



PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic
Together Through Life
a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization

Topic of the Month

Free - Help Yourself!

Too much of a good thing?

It's a good idea to act as if what you eat and drink truly matters, can impact how you feel today, and whether you live a long, healthy, and happy life. But... problems start when you move from being thoughtful about what you eat, to worrying about what you eat, to being constantly fixated on the quality and purity of your food.

Red Flags of Orthorexia

- Compulsive checking of ingredient lists and nutritional labels
- Constant concern about the health of ingredients
- Cutting out an increasing number of food groups (all sugar, all carbs...)
- An inability to eat anything but a narrow group of foods that are deemed 'healthy' or 'pure'
- Unusual interest in the health of what others are eating
- Spending hours per day thinking about what food might be served at upcoming events
- Showing high levels of distress when 'safe' or 'healthy' foods aren't available
- Obsessive following of food and 'healthy lifestyle' blogs on Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest
- Refusal to eat foods for if they're unclear about preparation or what it contains (ex: at a restaurant) or if they haven't prepared it themselves.
- Refusal to eat foods that weren't produced or prepared in a way they consider pure (ex: farm to table only)

Note: It's entirely possible to follow a diet that has parameters (vegetarian, vegan...) without it meaning you have orthorexia. The difference is in whether or not you can approach eating with balance, flexibility, and moderation. For more information, visit:

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog/when-does-healthy-eating-become-dangerous

If you or someone you care about has any of these red flags, you can talk to a Behavioral Health Consultant at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic by calling 218-387-2330.

The Dark Side of Clean Eating

*I long for the days
when clean eating
meant not getting too
much down your front.*

- Susie Boyt



There was a time when people just ate and were grateful for whatever they had. Their food was mostly what they had hunted, foraged or grown themselves, and it was the epitome of local, seasonal, and organic. Over time, fewer and fewer people produced their own food, and now the choices before us are often nutrient-poor, cheap, and laden with grease, salt, and sugar. Today's "Standard American Diet" (SAD) truly does make people sick. Compound that reality with the conflicting messages that we're bombarded with about how, when, and what to eat, and the grocery store becomes a mine-field. We try to avoid all the things that we're told will slowly kill us (Gluten? Fat?) while trying to pin point this week's super-food that will surely save us (Kale? Flax?). "Clean Eating" was supposed to be the clear answer to this anxiety and confusion.

At its most basic, clean eating is about consuming a diet mostly made up of foods that are highly nutritious and minimally processed. Unfortunately, this generally healthy definition has morphed into a belief system that labels whole categories of food as good or bad, toxic or clean. Social media empires have been built on our growing fear of being slowly poisoned by our diets.

This fear can lead to a disorder called "Orthorexia Nervosa," which literally translates to "correct appetite." While not a clinically recognized eating disorder like anorexia or bulimia, it does describe a pattern of behaviors that can be damaging. In orthorexia the belief is that a healthy diet is rooted in absolutes: One should NEVER eat _____ or one should ALWAYS eat _____. Stray from that and you have failed.

Part of what can be tricky about the clean eating message is that some of its basic ideas are absolutely correct and healthy. We definitely *should* be eating more vegetables and less

meat. We *should* be eating less refined sugar and grains and more whole foods. Our food system *is* broken, and it *has* contributed to our current epidemic of ill health.

Is there a way to a healthy middle-ground?

Yes, but the old adage of "everything in moderation" won't be much help in our world of cheap, super-sized junk food. Today's "normal" just isn't nourishing. Additionally, what we often believe to be the most nutritious is also often the most expensive. Does that mean "clean eating" should only be for the wealthy? NO!

Eating healthily is simple, even if it's not always easy, and small changes can make a big difference. Going from 0 or 1 servings of vegetables a day to 2 or 3 is a good improvement, and that improvement can be a stepping stone getting to 4, 5 or more servings. Switching from sugar-sweetened pop to fizzy water really can make a positive impact. Good nutrition is not an "all or nothing" proposition, and food doesn't have to be fancy to be healthy.

If you'd like to know more about the growth of the "clean eating" movement, visit www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/aug/11/why-we-fell-for-clean-eating?CMP=fb_gu

**Taking care of ourselves
can take a lot of support.
We're here to help!
Ask a nurse or provider if
you'd like to talk.**

Want to eat what's good for you

Our current culture is pretty focused on the components that make up food (How much protein? Is there too much salt?), but we don't pay enough attention to the way we feel about what we eat.

Our "food feelings" are mostly what we were taught when we were children. Our families trained us how food should taste; what's appropriate to eat and what's gross or stupid to eat, and how we know when to stop eating. The more sweet, salty, greasy manufactured food-like substances that we grow up eating, the more thoroughly we're trained that that's how all food is supposed to taste. Think about vegetables, for instance. The message that most of us received from home, school, and TV is that vegetables are healthy but not something that anyone would actually love. So we occasionally choke down the obligatory cupful and move on to the real food. Ultimately, we don't usually put much thought into what we eat - we just eat what we're used to eating.



Our habits are in charge of our health - and this can be great news.

Habits are just patterns of behavior that we learned, and we change our food habits all the time. Most of us didn't grow up eating sushi, kale chips, or bacon on our desserts, but those things are pretty common today. If we learned one eating pattern, we can learn another. We can teach ourselves (and our children) new eating habits and learn how to want to eat what's good for us by:

1. Being intentional about mealtimes. Try not to leave planning, shopping, and preparation for the last, famished minute. Some healthy basics in the pantry and freezer can make meals a lot less stressful and a lot more nutritious.
2. Paying attention to and honoring your own internal cues of hunger and fullness, instead of being controlled by external signals that tell you when it's time to eat or portion sizes that tell you how much to eat.
3. Being open to trying new foods. The way adults teach children to eat well is by choosing to eat healthy food themselves, being adventurous and enthusiastic about trying new foods, and giving foods a second (and third and fourth...) chance, even if that food wasn't a huge hit the first time. These steps are how we re-teach ourselves to eat well too.

We can re-learn how to eat in ways that makes us both healthy and happy. **We can teach ourselves to love food that loves us back!**

Okay, so what's actually good for me?



Questions and Answers about the very simple, but sometimes extremely complicated, subject of what to eat.

- Q. What's the very best diet?** A. There isn't just one, but there is one general pattern, and it highlights vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, and water. It can include (but certainly doesn't have to) seafood, dairy, eggs, or some meat.
- Q. Should I be avoiding carbs?** A. No. Plant foods are mostly carbohydrates, and we should all be eating plenty of veggies, whole fruit (not juices), whole grains, beans, and nuts. The carbs we should avoid are refined grains and sugars, not because they're carbs, but because they've been so highly processed that they have virtually no nutritive value left - just empty calories.
- Q. What about the gas that I might get with all those veggies, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and beans!?** A. If you're not used to eating high-fiber foods, you might be gassier at first, so increase these foods gradually. As your gut adjusts, the gassiness will probably ease up. You can also try a digestive enzyme product like Beano. If things don't improve, talk to your doctor. You don't have to choose between a healthy diet and too much gassiness.
- Q. What about fat? First it's bad, then it's good.** A. Fat is necessary, just like carbs. There are different types of fats, and saturated fat is the primary one we need to limit. It's found in things like animal products, coconut, and palm oil. If your diet emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, you can probably stop worrying about fat. If you'd like to know more, here's a link to some thorough presentations by registered dietitian Mary Zbaracki: Part 1 - <https://bit.ly/2Eoryea> Part 2 - <https://bit.ly/2ECelj9>
- Q. What about probiotics, and soy, and anti-oxidants, and alcohol, and calcium, and inflammation, and smoothies, and coffee...?** A. It's great you've got more questions. Here are more answers! Check out: <https://grb.st/2pprvpD> and <https://grb.st/2KADVVf>