

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Many nations have created and published dietary guidelines for their citizens. In 1992, the United States Department of Agriculture released its first food pyramid. An updated version named MyPyramid was published in 2005, before being superseded by MyPlate in 2011. Typically, foods are organized into six groups — grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meat/eggs/beans/nuts, and fats/oils/sugar/salt.

Countless books and articles have been written on the subjects of diet and nutrition. But there never seems to be a consensus. Experts deem certain foods unhealthy only to reverse their assertions later on. Much touted “superfoods” soon fade into obscurity. Searching for some sort of guidance, people turn to medical professionals, nutritionists, fitness coaches, and even their favorite celebrities. However, in the Bible, God provides us with HIS instructions and wise counsel regarding proper diet to ensure our good health.

Grains are staple food crops around the world. Some well-known examples are wheat, rye, barley, oats, and rice. Millet and spelt, two grains that are rather uncommon today, are mentioned in Ezekiel 4:9. The anatomy of an individual grain kernel consists of the husk or chaff, bran, endosperm and germ. During processing, the inedible husk is removed. Refined grains contain only the starchy endosperm, but whole grains retain the bran and germ in addition to the endosperm. As a result, whole-grain products contain more nutrients and fiber.

The grain food group also includes bread, pasta, cereal and other products made from milled grains. The human body can convert these foods into energy, giving people the fuel to complete their daily activities. The Bible mentions bread, both leavened and unleavened (Leviticus 7:13; Genesis 19:3). Regardless of type or form, grains tend to make up the bulk of people’s diet.

The vegetable food group is comprised of edible plant parts. For instance, broccoli and artichokes are actually flowers. Tomatoes, bell

peppers and cucumbers are the “fruits” of their respective plants. Celery is an edible plant stem, while carrots are root vegetables. Examples of leafy greens include lettuce, spinach and cabbage. Found in dark green and yellow-orange vegetables, beta-carotene is a substance that the body changes into vitamin A. Some functions of vitamin A are maintaining healthy skin, preserving good eyesight and fortifying the immune system. Vitamin K, present in leafy green vegetables, ensures that the blood clots when it’s supposed to. At the beginning of their captivity in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends ate vegetables instead of the king’s delicacies in order to avoid defiling themselves (Daniel 1:8, 12, 16). Without vegetables, people would lack many valuable vitamins.

Fruits come in several shapes and sizes. Melons are large fruits with a hard rind and a tender inside. Berries, on the other hand, are small and fleshy. The citrus family is made up of juicy fruits with an acidic flavor and a thick peel. Stone fruits, such as peaches and plums, get their name from the large pit (seed) in the middle of each fruit. Citrus fruits and berries have high levels of vitamin C, which boosts the immune system. Potassium, a mineral found in avocados and bananas, decreases the risk of muscle cramps and aids in relaying nerve impulses. God planted numerous fruit trees for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:29; 3:2). Whatever the size or appearance, fruit is an important part of a healthy diet.

Although beans are considered vegetables and nuts are classified as “fruits,” they are grouped together with meat and eggs on the food pyramid. Meats in this category include beef, poultry and fish. Chicken eggs are the most prevalent kind of egg, but duck and quail eggs are eaten in some cuisines. In Leviticus 11:1-31 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21, God specifies what animals are beneficial for man to eat. Additionally, God forbids the consumption of animal blood (Leviticus 17:14; Deuteronomy 12:23). Some risks associated with ingesting animal blood are food poisoning, parasitic infection, and iron overload.

Beans belong to a family of vegetables known as legumes. They can be baked, boiled, or fried. Certain types of beans are used to produce specific foods. Tofu, soy sauce, and soy milk are all made from

soybeans. Hummus is a smooth dip made from garbanzo beans or chickpeas. The stew Jacob gave his brother Esau in exchange for the birthright was made from lentils, a type of legume (Genesis 25:34).

The main parts of a nut are the durable shell and the softer, edible seed or kernel. Chestnuts and hazelnuts are two examples. Nuts can be enjoyed roasted, as a spreadable paste, or even in beverage form. Song of Solomon refers to “the garden of nuts” (Song of Solomon 6:11).

The reason meat, eggs, beans, and nuts are in the same food group is that they all supply protein. Human bodies break down proteins in order to build new cells and repair old ones. Furthermore, this food group provides iron, a necessary part of producing hemoglobin (an important component of red blood cells). Because of the nutrients provided by these foods, the human body is able to function properly.

Milk and milk products make up the dairy food group. Though cow milk is the most common in the United States, the Bible also mentions goat milk (Proverbs 27:27). Sour cream, buttermilk, yogurt, and evaporated milk are additional examples of dairy products. Calcium and phosphorus can be obtained from consuming dairy. These minerals ensure the bones and teeth develop correctly. The dairy food group keeps the body’s framework healthy and strong.

Numerous times in the Bible, the Promised Land is called “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8, 17). Separating the solid and liquid parts of milk through churning results in butter. Cheese is made from milk that has been fermented, curdled, drained, and then allowed to mature. King David was given provisions that included cheese (2 Samuel 17:29).

Fats, oils, sugar and salt have a fairly poor reputation in matters of nutrition, and not without reason. Nevertheless, partaking from this food group sparingly should not cause any harm. If a fat remains fluid at room temperature, it is classified as an oil. Shortening and margarine are vegetable oils made solid through hydrogenation (adding hydrogen).

There are two types of fat: saturated and unsaturated. Red meat and butter both contain saturated fat. Whereas, fish and nuts contain unsaturated fat. God prohibits eating the fat attached to animal meat (Leviticus 7:23-25). A diet high in animal fats can cause cardiovascular disease, cancer and liver problems. But fats from other sources, such as pumpkin seeds and olive oil, provide many benefits: keeping the skin smooth, relieving inflammation and improving heart health.

Sugar and salt are used for their flavor. Sweeteners come from a wide variety of sources. Sugar cane or sugar beets are processed to make brown sugar, white sugar and molasses. Maple tree sap is harvested, then turned into maple syrup. Bees gather nectar from flowers to produce honey. The Bible cautions against the excessive consumption of sweets (Proverbs 25:27). Consuming too much sugar increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and tooth decay.

Edible salts are divided into two main categories: rock salt, which is obtained through mining; and sea salt, which is extracted from salt water. Salt not only flavors food but also helps maintain the body's fluid balance, ensuring the amount of water lost does not exceed the amount taken in. However, eating an excessive amount of salt can lead to osteoporosis (weakening of the bones), as well as stomach and kidney issues. The book of Job emphasizes how useful salt is as a seasoning (Job 6:9). Jesus Christ Himself describes salt as "good" (Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34). So long as moderation is exercised, the average healthy person can safely consume fats, oils, sugar and salt.

The human body is an amazing creation of God, more marvelous and intricate than any machine. A balanced diet is an integral part of keeping our bodies healthy. God wants everyone to have a happy, abundant life — and that includes radiant health (John 10:10)!