

GOT NUTRITIONAL COUNSELING?

By Cara Hillwig, MS, DC

YOU EXERCISE. YOU TRY TO EAT WELL. You see your Primary Care Physician for regular checkups. You read up on diet and nutrition findings. You generally feel “ok” or “pretty good.” You may also know how important vitamins and supplements can be. So, why might it also help you to work with a nutritionist? Here are a few benefits worth considering:

YOUR PERSONALIZED ASSESSMENT – Even within a single family, there are significant health differences. It’s not just that your special DNA package varies from your folks and siblings. You have a unique set of health factors. You have put your body through your own distinct mix of meals and snacks, your own exercise regimen. You have your own particular history of emotional and physical stress, and your own unmatched set of environmental influences, the effects of where you’ve lived and worked, and what you’ve been breathing. No wonder your wellness needs aren’t exactly the same as anyone else! You and your health are one-of-a-kind. A professional nutritionist can make exactly individualized food and supplement recommendations based upon the findings of a well-conducted history, examination, and blood work. Nutritionists can offer guidelines regarding your caloric intake, meal/snack frequency, size, and quality of meals to better help you to fuel your work-out and work-day. You can get truly informed answers to your questions regarding whole foods vs. supplements. Are you getting enough value (vitamins and minerals) from the foods you eat? When should you be eating? How many calories? What about your body’s ability to metabolize protein, fats, and carbs? The answers could make a world of difference in terms of your health, strength and yes, your life.

INTERACTIONS AND

CONTRAINDICATIONS – You wouldn’t think of ingesting pharmaceuticals that weren’t prescribed for you. You know that one of the most important things a pharmacist does for you is to oversee the combination of medicines you’re taking. The same kinds of caution should go into decisions about vitamins and supplements. Your personalized nutritional assessment and guidance can also go a long way toward protecting you against overdoses, potentially



dangerous combinations and even inadequate dosage. There can be contraindications with supplements as seemingly innocuous as Ginseng or Echinacea. It depends on your own unique health factors. For example, certain forms of Ginseng have been found to increase blood pressure in hypertensive individuals. Echinacea, due to its stimulating effects on the immune system, is contraindicated in autoimmune conditions. A nutritionist can also advise you about possible interactions between medicines you take, various nutritional supplements, and foods. These interactions can be for better (in some case, aiding in each other's absorption) or for worse (when combinations harm or inhibit one another). Vitamin A, D, E, and K, many minerals and other supplements also have the tendency to accumulate in your body: too much of any of these can easily become harmful to your health. For this reason, you should consider having an expert evaluate your dosages – these may or may not correspond with general “RDA” values. Due to the safety issues involved here, checking supplements, medications, and foods against one another and adjusting your dosages as necessary can ultimately be just as, if not more important than, any other part of your nutritional plan.

SETTING GOALS - The kind of goals you set and how well you monitor your progress is likely to determine your success. Are the goals you set for yourself poorly defined and/or too general (i.e. “I want to be healthier”)? A nutritional counselor should help break down these types of lofty goals into more manageable and realistic, goals. These goals should not be without a planned time-frame in which to re-assess progress. Whether it be shedding 20 lbs of body weight or subtracting 20 points from your total cholesterol reading, devising a plan and setting time-specific goals may be just the extra help you need. For many people, knowing that you will be “checking in” with your nutritional counselor can keep you focused, on target and on schedule.

PITFALL-AVOIDANCE – You clearly have good intentions about your health or you wouldn't be reading this article. So why may you “fall off the wagon” when it comes to eating

right? Perhaps it is that sweet tooth that you just can't shake. Maybe you get hungry midmorning because you have trouble staying full from a reduced carb (but also reduced fiber) breakfast. Maybe it's the late afternoon snack you eat when you start to feel tired that gets you. Helping you to find these pitfalls, and better yet, helping you to find ways to avoid them, is another area where a trained nutritionist can help.

WORKING ALONG WITH YOUR MEDICAL DOCTORS

- Establishing lines of communication between all people treating you should be an important part of your care. Perhaps there are recent physical or laboratory exam results that could affect what another licensed practitioner is prescribing. Being in contact with one another helps to ensure these necessary exchanges of information. As is true in many other fields, health care professionals often possess such a specialized understanding that consulting with one another may also help to elucidate new and critical areas for consideration.

ADDRESSING QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS—

It is likely that you will have questions when you attempt to start your new nutritional plan. Are there tips to help you remember your new regimen? What should you do if you forget to take the recommended supplement? You may also find you have questions about a particular scientific study on nutrition or a new diet idea. A research-oriented nutritionist should be able to help you evaluate the study in terms of its methods and limitations. Your nutritionist can relate the findings or diet to your personal profile and factors. Whether you want to fine tune your health, protect yourself against deleterious mistakes, or plan your future well-being, get what is right for you, personally, from your personal nutritionist.



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