

How Important Is a Healthy Diet?

By Daryl Wingerd

It might surprise you to learn that even though the New Testament says much about food, it is silent on the issue of healthy eating. Not one single book, chapter, or even verse was penned for the express purpose of telling Christians what they should or should not eat or drink for reasons of physical health. The closest any biblical writer comes to an actual dietary instruction is Paul, when he tells Timothy to “use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim. 5:23). But even in this case, the wine was more of a medicine than a beverage.



There are instructions in the New Testament regarding self-control (e.g., Gal. 5:22-23) and self-discipline (e.g., 1 Tim. 4:7-8). These words certainly should affect the *quantity* of food we consume in relation to how much we really need. But however important these personal and spiritual disciplines are, they are never applied to the *quality* or *type* of food we should consume. While significant portions of the Old Testament major on dietary laws and restrictions (that is, what to eat and what not to eat), the New Testament seems to reduce the issue of food quality or type to a complete non-issue.

It is undoubtedly a good thing to try to be healthy, and as we all know, what you eat has a lot to do with your level of health. But believers have differing preferences and standards concerning just how much emphasis a healthy diet should be given. Some prefer an all-organic diet, avoiding processed foods as much as possible (if not completely). Others organize their grocery shopping around factors like low cost and convenience, and are therefore willing to include a certain amount of processed food in their diet. Some drink only the best filtered water, while others just turn on the tap and drink whatever comes out. I could go on and on with comparisons, but you get the point.

Now here's my main point: Whatever diet you choose for yourself and your family, make sure food and drink does not occupy a more important position in your life than you find modeled and taught in the New Testament. Here are a few ways to make sure you're on the right track.

1. Don't be religious about what you eat. I'm not telling you not to exercise the spiritual discipline of self-control in your eating. I'm just reminding you, as Paul reminded the Corinthians, that “food will not commend us to God” (1 Cor. 8:8). Eating processed food will not degrade you spiritually, and eating whole foods is not a means of becoming more spiritual. Jesus explained it clearly when

he said, “Whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated” (Mark 7:18-19). What all Christians should be vigorously seeking is the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), but as Paul said, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). If you're looking for enhanced spirituality in your food, you're looking in the wrong place.

2. Make love a higher priority than food. Differing convictions between Christians can cause strained relationships, or even broken fellowship. These sad effects often result from a carnal desire to be proven wisest, or the sinful tendency to find fault in those who have chosen a different course within the general highway of Christian freedom. This can all be avoided by genuinely respecting the other Christian's decisions and priorities, and by avoiding all forms of offense. For example:

- Never ridicule or gossip about another believer's food choices. Never poke fun at them or make sarcastic comments. Whether you see it or not, these build up an ever-thickening layer of defensiveness and hurt, and can easily destroy fellowship.
- When invited over for a meal, eat your host's food even if it's not what you would ordinarily allow for yourself or your family. Unless you have a legitimate medical condition that requires you to bring your own special food, you're being religious (and offensive) by not eating what is set before you.

3. Eat within your means. Don't spend more than you should on food. The New Testament says nothing about a healthy diet, but much about using money faithfully. You are not being faithful if your expensive organic diet causes you to reduce what you give to your local church or to other Christians in need. You are not using your money responsibly if your preference for whole foods puts you (or keeps you) in debt, or diverts money away from other necessary expenditures. You are also not using your money faithfully if you are throwing it away on excessive junk food. Consider your money to be God's, and use it to buy food in keeping with all of the other *higher* priorities in the New Testament.

In summary, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

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