GOOD FOOD STANDARDS!

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"Foods are classified into macro–nutrients and micro–nutrients. Macro–nutrientsare chemical compounds consumed in large amounts which supply us with energy (carbohydrates, proteins and fats) and, in some cases also used as structural components (proteins & fats). Micro–nutrientsare the essential compounds needed only in small quantities for a wide variety of important biological functions, including protection against free radicals, enhancing immune response and repairing DNA."

Have you ever wondered if there were standards by which we could judge the foods we eat?

The food we eat will either make our current physiological or psychological or both states healthier or make it less healthy - there is no neutral food that will not impact our health. In this post, I'm going to discuss principles that will surely help you to choose foods that will promote your health.

The foods we eat trigger many emotions, in ways that go far beyond our conscious awareness. Ever wondered why you had to eat huge packets of chips? Or why you ate that huge portion of dessert you love? Or perhaps the alcohol binge you'd done last weekend? Probably, not until your waist size starts showing how much you have been eating (or drinking) lately!

The examples of foods that are stated above have one common denominator. They all fail to meet the paradigm of Good Food Standards described in this post. The Good Food Standardsare developed by world renowned

researchers in the field of Nutrition &Dietatics; Dallas & Melissa Hartwig. Their work draws upon the seminal work doneby Dr. Loren Cordian& Robb Wolfinto Paleo Diet & Lifestyle. Their food recommendations are based on the diet consumed by humans during the 2.6-million-year Paloelithic era that ended about 10,000 years ago with the advent of agriculture!

The idea here is that humans have lived in the Paleo era for most of their existence, almost 99.5%. Therefore, we are better adapted to food that our ancestors had been eating for the past 2.6 million years vs. the foods we find in the modern diet, post the agriculture and industrialization era. The development of agriculture and large-scale production of crops such as Maize (Corn) and White Potato as well as easy availability of refined flour from which dietary fibre is removed in mills, has led to the large-scale consumption of these foods by common man.

Our bodies have hardly had any time to get adapted to the modern foods of the Neolithic era, which indeed do us more harm than good! Developing from these ideas of the health benefits of consuming a Paleo diet, Dallas & Melissa Hartwig have devised the Good Food Standards for assessing the biological response to different foodsand whether the food we are consuming is making us more or less healthy.

So, what are the Good Food Standards and which foods come into it?

Well, to begin with, there are four Good Food standards. For the food to be classified as one that makes us healthier, it should satisfy all four following criteria. Not three, not most… but all!

1. Promotes a healthy psychological response
2. Promotes a healthy hormonal response
3. Supports a healthy gut
4. Supports immune function and minimizes inflammation

But first let'stake a quick look at the nutrient composition of food. As you may be aware, food is composed of various complex molecules, some of which provide us with energy, some with structural components, some interact with various cell receptors and transmit signals to our bodies and some are relatively inert.

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Based on these functions, foods are classified into macro-nutrients and micro-nutrients. Macro-nutrientsare chemical compounds consumed in large amounts which supply us with energy (carbohydrates, proteins and fats) and, in some cases also used as structural components (proteins & fats). Micro-nutrientsare the essential compounds needed only in small quantities for a wide variety of important biological functions, including protection against free radicals, enhancing immune response and repairing DNA. There are hundreds of different micro-nutrients, including vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients that play a critical role in improving our health and wellbeing.

Now, here's why one has to avoid foods which fail to pass one or more of the four Good Food standards - the food groups that are best avoided to regain/maintain good health!

1. Sugars, Artificial Sweeteners, Alcohol and Refined grains. These foods fail the first Good Food standard i.e. a healthy psychological response. They elevate pleasure, reward and emotional pathways in the brain, offering supra-normal stimulating flavors without providing the nutrition that nature intended. These are foods-with-no-brakes, promoting over consumption and the inability to control food cravings, habits and behaviors.

2. Sugars, Artificial Sweeteners, Alcohol, Refined Grains and Skimmed Dairy. These foods fail the second Good Food standard i.e. a healthy hormonal response. They disrupt the hormonal balance, leading toleptin resistance (hormone secreted in the stomach to signal the brain that enough has been eaten and give us the feeling of satiety), insulin resistance (and all of the negative effects that follow), disrupting the hormone glucagon's energy-access function (hormone responsible for releasing glucose from liver and fatty acid from fat tissues for energy) and elevating cortisol levels (stress hormone).

3. Sugars, Artificial Sweeteners, Alcohol, Refined Grains and Legumes. These foods fail the third Good Food standard i.e. supporting a healthy gut. These foods directly promote intestinal permeability, leading to a less-than-intact barrier that lets foreign substances get inside the body (where they do not belong).

4. Sugars, Artificial Sweeteners, Alcohol, Whole Grains, Seed Oils and Legumes. These foods fail the fourth Good Food standard i.e. supporting immune function and minimizing inflammation. By creating intestinal permeability (or directly promoting chronic systemic inflammation), these foods force your immune system out of a healthy balance. This will over time lead to the development of systemic inflammatory symptoms or autoimmune diseases and is a central risk factor for many lifestyle-related diseases.

Therefore, basing the foods we eat on these standards will help us choose the right kind of food such as whole milk dairy, unprocessed meats, pulses, vegetables, whole fruits, chicken, fish and whole eggs. These foods, apart from giving us quality macro-nutrients, also are endowed with the goodness of micro-nutrients that support and promote our health. Combine this with eliminating or minimizing foods that fail to pass these standards of Good Food, and you will certainly see the improvement in your health and wellbeing!

Vijay Thakkar, is a well-known passionate die-heart specialist in Fitness & Nutrition Science qualified from UK & USA. He is currently spearheading India's most premium and technologically well advanced fitness club in the country which is a home to many celebrities, sports personalities and high profiled businessmen of the country. He has to his credit many international certifications in Exercise Science, Strength & Conditioning, Sports Training and Nutrition Counseling, one of the first to acquire these international credentials in India.

- Masters (Hons.) in Sports Management from University of Glamorgan (UK)
- Bachelors (Hons.) in Economics and Management from London School of Economics International.
- Registered Exercise Professional at Level 3 with Skills Active from Premier Training International (UK)
- Certified Personal Trainer from National Academy of Sports Medicine (USA)
- Level 2 Strength and Conditioning Coach (UK)
- Level 2 Kettlebell Trainer (UK)
- Tri-planar Kettlebell Trainer from Premier Training International (UK)
- Certified NLP Practitioner from Inspire360 (UK)

Remarkably knowledgeable with a unique foresight in his field of expertise, Vijay is fondly known amongst the fitness enthusiasts as "Fitness Encyclopedia". He has been taking corporate fitness training workshops and has been imparting the same to many high flying individuals and professionals on their specific lifestyle based fitness & nutritional needs. Having more than a decade of experience, over the years he has developed keen interest and higher knowledge deeper into this subject. His quest and quench to break his own fitness levels and progress each day with more advanced training sets him apart from the rest. He strongly opines that if the science of fitness and nutrition is applied tactfully with dedication and a disciplined routine can help anyone to achieve "any fitness goal at any given stage in one's life gradually & gracefully".

He strongly believes that a good customized combination of physical activity and nutritional requirement of the body is offered in a right manner to an individual can help him or her to achieve optimal physical performance in their day to day lives with age not being any kind of a constraint in achieving one's specific fitness goals. In addition to applying this valuable knowledge, he loves spreading it to help people achieve a fit and functional body equipped to undertake and triumph in any physical activity and/or sport they wish to enjoy.