towards eating more plant-based proteins, and more fruits and vegetables,” says Young. “That’s a step in the right direction.”
“Iron is a nutrient that is found in meat and animal proteins—you can get it from legumes and beans,” says Young. “If you’re a vegan, you’ll probably need a B12 supplement.”

Young also advises those on a vegan diet to consider taking iron and vitamin B12 supplements as plants may not provide sufficient amounts of these nutrients, especially if the diet is not well-planned.

“Diet has been an issue from the time of humanity, this is nothing new,” says Belbachir. “We have been authorized everything that is halal, except for what is haram so when God says that something is halal, nobody in the world, not even the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can say it is haram.”

From an Islamic perspective, Sheikh Rachid Belbachir says adhering to a vegan diet is a personal choice, however one should not abstain from eating meat and animal products out of protest against the use of animals for human consumption because God gave Muslims permission to do so, as it is stated in the Quran:

"They ask you, [O Muhammad], what has been made lawful for them. Say, 'Lawful for you are [all] good foods and [game caught by] what you have trained of hunting animals which you train as Allah [God] has taught you. So eat of what they catch for you, and mention the name of Allah upon it, and fear Allah.' Indeed, Allah is swift in account.” (Quran 5:4)

“Once you start to believe that animals shouldn’t be a part of our diet as God has prescribed, once you make that decision, that is crossing the line.”

Even Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]) had his preferences when it came to food, Belbachir adds, but when talking about the Muslim diet, it is a matter of what God has ordained as halal and haram.

Contrary to what other people might expect, Mujawar says that she doesn’t crave meat or dairy products. Some of her favorite vegan meals include smoothie bowls—prepared either at home or served up at restaurants—topped off with seeds, nuts, and fruits. When cooking at home, Mujawar enjoys experimenting with Mexican and Asian cuisines.

“I’ll take traditional meat dishes and just make a vegan version of it, like pad thai and fried rice,” says Mujawar.

Following her experiences as a vegan, Velani says she prefers not to label herself as either a vegan or vegetarian, but instead strives to eat a balanced diet consisting of mostly fruits and vegetables, occasionally consuming meat.

“When I label myself, it confuses me more,” says Velani. “When we sit down to eat, I don’t eat the meat. I just eat the vegetables and I’ll try to avoid the cheese. Once in a while, I’ll have eggs, but I’m not labeling myself.”

Despite the growing amount of evidence demonstrating how plant-based diets can aid in the prevention of many chronic diseases, including cancer, and other health-related issues, or how plant-based diets could play a role as a possible long-term solution to food scarcity, most consumers may not be prepared to give up eating meat and dairy products just yet. Still, both Mujawar and Velani hope that more people will try veganism, or at the very least learn more about it.

AYSHA HUSSAIN is a New York-based writer and journalist. Aysha was featured in The New York Times’ “We, Myself and I,” and her work has been published in Newsday and Muslim Girl.
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Hair: Form & Function

By Asma Jarad
A full head of healthy, thick, flowy hair has traditionally been a sign of attractiveness and indicator of potency. Without healthy locks or burly mops on our heads, many people feel a loss of identity and lack of beauty. Hair loss is not entirely within our control, though, because it can often be linked to heredity, medical conditions, medications, or stressful events. Still, we do have control of a number of factors such as avoiding certain hairstyles and hair products, and maintaining a healthy diet. While some people regard hair loss as part of the natural order of life, others opt to get it treated. At the same time, hair on other parts of the body is often viewed with disdain. In fact, many people regularly remove hair from their bodies.

A typical human body is covered in hair, except for the palms of hands, soles of feet, and lips. Losing hair on the body and not the head, does not seem to have any negative affect. This is because many people consider bodily hair as inconvenient and unattractive. A study investigating the “hairlessness” norm of men and women, conducted by Marika Tiggemann and Christine Lewis, published in Psychology of Women Quarterly, found that, “The vast majority (ninety-eight percent) of female participants regularly remove their leg and/or underarm hair, most frequently by shaving, and attribute this to femininity and attractiveness reasons... For the sample as a whole, negative attitudes toward body hair were related to disgust sensitivity.”

Despite this, the truth is that hair on our bodies serves multiple functions. Whether it is our tiny eyelashes which prevent dust and debris from irritating our eyes, or the hairs on our chests and backs which help regulate our body temperature by wicking away sweat in hot weather or trapping in heat when temperatures take a dip, hair serves as a protective barrier. Desmond Tobin, professor of cell biology and director of the Center for Skin Sciences at the University of Bradford—the largest academic center for skin and hair sciences in Britain, says, “Hair anywhere on the body is important for maintaining skin health... Each hair follicle is not just producing a hair fiber, but also has masses of blood vessels, nerves, and fat around it. Hair follicles are also rich in stem cells—cells that never lose the capacity to renew themselves—which help the skin heal.” In addition, hair protects the skin from bacteria while also providing a cushion against friction, which can cause rashes.

When it comes to hair loss and baldness, the most common cause is heredity. This occurs naturally based on aging, genetics, and fluctuating hormones. Nearly everyone will go through some degree of hair loss due to these factors. The area mainly affected with hair loss, is the scalp which contains about 100,000 hair follicles. For men, when the hair growth process slows down, it begins at the sides of the head, on the crown, or at the hairline. This is known as pattern baldness. According to Olivia Willis, a science and health reporter based in Australia, this is the most common type of baldness affecting about half of all men by the age of fifty and more than eighty percent by the age of seventy.

Hereditary hair loss is also the most common type of hair loss for women. Rather than resulting in patches of baldness; women tend to get thinning hair all over the scalp. For most women, this begins in midlife, around the age of forty-five. Willis found that over fifty percent of women have some mild hair loss as they age further, and about twenty percent develop moderate or severe hair loss by the age of eighty. Most experts agree that hair loss is just as common in women as it is in men, although less obvious in women because they are generally more conscientious about hiding it.

**Whether it is our tiny eyelashes which prevent dust and debris from irritating our eyes, or the hairs on our chests and backs which help regulate our body temperature by wicking away sweat in hot weather or trapping in heat when temperatures take a dip, hair serves as a protective barrier.**

Another common cause for hair loss is medication and product use. Hair loss is often a side effect of certain medical drugs used for cancer, arthritis, heart disease, acne, birth control, weight loss, and depression. These medical drugs interfere with the normal cycle of scalp hair growth by forcing the hair follicles to go into a resting phase and fall out. The good news is that at the end of the resting phase, the hair is usually replaced by new hair.

On the other hand, over-styling and overuse of hair treatments through the years, can damage hair and eventually cause it to fall out and prevent regrowth. For example, tight braids, harsh chemical relaxers, and high-heat negatively affect the hair root when repeated on a regular basis. To prevent permanent damage, the American Academy of Dermatology Association (AAD) recommends limiting these practices, using conditioner after every shampoo, and allowing hair to air dry before styling or combing. The AAD further recommends treatment at the earliest sign of hair loss.
For those men and women who seek treatment for hair loss, there are plenty of options. To start, they may choose to improve their diets and increase certain vitamins and minerals on a daily basis. Healthy, hair-promoting nutrients include protein, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, zinc, and vitamin D. Our bodies need these essentials to reduce hair loss, keep our hair growing and maintained, and for overall scalp health. Good sources include meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds, dairy products, leafy greens, fortified cereal, and a variety of fruits.

Another treatment plan to try to minimize the effects of hair loss is the use of fortified shampoos. In the early stages of hair loss, most people choose over-the-counter shampoos because they are less expensive and easily accessible. It is important to choose a shampoo that does not include parabens, sulfates, or artificial fragrances. A more heavy-duty approach is to get a prescription shampoo which includes ketoconazole, an antifungal agent used to eliminate scalp conditions such as dandruff. Fortified shampoos are meant to target hair growth at the site of the follicle, rebuild hair, reduce damage and inflammation, and help to interrupt the hormone cycle that causes thinning hair.

Still, others seek an even more vigorous approach to treating hair loss and choose to have a hair transplant. Those who promote this plan, claim that it will produce permanent, natural-looking results. The first step is for a dermatologist to determine whether you have enough healthy hairs to remove and whether you have the ability to regrow hair on the thinning area(s). A surgeon will remove a few healthy hairs at a time and transplant them in the thinning areas. This process is time consuming and costly. Most patients may not see results for up to a year. Furthermore, positive results are not guaranteed since other factors associated with aging and health may prevail. However, advances in technology eliminate the unnatural, doll-like appearances known in earlier times, and patients may enjoy their natural-looking results, even if only temporarily.

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ASMA JARAD is a freelance writer and editor. She has a YouTube channel, Sami & Amro Reading Time, to promote literacy for children from all backgrounds.
Vitamins and Minerals

By Nadia Malik
The human body may need vitamins and minerals in small amounts, but these building blocks have an immense impact. Missing out on any of them can have serious consequences on health and nutrition.

“Vitamins and minerals help your body do what it needs to in terms of everyday functioning, from proper digestion to immunity,” says Shelley Maniscalco, founder and president of Nutrition on Demand. Magnesium, for example, is needed in more than 300 reactions in the body and helps with muscle and nerve function, and potassium is needed for muscle contraction and decreases risk of stroke, according to Jonathan Valdez, owner of Genki Nutrition and media spokesman for the New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Angel Planells, spokesman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, equates their lack to a car running with used oil. “We’re not running as efficiently as we could be,” he explains. “It puts the body under a lot of stress.”

Minerals are usually elements you’d find on the periodic table, such as calcium, explains Alex Berezow, senior fellow of bioscience at the American Council on Science and Health. Vitamins are organic compounds that are needed for bodily functions. For example, vitamin A prevents night blindness and protects against cataracts, vitamin D helps absorb calcium, vitamin E acts as an antioxidant, and vitamin C assists with the immune system, according to Valdez. “All the vitamins and minerals from food are important in proper amounts because the body is unable to make (them),” he adds.

Scientists and nutritionists generally agree that these products should come from food, especially a diet of fruits and vegetables, and not from supplements. Part of that is because produce also brings fiber into the system, which is essential for satiety and heart health. Even if fiber is consumed in supplement form, plant foods have phytochemicals like chlorophyll, which they have developed over the years to stave off predators. Dr. Jed Fahey, assistant professor and director of Johns Hopkins University’s Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Chemoprotection Center, specializes in researching phytochemicals. “While you can argue that carbohydrates and fats are required for survival, phytochemicals are required for the health span or the maintenance of a long, healthy, productive, and vigorous life,” he says. Their function has also not been fully studied, so the benefits in supplements hasn’t caught up to their efficacy yet.

Carol Haggans, with the Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health, recommends consulting a physician before starting a pill as a substitute. A deficiency in one or more vitamins or minerals may necessitate the need to bolster with a supplement, but that can also interfere with medications. “Generally speaking, it’s best to get nutrients from food rather than supplements,” she says. Echoing Fahey, she explains that phytochemicals likely have benefits that have yet to be explored and that cannot yet be duplicated.

Of course, there are spans in life where a supplement is necessary. Older people have a tougher time absorbing certain items. For example, hydrochloric acid production required to break down vitamin B12 diminishes with age, so older adults may need to use supplements or consume more fortified foods, such as breakfast cereals. Vitamin B12 is also only found naturally in animal products. Planells explains this also means that difficulty chewing meat is another reason older populations may be deficient in B12. Vegans and vegetarians would also need to take it in other ways. Iron is another one where it’s easily absorbable when it comes from meats but not so much when extracted from vegetables, according to Maniscalco.

Scientists and nutritionists generally agree that these products should come from food, especially a diet of fruits and vegetables, and not from supplements. Part of that is because produce also brings fiber into the system, which is essential for satiety and heart health.

Pregnant women need vastly more iron, which may be difficult to take in from food alone. “Any woman or teenage girl who could become pregnant should get 400 mg of folic acid on top of what they get from their diets,” Haggans adds. Any physician would recommend this because folic acid reduces the risk of neural tube defects in pregnancy, but that benefit comes at the beginning of gestation, before most women are aware they are pregnant.

Kerry Schulze, associate scientist at the Center for Human Nutrition at Johns Hopkins University, studies pregnant women in Bangladesh and Nepal. These women are at higher risk because of the lack of access to appropriate vitamins and minerals. While pregnant women in the United States also need a boost to folic acid and iron, women in developing countries often lack the baseline of other nutrients enjoyed by American women. Her studies have focused on giving a general recommended dietary allowance (RDA) to women whose diets are deficient in those nutrients. While this supplement during pregnancy gives those women a short boost, it doesn’t make up for
the deficiency in vitamins and minerals resulting from the limited access to required foods.

Berezow argues that anyone who lives in the United States, even those in impoverished areas with less access to healthy diets, receives enough vitamins and minerals and should not need a daily multivitamin, even though many take them as a part of their daily routines. That’s because so many foods are fortified simply to make up for those who aren’t eating produce. For example, table salt includes iodine because it affects thyroid function and prevents goiters in the population. “The only people who should take vitamins are people who have specific metabolic deficiencies,” he explains, and those should be diagnosed by a doctor. Some of the most prevalent deficiencies can be of vitamin D and calcium, especially as people age.

Time and scientific knowledge have taken care of most of the drastic instances of lack of nutrients. Rickets and scurvy, for example, are attributed to a deficiency of vitamins D and C, respectively. Once those causes were ferreted out, it was easy enough to fix with exposure to sunlight and consumption of citrus fruit.

However, there can also be too much of a good thing. “Most of the nutrients have an upper limit,” Haggans explains. The Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council sets the standards for the RDA. Iron is toxic at high doses, she says, and any supplements should be in childproof containers to prevent overdoses. Vitamin A comes in two forms: preformed and with beta-carotene. The latter, which can be found in carrots, has no adverse effects in large amounts, but the former, found in animal products like milk and liver, can be toxic in high doses.

Valdez recommends following the general “MyPlate” rules provided by the USDA: half the plate with fruits and vegetables, a quarter with whole grains, a quarter with protein, and a glass of milk, which has an array of nutrients, such as calcium, phosphorous, potassium, and magnesium.

Fat-soluble vitamins, such as A, D, E, and K, stay in the body longer and also pose a threat in excessive amounts. Many nutrients are water soluble, so something like Vitamin C is excreted from the body through urine, if too much is taken in. However, that solubility also means that cooking vegetables can sometimes mean losing nutrients. Boiling broccoli, which is high in vitamin B, means literally throwing away nutrients when draining. In contrast, tomatoes allow additional access to lycopene when cooked. Lycopene, a phytochemical, works as an antioxidant.

In the end, a balanced diet rich in a variety of fruits and vegetables is key. Valdez recommends following the general “MyPlate” rules provided by the USDA: half the plate with fruits and vegetables, a quarter with whole grains, a quarter with protein, and a glass of milk, which has an array of nutrients, such as calcium, phosphorous, potassium, and magnesium.

Attention to a balanced diet is a gradual process that should be built up. “Change won’t happen overnight,” Planells warns. If people want to have the recommended five to seven daily servings of fruit but are only consuming one, they won’t find much success trying to make that leap right away. Gradually taking in two a day and then increasing from there will ultimately mean a healthier overall diet and more intake of vitamins and minerals. “It may take a couple of months. Have patience, and don’t be afraid to reach out to a dietitian if you’re feeling stuck,” he says.

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And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm trees—of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce] gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied. Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] its ripening. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe.” (Quran 6:99). And in the same Surah, verse 141: “And He it is who causes gardens to grow, [both] trellised and untrellised, and palm trees and crops of different [kinds of] food and olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Eat of [each of] its fruits when it yields and give its due [zakah] on the day of its harvest. And be not excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess.” (Quran 6:141)

“In both of them are fruits and palm trees and pomegranates. So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?” (Quran 55:68-69)

For me, I have dubbed pomegranate a ‘superstar’ fruit. Among many fruits, it has earned itself a unique gold medal by the Most High simply because pomegranate is one of the fruits mentioned in the Quran. I have grown to love all the palatable fruits, foods, and herbs mentioned in the Quran because without any doubt, I believe that they offer ample nutritional and spiritual benefits.

Pomegranate is one of the oldest known fruits. The pomegranate fruit is reddish in color and sturdy looking. Embedded in it are small, golden red seeds lined up perfectly in a star-shaped style. Each red seed looks like a pearl encased in its own thick pith and connected to one another by a cloudy-looking, white pulp.

When looking for fruits that are rich in minerals and vitamins, consider pomegranates. Pomegranates are loaded up with potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, calcium, zinc, selenium, folic acid, vitamins B, C, E, and K, thiamin, niacin, and riboflavin.

Pomegranates are very versatile in nature when it comes to food preparation. Their juice and seeds can be used as food staples. Pomegranate juice can be used as the liquid base to make different kinds of smoothies and kombucha drinks. The seeds, layered within the white honey-combed membrane, can be combined with either muesli,
oatmeal, or salads, or eaten raw as a snack. In more recent times, the skin has been used to treat ailments such as skin disorders.

The United States Department of Agriculture recommends consuming one-and-a-half to two cups of fruit per day. This can be either fresh fruit or fruit juice. In this case, both pomegranate seed as well as the juice, count.

The benefits of pomegranates cannot be underestimated. In Imam Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziyah’s book titled Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]), pomegranate is a nutrient for the human body. It is good for the stomach, throat, chest, and lungs. It relieves diarrhea, prevents vomiting, strengthens the organs, and improves heart health. From a clinical perspective, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, a board-certified family physician who specializes in preventing and reversing disease through nutritional and natural methods, quotes a published research article on pomegranates from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition which states that “the potent antioxidative compounds in pomegranates, reverse atherosclerosis and reduce excessive blood clotting and platelet clumping, which are factors that can lead to heart attacks and strokes.” Dr. Furhman also adds that pomegranates are known to inhibit breast cancer, colon cancer, leukemia, and prostate cancer. They also reduce tissue damage in those with kidney problems.

Forms of Pomegranates

Pomegranates come in sweet, bitter, and sour forms. Each can be consumed on its own or combined. For example, one cup of sour pomegranate juice can be mixed with one cup of sweet pomegranate juice plus honey and cooked until it reaches the consistency of a syrup. This syrup can be used in lowering fever.

Subia Ansari, a Dallas, Texas resident and a board certified integrative and holistic health practitioner, states that pomegranates have not only been mentioned in the Quran but also in various narrations of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She says, “pomegranates have significant health benefits. They are potent antioxidants and rich in flavonoids, anthocyanins, and other components that have anti-hypertensive, anti-atherogenic, and anti-inflammatory properties.” She further states that according to research, pomegranates can be used in the prevention and treatment of several types of cancer, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and other diseases.

The seeds can be eaten raw because of the direct health impact of eating fresh fruit compared to its alternative such as juice. Its seeds can be used to garnish salads, or frozen for later use, when they are out of season.

According to the Pomegranate Council, pomegranate are commonly used as decorations during the fall and winter seasons. They can be displayed fresh and later used for consumption, or they can be dried. Pomegranate season is usually from October until February. The seeds can be eaten raw because of the direct health impact of eating fresh fruit compared to its alternative such as juice. Its seeds can be used to garnish salads, or frozen for later use, when they are out of season.

So, when you are relishing pomegranates in whatever form, remember that it is a blessed fruit; a superstar fruit among many fruits.

California produces more than ninety percent of the pomegranates within the United States (The Packer, 2014). Pomegranates grow in any conducive climate and are usually adaptable because the pomegranate tree does not need fertilizers or large quantities of water. They survive well in dry soils.

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Natural, Organic, and Synthetic

By Kelly Crosby

“O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah [God] if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.” (Quran 2:172)
Islam instructs us to seek out the best and most wholesome food to eat. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), good food meant any food that was halal and purchased through honest means. God also says in the Quran, “O messengers, eat from the good foods and work righteousness. Indeed, I, of what you do, am Knowing.” (Quran: 23:51) In modern times, we have an amazing selection of food and health choices that people centuries ago couldn’t have imagined.

Advances in chemistry and biology have enabled us to have an abundant supply of food and other consumables at our grocery stores. But with these new scientific processes come concerns about food integrity and modern-day consumption. Reading the back of any ingredient labels on our products would lead anyone to be confused. In response to these concerns, corporations have labeled their items with such words as “organic,” “natural,” “synthetic,” or “artificial.” But what are the main differences among these labels and most importantly, what are the health benefits (and detriments) to each one?

To clear the air on product labeling, we should look to the ones responsible for creating and defining those labels. Two major government agencies are responsible for labeling all products; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Both organizations overlap in some regard, but their primary responsibilities are making sure that our consumables, such as food, drugs, and cosmetics, are safe and labeled properly. We will derive our definitions for natural, organic, and synthetic from these two groups.

According to the USDA, for a product to be labeled as “natural,” it must contain no artificial ingredients or added colors and must be only minimally processed. It’s the words “minimally processed” where we must pay attention, as there is no certification process that determines what has been minimally processed. Furthermore, natural does not mean free from chemicals. According to the USDA, for a product to be labeled as “natural,” it must contain no artificial ingredients or added colors and must be only minimally processed...[but] there is no certification process that determines what has been minimally processed. Furthermore, natural does not mean free from chemicals.

The requirements for organic labeling are much stricter. According to the USDA, “Foods labeled ‘organic’ must consist of at least ninety-five percent organically produced ingredients and the other five percent must be approved on the national list provided by the USDA. They cannot be produced with any antibiotics, growth hormones, pesticides, petroleum or sewage-sludge based fertilizers, bioengineering, or ionizing radiation. Each organic ingredient must be identified along with the name of the certifying agency.” Because the process for regulating organic labels is more thorough, foods labeled organic are much more likely to be organic. Applications must detail the substance history of the past three years of operation, plans of practice for the substance use, and the products to be grown, raised, and produced. They must also keep records for five years after certification and make said records available to the National Organic Program (NOP), a division of the USDA which handles organic production. But the organic label is only related to food, as cosmetics are created primarily by synthetic processes of natural materials.

The simplest definition for synthetic is that it is a chemical made by human methods. The chemical structures may or may not be found in nature and synthetic chemicals can be made from natural products. For example, ascorbic acid, better known as vitamin C, is found naturally in oranges but it can also be produced from glucose. Because...
synthetic products can be made from natural products, a product may sometimes be labeled as “naturally derived.” In the food industry, the word “artificial” is used in place of “synthetic.” Another example would be a cereal or candy bar, often labeled with “artificial flavoring.”

“Have you ever heard of malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, botulism, or tetanus? Why, then, are so many convinced that anything and everything natural is healthier for us than synthetic products?”

So which option is healthier and most importantly, which one fits the standards for halal consumption? We live in an eco-conscious society where more and more people are concerned about how consumer industries are impacting our environment. And it’s quite easy to be pulled in by items touting themselves as natural, ecofriendly, or green. But are they really any better, healthier, or friendlier to the environment, than products made through synthetic means? The answers may surprise you. Dr. Dorea Reeser, environmental chemistry professor at the University of Toronto says, “Unfortunately, the natural versus synthetic debate falls very much in the gray region, and each chemical, or class of chemicals, must be considered on a case by case basis.” Despite the latest hype around natural products, they are not necessarily better than synthetic products. As Dr. Reeser states, “Have you ever heard of malaria, HIV, tuberculosis, botulism, or tetanus? Why, then, are so many convinced that anything and everything natural is healthier for us than synthetic products? It’s true that modern chemistry has brought us several toxic chemicals, like DDT and dioxins, but do you really think that nature’s chemicals are any less harmful to you? In fact, the most toxic chemicals to humans are completely natural.” This point is summed up well by researchers from the University of Cambridge who studied natural and synthetic chemicals in the human diet in 2001 and wrote, “Among the agents identified as human carcinogens by the International Agency for Research in Cancer, sixty-two percent occur naturally: sixteen are natural chemicals, eleven are mixtures of natural chemicals, and ten are infectious agents. Thus, the idea that a chemical is safe because it is natural, is not correct.” There are more harmful natural carcinogens than harmful synthetic carcinogens.

For scientists, the debate on whether organic foods are healthier than conventional farmed foods continues. However, for halal consumers looking for halal and ecofriendly options, organic food can offer some benefits. Mainly, this is because organic farming for fruits and vegetables involves less pesticide use than found in conventional farming. Because organic farming has more restrictions and uses smaller farming space, some Muslims consider this method of farming as kinder and gentler to the earth’s ecosystem. Also, because organic farmers do not use antibiotics for meat production, people who eat organic meat are less likely to develop antibiotic resistance. Organic meat and dairy must not contain synthetic hormones, which have been linked to an increased risk of cancer. Organic meat and dairy have more omega-3 fatty acids, a healthy unsaturated fat. But if you’re looking to increase your omega 3 fatty acid intake, make sure you choose grass-fed, free-range organic meat. Scientists say that the free-range, grass-fed diet contributes to more omega-3 fatty acid production. Consumers say organic grass-fed meat tastes better, and is a leaner, healthier meat because a grass-fed diet is the most natural diet for livestock. Not all organic meat is grass-fed but there is a lot of overlap. To make the decision for you and your family, read those labels and choose accordingly.

When you see “clean” and “green” cosmetics and cleaning products, it usually means that the ingredients were ethically sourced and naturally derived. Some synthetic processing has taken place to create the product, but the product is safe, non-toxic, and biodegradable. These products are usually packaged in recycled or recyclable packing. Cruelty-free labeling may also be helpful for halal consumers, but since it has no legal definition, it may not mean what the buyer thinks it means. God says in the Quran, “And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily…” (Quran 25:63) Buying ecofriendly and organic products can decrease our carbon footprint, making the verse into a literal encouragement to be kind to the environment.

Not all organic products are healthier than non-organic products. Each must be judged individually. A candy bar that is organic or with “naturally-derived ingredients” will still have the same amount of sugar and calories as a regular candy bar. The same goes with most cereals, potato chips, and other snacks. While a snack may be ethically sourced, make sure to read the nutrition label to check for its health content. Organic and eco-friendly alternatives tend to be more expensive than conventional consumables. So, if you’re on a limited budget, try to spend your money on organic essentials, like meat, dairy, or vegetables, and purchase safe artificial products for the non-essentials.

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Creamy Chunky Potato Soup with Pesto Chickpea Dip
By: Linda Gardner Phillips

Servings: 8

INGREDIENTS

**Vegan Basil Pesto Ingredients**
- 4 bunches fresh basil (about 1 1/2 cups tightly packed)
- 1/2 cup pine nuts or cashews
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh-squeezed lemon juice

**Pesto Hummus Ingredients**
- 1 1/2 cups cooked chickpeas (or a 15 oz can of chickpeas)
- 2 tablespoons vegan basil pesto
- 1-2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons fresh squeezed lemon juice
- 1-3 tablespoons water or reserved chickpea liquid (optional)
- salt to taste

**Creamy Potato Soup Ingredients**
- 5 russet potatoes (medium to large size)
- 2 onions
- 8 cups water
- 2 teaspoons dried dill
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons Pesto Hummus Dip
- fresh squeezed lemon juice to taste
- salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

**Pesto Chickpea Dip**
1. If using canned chickpeas, drain, and set liquid aside.
2. In a blender, combine chickpeas, vegan basil pesto, extra virgin olive oil, lemon juice, and salt.
3. Blend until creamy. Optional: During blending, add 1 tablespoon (or more) of water or the reserved chickpea liquid.
4. Set aside.

**Creamy Potato Soup**
1. Rinse potatoes and remove any blemishes (optional: peel potatoes).
2. Cut potatoes into large pieces (approximately 3/4” x 3/4”).
3. Peel and chop onions.
4. Place potatoes, onions, and water into a large pot and bring to a boil.
5. Reduce heat to low, cover pot, and simmer for 30 minutes.
6. Add dill and 3 tablespoons of the Pesto Hummus Dip.
7. Lightly blend the soup (using an immersion blender or a potato masher), leaving large chunks of potatoes.
8. Add salt, pepper, and fresh lemon juice to taste.
9. Prior to serving, sprinkle a pinch of dill over each bowl.

Note: This quick and nourishing vegan soup gets its creaminess and subtle flavor (plus an extra nutritional boost) from an easy-to-make Pesto Chickpea Dip. To save time, simply use canned chickpeas and pesto from the store. The Pesto Chickpea Dip may be served alongside the soup with pita chips or carrot sticks.
The Ultimate Black Bean Burger
By: Minar Shehadah

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cans of organic black beans, drained and rinsed or 1 cup dried black beans, presoaked and drained
- 1 medium avocado, mashed (binding agent)
- ½ cup loose corn, room temperature
- ½ cup bread crumbs
- ½ bell pepper, finely diced
- ½ red onion, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon cumin powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon paprika
- salt and pepper as desired

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Drain the beans and spread them onto a lined baking sheet. Bake the beans for 20 minutes until the beans are dried out.
3. Transfer the beans to a large mixing bowl and mash the beans with a fork, leaving some larger chunks to enhance the texture of the burgers.
4. Add the remaining ingredients and combine with a spatula. Form into patties, using about ⅓ cup per patty.
5. Place the completed patties in the refrigerator for 15 minutes to hold their shape. These burgers can be grilled, baked, or pan-seared on the stove-top.
6. For grilling, grill the patties for 6 to 8 minutes on each side.
7. For baking, preheat the oven to 375°F, and bake the patties on an oiled or lined baking sheet. Bake on each side for 10 to 12 minutes.
8. To cook over the stove, add a drizzle of oil and grill for 6 minutes on each side over medium heat.
9. Serve on a warm, toasted bun with preferred toppings (lettuce, tomato, red onion, pickles, and Cabot cheese slices are recommended). (Remaining uncooked patties can be frozen for later use.)
Maryam’s ‘Super Red Power’ Fruit Salad
By: Maryam Funmilayo

Servings: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium-sized pomegranates
- 1 medium-sized watermelon
- 1 cup raspberries
- 1 cup cherries
- 1 cup strawberries, sliced
- 2 medium-sized red apples, peeled, cored, and grated
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 small-sized red onion, diced
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon of red crushed paprika
- 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

DIRECTIONS

1. Wash the first 6 fruits properly. Then, cut around the center of each pomegranate with a knife and separate each into two halves. Set aside a big salad bowl. Use a heavy wooden spoon to bang the pomegranates hard all around, facing directly into the salad bowl. The skin starts to soften and bend, and the seeds start falling into the salad bowl.

2. Dice the watermelon into 1-inch pieces and mix with the pomegranate seeds.

3. Add the raspberries, cherries, strawberries, grated red apples, and dried cranberries in the salad bowl. Mix well.

4. Set aside a smaller bowl for the diced onion, lemon juice, paprika, and olive oil. Mix together and pour the mixture on top of the fruits in the salad bowl. Mix very well.

5. Chill and serve!
Shrimp and Vegetable Stir Fry
By: Sakina Syeda

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

1 pound fresh or frozen large uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 zucchini, washed and julienned
1 yellow squash, washed and julienned
1 red onion, sliced crosswise
½ pound fresh or frozen broccoli, cut into small chunks
3-4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3-4 teaspoons olive oil
1-2 teaspoons soy sauce
fresh black pepper and salt to taste
1 dozen mushrooms, sliced
3 carrots, peeled and julienned
2-3 green onions, 1 inch sliced
salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat 1 teaspoon of olive oil in a medium size cast iron skillet.
2. Add garlic, shrimp, salt, and fresh pepper to the skillet.
3. Cook until shrimp turns pink.
4. Remove shrimp from the skillet and add 1-2 teaspoons of olive oil in the skillet.
5. Add onions, zucchini, yellow squash, and broccoli to the skillet.
6. Add in the soy sauce.
7. Cook for about 5 to 7 minutes. (Do not over cook your veggies).
8. Once veggies are tender, add the shrimp back to the skillet.
9. Add green onions into the mix.
10. Cook for another 1 to 2 minutes.
11. Mix the stir fry well to coat with the seasonings.
12. Plate stir fry and garnish with green onions.
13. Serve immediately.
Riced Cauliflower Taco Salad
By: Ms Deena Deceptive Chef

Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 16 oz riced cauliflower ground to small pieces
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon coriander
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon pink salt
- ¼ teaspoon fresh ground pepper to taste
- 1 cup shredded lettuce
- 1 tomato chopped
- ¼ cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 avocado sliced and preserved with a touch of salt and lemon juice
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup water

DIRECTIONS

1. Add the black beans and water to a saucepan and simmer on low until tender. Add salt and pepper to taste and set aside.
2. Combine all ingredients from the cauliflower to the fresh ground pepper in a sauté pan and cook on medium heat until cauliflower is soft and resembles taco meat. Remove from heat.
3. Place lettuce on a plate, top with cauliflower, cilantro, and tomato.
4. Add the beans to the side along with the avocado.
5. Enjoy!
Realign Your Mind and Body with Pilates

By Ali Othman

With names like “the Spine Twist,” “the Saw,” and “the Jack Knife,” Pilates may sound more like a method of medieval torture than an exercise system designed to improve body awareness, muscle function, flexibility, and posture.

As a German national in Britain, Joseph Pilates was sent to an internment camp during World War I. It is here that he developed his fitness techniques as he worked to rehabilitate his injured fellow internees. Towards the end of the war, he was freed from the camp and served in a hospital with patients who had lower body injuries. During this period of his life, Pilates studied human anatomy which helped to refine his skills as both a rehabilitator and fitness trainer. After the war he moved to New York and opened a successful gym where he and his wife developed the system known as Contrology. Contrology would develop over the life of Joseph Pilates, and after his death began to be called the Pilates Method (Pilates Foundation, The History of Pilates, https://www.pilatesfoundation.com/pilates/the-history-of-pilates/).

The Pilates Method employs movements which originate from six core principles. When combined, they encourage the synergistic use of the mind, body, and spirit to aid in the development of a healthier overall existence. The concept is meant to reach into the performer attempting to encourage a synergy between brain and body. Fear not though, these six principles blend together seamlessly, making Pilates an ideal addition to any exercise routine for those seeking a healthy and balanced body. For those not into the Pilates system, the ideology of the six principles can be a healthy supplement to any form of exercise or the activities of daily living. To better understand the system, we must look into the six principles.
1. Breath

Necessary for the survival of all of our cells, oxygen is one of the life-forces that fuel our bodies. As exercise intensity increases, the heart pumps faster and the body requires higher levels of oxygen; hence, the feeling of being out-of-breath during moments of rigorous training. Joseph Pilates once said, “Lazy breathing converts the lungs, literally and figuratively speaking, into a cemetery for the deposition of diseased, dying and dead germs as well as supplying an ideal haven for the multiplication of other harmful germs” (Joseph Pilates, Return to Life). Pilates encourages control and regulation of breath to aid in a higher level of performance.

2. Concentration

Distractions from our jobs, families, and our beloved electronic devices are all around us. These are exercise obstacles which easily detach us from achieving the focus necessary to fire on all cylinders and reach our full potential. When you enter a Pilates studio, leave your belongings and their accompanying stresses behind. As class begins, guide your focus to the direction of the muscle contractions which are moving your body, the pattern of breath throughout each movement, and your body working as one cohesive unit. Concentration during exercise has been lost over the years, and without it we put ourselves at risk of improper form, incorrect exercise performance, and increased risk of injury. Pay attention not only to the movements, but also to the desired result.

3. Center

The body’s center of gravity is the single point about which every particle of mass is equally distributed (Isacowitz & Clippinger, Pilates Anatomy). This center of gravity, otherwise known as the powerhouse, is where Pilates movements originate. Proper activation of this center results in movements which are balanced and graceful. Think about the solar system, with the sun at the center radiating energy and power to all of the planets in orbit. The planets orbit the sun and rotate on their axes with a heavenly character. With proper performance, the power emanating from the center of the body can be directed equally to all of the extremities allowing motions involving both the arms and legs to be performed with swan-like elegance.

4. Control

The ability to direct one’s muscles to perform a certain movement defines how beneficial the movement will be for the performer. As an example, we look at one of the most popular pieces of Pilates equipment, the Pilates Reformer. The first time a person uses the Reformer, their movements may be awkward and forced; but after only a few sessions, the body becomes used to the movements. As you progress in ability, the amount of effort needed to keep correct posture during movement is minimalized. At this point, greater concentration can be applied to the specifics of each movement, breathing technique, and the flow of the exercise.

5. Precision

Joseph Pilates once said, “A few well-designed movements, properly performed in a balanced sequence, are worth hours of sloppy calisthenics or forced contortion.” Pilates produces motions which are designed to lengthen and strengthen the muscle and condition the connective tissue to become more elastic, all while maintaining proper skeletal alignment. This means that risk of injury is minimal compared with other forms of exercise, and Pilates programs can be a legitimate long-term exercise routine.

6. Flow

Perhaps one of the most neglected manners in exercise is a smooth, even flow of movement. Pilates movements are meant to fit together seamlessly. One motion flows into the next as the entire body of the performer works together in harmony. Energy and power radiate from the body’s center in all directions equally, resulting in a balanced, powerful, and elegant flow of motion.

According to Sung Kyung Kim of Healing Pilates in Daegu, South Korea, many of her clients come to her studio with recommendation from their doctor. Some have postural issues, others have joint pain; but in many cases the root cause of these problems is structural misalignment and weak postural muscles. Clients at Healing Pilates typically start out with a ten session package, come in two or three times a week, and the majority renew upon completion of their
The Pilates 100
The Pilates 100 is a great way to begin your workout. It increases circulation throughout the body, works on stabilization of your trunk and core, enhances your lung capacity and cardiovascular endurance, and helps to develop proper breathing technique.

Lie on your back, bend your legs at the knee, and bring your knees up to your chest. Then extend your legs straight forward at a 45 degree angle with your arms along your sides and your palms resting on the floor. Raise your head and shoulders off the ground, engage your abdominal muscles to keep your body in place, and lift your hands and arms a few inches off the ground. The exercise begins here with a pumping motion, your arms moving only a few inches up and down with energy radiating from your activated core. Breathe in for 5 pumps, and breathe out for 5 pumps. Repeat this 10 times to reach 100 repetitions.

Leg Circles
Leg Circles are a beginner level move on the Pilates Reformer, but performing this movement in a fluid pattern is more difficult than it seems on first glance. This exercise will strengthen and stretch the hip flexors, hip extensor (those glute muscles that we love to work), and the muscles of your pelvic floor. This group of muscles greatly influences posture and strengthening them will have a positive effect on the entire body.

On the Pilates Reformer, lie on your back, bring your knees to your chest, grab the long straps and slide your feet through, placing the straps on the arch on the bottom of your feet. With straight knees, raise your feet towards the sky so that your legs are perpendicular to the ground. With your arms down by your sides, your heels touching each other, and your feet externally rotated, slowly rotate your legs outward from the hips, sweeping your legs open and inhaling. As your legs make a half-circle and are extended in front of you at a 45 degree angle, begin to inhale and complete the full circle by bringing your legs towards the midline of your body and back up to a position perpendicular to the ground.

The Shoulder Bridge
The Shoulder Bridge is an exercise designed to strengthen the core musculature as well as the hamstrings. The hamstrings are the muscle group on the posterior thigh between the hip and knee, and are used in the daily activities of walking, running, and jumping. They are the main muscle group used to decelerate knee extension (slowing down and stopping from a run), and are quite susceptible to injury, which makes them important muscles to stretch and strengthen.

Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and your arms along your sides with your palms resting on the floor. Push your feet into the ground and raise your hips off the floor creating a bridge between your shoulder blades and feet. Extend your right leg and kick it towards the ceiling until it is perpendicular with the floor, then bring it back down to the level of your left knee and even with your body’s bridge. Breathe in while your leg is kicking towards the ceiling, and out as you lower your leg to the starting position.
sessions. The Pilates instructor is essential to the experience. Pilates can be done at home, with a mat, some simple equipment, and an instructional video; but this method lacks the benefit of studio classes. The role of the instructor is not only to lead the class, but also to give posture, motion, and breathing corrections as participants are learning the movements. For this reason, Ms. Kim recommends a one-on-one class for beginners while they advance their skills and learn to control their bodies.

To find out if Pilates is right for you, first determine your exercise goals; then assess your needs based on these goals. If your goal is full-body realignment, lengthening and strengthening your muscles, and improving control of your motor functions, then Pilates alone may be the answer. Everyone has different fitness goals, and the program you chose should be tailored to ensure your needs are met. If your objective is weight loss, then a cardiovascular regimen is required. Supplementing with Pilates will help to align the body so the cardiovascular exercise is undertaken more efficiently. A competitive bodybuilder aspires to develop both the size and symmetry of their muscles. Hard, heavy weight lifting will build the bulky and sometimes asymmetrical muscle (which tends to be more injury prone), and the addition of a Pilates routine can help to lengthen the muscles and decrease stress on the connective tissue, reducing the risk of injury.

According to Maureen Nemmer and Marina Good at Club Pilates in Highland Park, IL, the proper apparel does matter. You should wear form-fitting clothing so your posture is easily visible during each movement, allowing the instructor to provide corrections. Also needed is a pair of grip socks as Pilates is performed without shoes and many of the movements will be in positions where the exerciser may slip or slide.

As with the onset of any exercise program you should consult your physician before beginning a Pilates routine and ask about any contraindications due to preexisting conditions or medications. Many Pilates movements are performed while laying on your back, so pregnant women in their second and third trimesters should avoid these moves, or find an alternative to Pilates for this time. Pilates can be used to help with rehabilitation of an injury to almost any joint on the body; just remember to be aware of your limitations due to any current or previous injuries. Breath deep, relax, and hit the Spine Twist with full force.

ALI OTHMAN has been an NSCA certified personal trainer for the past 13 years with specialization in weight loss, functional training, muscular hypertrophy, and human nutrition. He also works in the Technical Department at IFANCA and manages IFANCA business activities in South Korea.
Weight Management: What Do We Have to Lose?

By Naazish YarKhan

The South Beach diet. The Paleo diet. The Atkins diet. The Mediterranean diet. And then there is the “see food, eat food” diet that the rest of us are on. Jokes aside, if you’ve tried to lose weight, or even if you haven’t, you’ve probably heard about these diets. So when it comes to weight management, when is a good time to be concerned about your weight? Based on your height, you should be a certain weight and have a certain Body Mass Index (BMI). Certain weighing scales, trainers, and nutritionists can calculate BMI and guide you to your ideal weight.

“It isn’t ever about just exercise or just diet or just adequate sleep and drinking sufficient water. Weight management is impacted by all the above,” says trainer Patti Lawler, of Ackerman Sports and Fitness, Glen Ellyn. “Keep your diet natural as much as possible. Read labels. Lots of food have sugar hidden in them. Make sure you are drinking those eight glasses of water a day.”

If you aren’t in the market for a gym membership, a trainer, or a meal plan, you can always walk, lift weights, follow an exercise video, and even use your baby as natural weight while you do some ab work on a mat, at home. While that may be obvious, it is surprising how many of us cite “we don’t have time to go to the gym” as a reason to avoid exercising.

Those who’ve successfully kept their weight off reveal that exercise probably accounts for twenty percent of weight loss while the rest is all about diet, especially to initially lose the weight. However, you have to experiment with different diets to find what works for you. If you are looking to purchase a program or food plan, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, your research should tell you, “What percentage of people complete the program? What is the average weight loss among people who finish the program? What percentage of people have problems or side effects? What are they? Are there fees or costs for additional items, such as dietary supplements?”

Food Selection and Cost

When you think of dieting, you imagine your grocery bills will shrink. Well, they may when it comes to snacks, but, you will most likely buy more protein products, more fresh produce, and fish. If you are looking for halal certified products, IFANCA certifies products like Cambridge Weight Plan and whey protein. So what will your weight management plan cost? The answer is it depends on your plan.

According to livestrong.com, your body type and whether you are “endomorph, ectomorph, or mesomorph” should determine your exercise plan and your diet.

What’s Your Body Type?

According to livestrong.com, your body type and whether you are “endomorph, ectomorph, or mesomorph” should determine your exercise plan and your diet. Endomorphs...
tend to be shorter, heavier, and lose weight with much difficulty but gain weight very easily. They should “focus on non-starchy vegetables, lean meats, and nonfat dairy and stay away from fatty foods and refined carbohydrates.” Ectomorphs are taller, longer limbed individuals and seem to eat all they want, without impacting their weight much. Like any human beings, that doesn’t mean they won’t be overweight if they don’t watch what’s on the menu. “Mesomorphs, those who fall between ectomorphs and endomorphs,” should follow a dietary plan that is nearly balanced between the three macronutrients—forty percent carbohydrates, thirty percent protein, and thirty percent fat.”

**Calorie Counting**

How many calories you eat each day impacts your weight. As nutritionist Shahana Khan explains, the calories you can eat to maintain your weight and those you consume when trying to lose weight are two very different numbers. Those numbers are influenced by your BMI, how much you want to lose, by when you want to shed those pounds, and your genetics.

So how do you maintain your weight? Yes, exercise is good but so is tracking how many calories you eat each day “Logging your food and tracking your calories is so important,” says Shahana. If you ask Google or use an app, it will tell you how many calories almost any food is, including fruits and veggies.

“If you are going on a diet, and you don’t do your research, you could be eating all the wrong quantities and calories accidentally. Nuts, for example, are good but you can’t eat them by the handful.” Lentils are good sources of protein but are also rich in calories. The same is true for protein-rich beans like kidney beans, navy beans, and chickpeas (read hummus, chole, chilli, bean salad). Clients of hers have taken to measuring their food in a cup or by the teaspoon (sugar, honey, peanut butter) and recording it to gain a true picture of the calories they are consuming each day.

Further, she says, “It is about portion control. Remember the Prophet’s (Peace Be Upon Him) sunnah. One-third of your stomach is for air, water, and food, respectively. And we fast in Ramadan, so we know we can do it.”
The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA®) is seeking applications from qualified candidates for full-time positions as

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For Aneesa Khan of Carol Stream, IL, weight management has been an ongoing quest since her youth. For her, counting and cutting calories alone wasn’t enough. Eliminating carbs was necessary. “Atkins is what worked for me as everyone’s body responds differently to different diets.” She gave up rice, pasta, and bread though she still struggles to forgo sugar entirely. She also gave up fruit for the initial two weeks on the diet. It took her a year to lose twenty pounds but, having given up carbs and with regular exercise, she has maintained her weight for the last four to five years. Though, as Aneesa admits, any diet is very hard to maintain long term because you have to say ‘no’ to things you love eating.

“There are days you are on it; there are days you are off it. Your weight goes up ten pounds and you go back on the diet. The only thing that was consistent for me was giving up the rice. I never liked rice a lot so that was easy.”

What has helped her stay the course? “When I had children, I made excuses for letting my weight slide but decided to prioritize my health when I hit thirty-five,” she says. “You become more cognizant, especially when you go to doctor’s well-visits and they ask you about any ailments you have and you see this long list of conditions that could potentially be you in a few years.”

Oakbrook, IL resident, Zareena Khader has lost and kept off 120 pounds. “My whole life I’d been overweight. I was 268 pounds. I used to exercise everyday but never dieted so [I] wasn’t able to lose weight.”

That changed in December 2011, following her sister’s engagement. “From then on, I never touched any oil, sugar, bread, rice, [or] fruit for two years. The only thing I’d eat was grilled meat with a piece of chapati or daal that I made with a non-stick oil spray. I was exercising three times a week. I lost about sixty-eight pounds in a year and a half and became a size sixteen.”

Staying the Course

Zareena began the Ketogenic Ideal Protein diet after her third child, when she found herself weighing 248 pounds. “You go to a doctor weekly and he takes your measurement and weight. You buy food from them,” she says. During the two years on the ideal protein diet, she didn’t work out per the program and, for prescribed intervals, skipped avocado, peas, tomato, and cooked onions. “Similar to the Keto diet, this diet was low on sugar and carbs and focuses more on lean proteins and vegetables.” She lost sixty pounds in eight months and has kept it off for three years. Besides exercise, today she even incorporates intermittent fasting. “This approach really works and isn’t hard. It is similar to our Ramadan.”

To maintain your weight once you’ve reached your goal, you have to cook healthy food. You can incorporate choices you’d given up while on a strict diet, but infrequently, and in very small portions. Finally, exercise remains critical.

NAAZISH YARKHAN is a college essay and writing consultant (www.writersstudio.us) and contributor to over 50 media outlets including Chicago Tribune, NPR, PRI and more. Her writing has been translated into French, Hebrew, Arabic, Urdu, Bahasa, and Tagalog.
HALAL-CERTIFIED PRODUCT LOCATOR

Not all of the company products are halal-certified. Look for the Crescent-M logo on the product label or verify the certification using the Certified Products listing on www.ifanca.org.

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