



"Laughter is brightest
where food is best."

~Irish Proverb

By Edie Weinstein-Moser

EATING

For Body and Soul

Food plays numerous roles in our lives. It is, first and foremost, fuel for the body. Eaten with care and discernment, it can provide energy and sustain us as we go about our day. Ingested with consciousness it can enhance our sense of well-being. Shared with family and friends, it can create an atmosphere of joy. Prepared with love, I'm convinced it has even stronger healing qualities. Unfortunately, many of us have an imbalanced and complicated relationship with this nourishing source.

Most of us are lacking in the knowledge needed to use this resource to our best benefit and that is where consulting experts come in handy. Donna Butler and Mara Lamanna are Holistic Health Counselors, who are nationally board certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners, Holistic Health and Nutrition Counselors, are graduates of the Institute for Integrative Nutrition in NYC, and affiliated with Columbia University. The Institute for Integrative Nutrition is the only holistic nutrition school in the world integrating all different dietary theories, from the ancient traditions of Ayurveda, Macrobiotics and Chinese medicine to the most current concepts like raw foods, Atkins diet, blood type diets, the Zone and the USDA Healthy Eating Pyramid. They are also on staff at Transformations, which is a Holistic Learning Center located in Voorhees, NJ

I had the pleasure of interviewing these two consummate professionals who are dedicated to assisting their clients in recog-

nizing that food energizes the body and soul.

PhillyFIT: What was the path that led you to become involved in the fields of nutrition and wellness?

Donna: My natural abilities as a care-taker developed into my role as a "healer." Helping people lead healthy lifestyles physically and emotionally became a passion for me. I saw how food and nutrition clearly affects one's health and well-being. This field was a perfect fit for me. It helped me see that by helping others, you help yourself.

Mara: After being raised with strong yogic and macrobiotic influences, with a desire to provide therapeutic services to individuals through the use of art and play therapies as a college art major, I learned that I was suffering from an accumulation of a serious heavy-metal toxin. I entered a wellness center worried and convinced that I was experiencing some sort of brain/memory damage. After undergoing a few tests, it

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was determined that I had high levels of mercury in my body and was, in fact, experiencing severe mercury poisoning. With the assistance of the wellness center, I immediately began researching ways in which I could most effectively and carefully remove the toxin from my physiology, and protect myself from further accumulation. This process led me to spend much time reading and researching health and nutrition, speaking with others, and listening to their own personal health concerns. Along with a personal strong interest in health and nutrition, and after having previously worked in the culinary industry, I enrolled in the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (IIN) in New York City. The Institute for Integrative Nutrition is the only holistic nutrition school in the world integrating many different dietary theories, from the ancient traditions of Ayurveda, Macrobiotics and Chinese medicine to the most current concepts like raw foods, Atkins diet, blood type diets, the Zone and the USDA Healthy Eating Pyramid.

PhillyFIT: Since this is a publication that focuses on total well-being, how can we allow our food to be fuel for a healthy, flexible, strong body/mind/spirit?

Donna: We can start by redefining the definition of “food.” Think about what feeds us at the most cellular level mind, body and spirit. Be pro-active with your own health. Take control. We can make healthy choices around what we eat. Choose organic foods when possible or as close to natural as can be. Check in with yourself. It is my belief that a true holistic approach toward food also includes other things that nourish you. These include love, intimacy, time with friends and loved ones, moving your body, and enjoying your work—just to name a few. Maintaining a healthy balance in all areas of your life will empower you for a lifetime.

Mara: As a Holistic Health and Nutrition Counselor, I gently assist those that I work with to create profound nourishment and well-being in each area of their lives including nutrition, exercise, relationships, career, home-life, and in deepening their spiritual connections. These life areas, when nurtured and strengthened, provide deep levels of sustenance in a person’s life, while contributing to an integral sense of balance and nourishment on all levels. My approach incorporates the use of certain foods and eating practices as “tools” in the process of accessing optimal health, vitality and balance.

PhillyFIT: Why do so many of us have “food issues,” i.e., addictions, eating disorders?

Donna: Food is very personal. I believe the reason there are so many food issues is for that exact reason. Food can be safe and loyal, unlike many relationships we have in other areas of our lives. We often use food to fill voids in our lives. Many people turn to food instead of healthier resources that are available to help heal them.

Mara: These are symptoms of imbalance. Our bodies (physical and emotional) constantly crave balance. The first thing to understand is that there is nothing “wrong” with the symptoms of imbalance, or the imbalance itself. It is merely a

state of being which can be altered through the use of certain foods, lifestyle changes, and coaching. When we experience being out-of-balance, we look to attain a sense of balance as quickly as possible. I teach about the “Yin/Yang” principles when discussing balance issues. We find that the more extreme the imbalance, the more extreme the craving/propensity to use a food or substance to attain a sense of balance. I enjoy assisting individuals in the process of understanding the nature of their particular expression of imbalance, deconstructing any cravings associated with it, and then coming into balance. It is truly a beautiful and surprisingly smooth process. Most importantly, we look to ensure that the person we are working with feels no sense of deprivation, rather, that they feel empowered and fulfilled along the way. Again, these “food issues” are merely symptoms of imbalance. We are looking to assist the individual in attaining a true sense of balance (the ultimate sensation that our total being constantly craves), and then noticing that most frequently their complaints have subsided and there is no longer a propensity to use food or substances in an unhealthy way.

PhillyFIT: How can we fit healthy choices into the busy lifestyle that many of us have?

Donna: We need to prioritize our time. Make a date with yourself and “show up.” Do nurturing things that don’t evolve around food. Make sure you always have the right foods in the house so when you come home after a long day you don’t end up “grazing” and choosing unhealthy foods for yourself because you are tired and hungry. Think ahead by making small baggies of healthy snacks for the week. Cook once and eat three times. There are many ways to integrate healthy lifestyles into busy days.

Mara: Use a coach! Hiring a coach, a Holistic Health and Nutrition Counselor, is an extremely effective way to quickly cause a shift in life specifically in this way. Through the process, which can often times be as short as a few coaching sessions around this particular topic, a person can gain the “coaching tools” they need to take this area of life on for themselves for the remainder of their years.

PhillyFIT: Is there an “appropriate” diet for different body types or blood types?

Donna: We are all bio-individuals. Not one diet works for everyone. It is wise to know your blood type and to educate yourself around what foods work best for you based on that knowledge, and what foods to avoid. Something as simple as wheat could work against you if your blood type doesn’t allow you to get the healthy benefits wheat can offer. It can have an adverse effect disguised as bloating and weight gain when in reality it is sensitivity to wheat. That works with many other foods as well.

Mara: There is no one diet for anyone or for everyone. Every single one of us is a unique person, with a unique physiological profile, and with unique emotional and physical needs. In addition, we are, each of us, evolutionary beings living out our own individual life processes, with the seasons, the years and

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the rhythms of life. As a person attains a sense of total balance, nourishment, and optimal well-being, while gaining the tools that they need to take these processes on in their own life, he/she is empowered to evolve and grow, altering their “diet” as necessary.

PhillyFIT: How can we get the full nutritional value from our food? Is raw food healthier, since some say that cooking diminishes it?

Donna: To get the full nutritional value from our food, one should obviously make healthy choices when possible. Buying locally grown food is an excellent choice. Staying away from processed foods is critical to our health. In addition, make eating an event. Sit down when eating and be present with yourself. Be mindful of your chewing which helps with digestion and energy. Raw food can work best for some people but not all folks. It is a personal decision to make. Some foods when cooked increase their nutritional value like lycopene in tomatoes, while others are best eaten raw.

Mara: One powerful way to ensure that we are getting optimal nourishment through food is to heighten our digestion and elimination, which also enhances metabolism. Also, we can use ghee (clarified butter) in the preparations of sautéed vegetables, in cooking soups and stews, grains etc. Preparing nutrient rich foods with ghee greatly enhances the bio-availability of the nutrients in foods. Eating raw foods (primarily produce) exclusively is a current trend. I find it to be beneficial to use a combination of raw and cooked produce according to the time of year and taking into account any therapeutic processes we may be implementing. Many foods contain natural levels of toxicity which can be diminished through the cooking process, in addition, it is often the case that lightly cooking certain foods enhances the bio-availability of the nutrients they contain.

PhillyFIT: Many of us struggle with weight issues. Any ideas for healthy weight loss and maintenance? Is the secret really: eat less, exercise more, and drink more water?

Donna: The “recipe” for success for anyone struggling with weight issues is pretty basic. Eat less, drink more water, and exercise more. Most people know the routine. The challenge is making this formula part of your daily lifestyle. The key to success is to make healthy choices for yourself that become a way of life, a lifestyle. It takes approximately six months for a habit to become a lifestyle. With motivation, support and little baby steps it can be done. The goals are to improve the quality of your life; to resolve concerns specific to you and your body, and to provide you with tools for a lifetime of balance. Have your mind be kind. What ever happened before today is ok. Start with a clean slate. And DON'T FORGET TO BREATHE!

Mara: Excess weight is a symptom of imbalance. Our bodies hold onto excess weight when we are acidic; for example, meaning that we are experiencing an imbalance and need to become more alkaline. When we are unaware of what foods to use during which times of year we can tend to accumulate

excess weight as a symptom of imbalance with nature. Often times a person struggling with weight issues has a blood sugar imbalance, or is simply “starving” for nutrient dense foods and eats excess amounts of foods in an attempt to feel nourished from a physical standpoint. Most often a person is experiencing a combination of all of these things and more! I do not believe that the secret is to eat less, exercise more, and drink more water. The secret is to find out who you really are, what imbalances you are dealing with, learn about attaining a true sense of balance, feel empowered, choose happiness and healthiness, and then create it, using certain foods, at certain times of the day, at certain times of the year, and using quality water, finding exercise that you love that literally has you wanting to do it every day, healing your relationships, choosing your career the way it is, while you may look to change it, and so on. I’m babbling, but really what I’m saying is that the secret is to shift the way you are living life from a disempowering one to an empowering one, experience using food for balance, then watch the pounds melt away!

PhillyFIT: How can we look beyond the “food pyramid” that most of us were raised to believe was a healthy standard for dietary choices?

Donna: Listen to your body. Honor your individuality. Develop a good filter system from all of the information we are inundated with around food and nutrition. Look at your genetic history and see what you may be predisposed to. That could have a huge effect on where your body needs to be, to give you a lifetime of health and wellness. Not all of us were meant to be a size six. Love your self, love your body.

Mara: My answer to the above question regarding whether or not there are “appropriate” diets for certain body/blood types would again be my response to this question. I cannot stress this enough. It is the key reason why so many people experience frustration and failed attempts when trying to follow an “eating system.” The new food pyramid does allow for more flexibility than the previous one, but is still lacking in the area of sound nutritional education in my opinion, and does not discuss seasonal foods for example (which is very important in assisting the body in the area of attaining a sense of integrity and balance). In addition, the modern food pyramid obviously can not and does not offer a person anything in the area of emotional balance and a person’s propensity to use food for emotional purposes. Quite simply, I feel that “nutrition” really means “nourishment on all levels,” and as long as we feel “without” or “depleted” in areas of our lives that would optimally provide us with a sense of completion, sustenance and balance (exercise, relationships, etc.), then “food nutrition” is ineffective.

Donna and Mara will be offering a series of classes at Transformations entitled: Food Is Sustenance/Eating for Energy. For more information: www.readytotransform.com



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