

GREEN NUTRITION

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What was once a small environmentalist movement, “going green” is now a mainstream lifestyle choice. Many individuals and organizations are embracing the idea of green living and implementing ways to preserve our environment and live lightly on the land. While it’s difficult to undergo a complete lifestyle overhaul, even making small changes can have a positive impact on the environment. “Eating green” is one of the simplest ways to incorporate green living concepts into your life. Not only does eating green benefit the environment, it also benefits your health by promoting a diet rich in antioxidants and high in fiber that reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as cancer and heart disease.

One of the key elements of going green in the kitchen is to eat “whole foods.” A “whole food” is a food closest to its natural state with minimal or no processing. The ingredients of a whole food consist of only the food itself with no “part” of the food missing. This includes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes, nuts and seeds, lean unprocessed meats, hormone-free dairy products and minimally processed fats. When shopping for groceries, “whole foods” are found primarily along the perimeter of the store.

Choosing organic products when possible is another aspect of going green. Organic farming principles are kinder to the environment and food is produced without the use of synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides or pesticides. While the effects of food grown with pesticides aren’t fully understood, there is growing concern of their long-term effects on many people, especially children. For this reason, organically grown foods are an option, though can often be priced considerably higher than conventionally grown food. What I tell my patients is that the benefit of eating fruits and vegetables, whether they are organic outweighs the possible exposure to pesticides.



Choose organic produce only if the higher prices don’t cause you to eat fewer fruits and vegetables. Aim to eat a minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

When making the choice to buy organic produce, it can be helpful to know which fruits and vegetables rate highest in pesticide contamination and then focus your organic purchases on these. After analyzing the tests on produce grown with pesticides, a leading environmental group has labeled the following fruits and vegetables the “dirty dozen”: apples, celery, cherries, lettuce, grapes, peaches, pears, potatoes, nectarines, spinach, strawberries and sweet bell peppers. Those fruits and vegetables lowest in pesticides include asparagus, avocados, bananas, broccoli, cabbage, eggplant, kiwis, mangoes, onions, pineapples, sweet corn (frozen) and sweet peas (frozen).

One way to get organic foods more affordably is to grow them yourself, if you have the space and desire to garden. This way, you’ll know exactly what has gone into your produce. Growing your own food is also a great way to get children interested in fresh fruits and vegetables. They are often so fascinated by the growing pro-

cess that they have to take part in sampling as well. If you’re short on garden space, there are many community gardens that rent plots to area residents.

Another aspect of green living is the concept of “eating locally.” When you buy food grown or raised from local purveyors you conserve resources and minimize pollution because these food items are easily accessible and not shipped from across the country or the world. One avenue for purchasing locally grown foods is through our area’s many farmers’ markets. At the farmers’ markets you can talk directly with growers about their farming practices, which are often organic. Many small farms are now a part of Community Supported Agriculture, a cooperative designed to increase access to locally grown, organically raised food. These farms can deliver fresh produce and sometimes dairy products directly to your home. Some local sources also tend to offer products in bulk, eliminating excess packaging and reducing the overall waste stream.

Going green is a wholesome, respectful way to treat our bodies, our community and our planet. Start small, by eating green, and you and your family will benefit tremendously with better health, increased energy and maybe even a summer garden.

At Overlake, we have begun to go green by replacing the old notion of prepackaged “hospital food” with fresher and more wholesome and whole-grain choices. We have also introduced recycling and composting. In addition, employees are being challenged to adopt green eating and green living principles into their own lifestyles.

Introduced one step at a time, the ideas around living green can offer dramatic and positive benefits for you, your family or any organization, big or small.

HELPFUL WEB SITES

www.seattleilth.org
www.foodnews.org
www.overlakehospital.org