

What We Eat Matters

Improving our awareness of the basic aspects of healthy living and being intentional with what and how we eat is a critical component of health care. Imagine if we could prevent obesity and reverse Type 2 diabetes with education and nutrition. We can! Changing our behaviors and our abilities to prioritize what we know to be healthful is the challenge.

A whole food, plant-based diet is a way we can impact positive change to promote healthier aging, reduce health-care costs and protect our environment. There is an abundance of compelling evidence, and two recent articles nicely summarize the ‘Why:’ [Time Magazine article, “Why Food Could be the Best Medicine of All](#) (February 2019) [Harvard School of Public Health “Food System Transformation Needed for Human and Planetary Health](#)(January 2019)

We lacked in-depth education as medical students in nutrition and its role in preventing obesity and how poor diets contributed to several chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers. The process of learning how to select nutrient-dense, whole, natural foods when grocery shopping and then how to prepare healthy meals that optimally fuel our bodies was missing in my education and upbringing. Like most young humans, I learned how and what to eat at home with my family. We mostly ate meals that were fast and easy concoctions, typically with meat and potatoes. Once a week we would pile into the Dodge Dart with a destination of McDonald’s, where one Canadian dollar bought us each a burger, fries and a pop. This was in the 1970s, before super-sized meals and the endless convenient consumer options to eat cheaply and quickly invaded our societies, contributing to an epidemic of obesity in North America.

At Kaiser Permanente, we have opportunities to swing the pendulum of health care from costly disease management “sick care” to optimizing the well-being of all individuals through prevention and by embracing healthy lifestyles. It’s empowering to ourselves, our patients and our society to optimize our health naturally with real and nourishing food. Many of our [Permanente colleagues have been and are leading the way.](#) The Basics: Plant “based” (vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, fruits), minimal added sugar, minimal intake of animal-derived foods, avoidance of red meat and processed foods. The Mediterranean diet is a flexible example: plant-based, add fish, olive oil, etc.

NWP is supporting a new [Culinary Medicine CME program](#), and we will supply links to useful websites that enhance practical knowledge of nutrition on your [NWP Wellness website](#). We all can have a tremendous positive influence on global health by adopting and promoting healthy lifestyles... and it feels wonderful!

— Suzanne Deschamps, MD, Family Medicine Physician and Co-Director, NWP Physician Wellness