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Life & Style

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Fight illness with food, not pills



Pigmentation is what lends colour to fruits and vegetables, and also contains healthy nutrients. Getty Images

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BP, osteoporosis and diabetes can heal with correct diet and no medication, says a homeopath.

The next time your blood pressure shoots up, remember that your body is capable of controlling it without a trip to the GP. Dr Nandita Shah, a Pondicherry-based homeopath, says simple dietary changes can help prevent, and more importantly reverse, ailments like osteoporosis, diabetes and even high blood pressure without popping pills.

Shah, who has been a homeopathic practitioner for 30 years, is the founder of Sharan India, a nonprofit that spreads holistic health awareness. The biggest hurdle most of us encounter, she claims, is that we fail to understand our body. "If you put kerosene in a car that runs on petrol, the car will break down," Shah says, adding that the human body functions better if it consumes foods that are a better fit.

She offers an instance. Our body is mostly alkaline, she explains. A pH (potential Hydrogen) level between 1 and 6.9 is considered acidic, while one between 7.1 and 14 is marked alkaline. The human body's natural pH level stands at 7.45, making it alkaline. All fruits and vegetables, natural juices like coconut water are alkaline, which make them a better nutrition fit than say animal proteins, tea, coffee, sugar, alcohol, and packaged foods that have high acidic levels. An imbalance in pH levels, says Shah, can lead to a disruption in cellular activity, causing health problems that range from heartburn to heart disease.

Eat right, be healthy

Osteoporosis cause: Calcium deficiency is not the cause of this condition. It's a diet that's either very rich in acidic foods or high in protein. Proteins are broken down into amino acids which are acid yielding. And so, consuming large amounts of animal protein results in the body extracting calcium from the bones to neutralise the effect of acids. When the lost

calcium is not restored, it causes osteoporosis over a period of time.
Food solution: Eat foods rich in vitamin D (it helps the body absorb calcium from foods), eliminate acidic foods like colas and caffeine. Include more fruits and vegetables in your meals. Green leafy veggies are rich in Vitamin K, and help rebuild bones.

Diabetes cause: Sugar is not the cause of diabetes, rather high blood sugar is the result of diabetes. The real cause of type 2 diabetes is the presence of fats in muscle cells. Beta cells present in the pancreas monitor the bloodstream for glucose. When blood sugar levels rise after meals, the beta cells secrete insulin

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monitor the bloodstream for glucose. When blood sugar levels rise after meals, the beta cells respond by secreting insulin. Insulin helps in the further absorption of glucose. Consumption of unhealthy fats causes beta cells to lose their ability to sense glucose in the blood, allowing blood sugar to rise unnaturally.

Food solution: Avoid unhealthy fats found in fried foods, packaged foods, butter, meat, whole fat dairy products, and most vegetable oils. Any fat that comes with fibre is good for you. Think peanuts, cashew, and sunflower, sesame and pumpkin seeds.

Acne cause: Eating processed foods increases the body's insulin levels, causing skin inflammation and breakouts. An imbalance of Omega-3 fats in the diet can also aggravate acne. Omega-3 fats are known to counter the effect of inflammatory chemicals that lead to breakouts.

Food solution: Have a diet that's low on sugar and rich in whole grains, fibre, fruits and vegetables. It will balance the body's insulin levels. Go for Omega-3 rich walnuts, flaxseeds, spinach and strawberries. Avoid fried and greasy foods.

High blood pressure cause: Blood pressure is the force exerted against the walls of the arteries as blood flows through

them. If a person has high blood pressure, it means that the walls of the arteries are receiving too much pressure repeatedly. Consumption of unhealthy fats leads to a build up of cholesterol deposits along the artery walls, thinning the passage for blood flow, and thereby adding to the pressure.

Food solution: Adopt a two-pronged approach — stay away from unhealthy fats found in fried and packaged foods, and boost the intake of potassium, a mineral that reduces the effect of sodium on blood pressure levels. Mushrooms, bananas, dark green leafy vegetables, sweet potatoes, oranges and dates are high in potassium.

Asthma cause: Asthma is an allergic response of the body to a substance, such as foreign dust particles or foods that cause swelling or inflammation of the airways. High levels of histamine, a chemical messenger that helps direct the body's response to a foreign invader, have been found to inflamate respiratory airways.

Food solution: Although no diet can guarantee the reversal of asthma, avoiding foods that up histamine levels can help control it. These include: alcohol, vinegar, ketchup, confectionary made with yeast, sour cream and fermented and processed foods.

Colour your plate right

The best way to ensure that your diet is balanced is to colour code it. Pigmentation is what lends colour to fruits and vegetables, and also contains healthy nutrients. The deeper the colour, the higher the percentage of a specific nutrient the food item has. Purple coloured foods like plums and aubergines have phytochemicals called anthocyanins and resveratrol that fight ageing, reduce blood pressure and protect the body against liver diseases.

Orange-coloured foods such as oranges and carrots contain betacarotene and betacryptoxanthin that keep the skin and eyes healthy, and also protect against arthritis. Yellow foods such as bananas and sweet corn contain carotenoids that boost the immune system and keep the heart healthy. White foods, including garlic, onions, cauliflower and mushrooms, are rich in vitamin C, and antibiotic and antifungal compounds that fight cell damage and keep the fighter white blood cells healthy. Red foods like tomatoes and watermelons contain the powerful antioxidant lycopene which acts as an internal sunscreen and protects you from sunburn, prevents osteoporosis and heart diseases. Greens such as peas, broccoli and spinach are packed with sulforaphane, isothiocyanate, and indoles which stimulate the liver to keep cancer producing chemicals in check.

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