

# **Chapter 2**

# **The Foundation of Total Wellness – Nutrition**

Nutrition is the foundation of our health. For our body to function correctly, we need to fuel it according to its needs. That is why what we eat and drink has a significant impact on how different parts of our body function. Nutritional knowledge helps us understand how our body uses the food we consume, how healthy eating habits affect our metabolism, and prevent various diseases.

Your body is a unique, efficient, and effective machine. But just like a race car, it is only as good as the fuel you put in it. When we talk about nutrition, it is not just the amount of food you take in, but also the kind of food you are eating.

By now, most people understand the importance of healthy food, but not all healthy food is the same. Similarly, we are all different too. Your body and the nutrition it needs are different from mine and anyone else's, and the 'right' food for your body depends on your lifestyle and goals. For instance, if you are a promising athlete wanting to take your performance to the next level, your nutritional needs will be very different from someone in their 40's who spend their days working a desk job. Such people are mostly looking to maximize their health to keep up with their kids in the park. Nutrition is not a 'one size fits all' kind of thing, although the way it is often presented, you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Developing a nutritional program that is right for you means understanding what your body needs. You don't need to worry because there are ways to assess this for you.

## Biochemical Individuality

The basic idea of requiring an individual nutritional program to suit your body and lifestyle has a foundation in the concept of Biochemical Individuality. Whatever your goals or functional health target are, you need a personalized approach to nutrition and dietary goals based on how you live and those health targets.

However, biochemical individuality takes this farther. Even if you share the same health goals as someone else and athletics training partner, perhaps your body will require a different nutrition program than anyone else. Beyond lifestyle and wellness, your body is unique, not just in looks, but it is chemically different from others as well. It may seem illogical, but the reality is that if two people are given a diet of identical portions of identical food, which they eat at the same time every day, they will absorb different amounts of nutrients from that food. The difference in the way each individual absorbs those nutrients is the difference in their biochemical individuality.

Scientists have proven this concept with several studies. One example is a study on the absorption of Vitamin C in college students. Each participant consumed 5,000 mg of Vitamin C each day for the duration of the course, with daily monitoring of each individual's absorption rates.

The study shows that while some students absorbed all 5,000 mg of the vitamin, others could only absorb a fraction of the daily intake. In some cases, this was as little as 1000 mg of the vitamin, with the excess merely passing through their bodies. This study clearly shows the importance of knowing what your body needs before establishing an effective nutrition program for yourself. Once you get to know that, use those nutrients instead of copying someone else's plan.

Once you understand the nutrients your body needs, it gets easier to develop an effective nutrition program that features the combination of food that delivers those specific nutrients in the right quantity for your body to absorb. While we all need protein, carbohydrates, and fat for functional health, it is the quantity of each of those things and the balance between them, which matters and is unique for each individual.

Part of this process means understanding the dietary effects of nutrients on hormonal responses, which plays a significant role in determining the right food combinations for your daily routine. However, there is still a lot of confusion about ratios and nutrient quantities required for healthy living, which is not surprising.

Throughout its history, nutrition research has given a wide range of conflicting information about a healthy diet's precise makeup. Now that we are aware of the individual nature of nutrient requirements, it is understandable why studies offer differing findings. However, for many, it has led to problems. Recommended food intake levels have always fluctuated, with proteins making up anything from 15% to 45% of daily food intake. Likewise, carbohydrates have shown an even more extensive range, with recommendations ranging from as little as 15% of daily intake to a massive 75%. Finally, fats have remained the smallest recommended component of daily food intake, but even here, a range between 10% and 30% changed the makeup of a diet significantly.

With such vastly differing information, following 'recommendations' is sure to leave you confused and is undoubtedly no route to finding the right balance for your total wellness. Your unique needs matter more than anything. In this chapter, we take a journey through the nutrients that your body needs and how you can determine the best solution for your unique biochemical individuality.

## Maintaining Hydration

The first thing we talk about is your water intake. Not only because getting this wrong can have dire consequences for your health, but because it's a relatively straightforward part of your journey to total wellness. Before looking at how much water you need to drink every day, we need to discuss the type of water you consume.

Not all water is created equally. Some are better for you than others, even if that water mostly looks and tastes the same. Good quality water is essential to maximize wellness, especially if you are an athlete. You should consume water that is clean and full of natural minerals, ideally with a reasonably high pH level so that it is alkaline for your body.

Highly processed water, such as bottled water, lack many of the minerals and nutrients that your body needs. It is often an expense you can live without. If you can find natural spring water locally, that is the best option of all. You will find a full range of minerals and other nutrients that can boost your body's health in these unprocessed water sources.

Once you have found a suitable water source, knowing how much you need to drink each day is the next big step. As with all other aspects of your nutrition, this somewhat depends on your lifestyle. For most people, take your weight in pounds and multiply it by 0.66 to find the weight in ounces of your daily water consumption needs. If you are an athlete or extremely active during the day, then use 0.80 as the multiplying factor instead. Getting this right is extremely important. Not taking enough water, or drinking low-quality water, can cause a decline in your performance at every level and even begin to affect your overall health. You can spot if you are struggling with your water intake by assessing your urine. Light yellow urine means that you are hydrating effectively. However, if you find your urine is a dark yellow color, that is a sign of dehydration, and you need to quickly adjust your water intake.

Throughout this process, you should never shift quickly to increase water consumption, as it can cause problems. Increase slowly over a month or more, allowing your body to acclimate to the new hydration levels. Remember, excellent water, in the right quantity, can change how your body feels and performs, but this is only the first step in finding the perfect nutrition regime for your needs.

## Metabolism – Finding the right eating habits for your body

So far, we have discussed the uniqueness of your body. Not just in terms of performance, but how it uses the nutrients you consume as well. The term that is used to describe the chemical reactions within the body is called metabolism. Your metabolism is the process in which those nutrients are broken down and converted to energy and includes your breathing, food digestion, nutrient delivery to your body's cells, energy use throughout the body, and the elimination of waste products. You may often hear people discussing the rate of metabolism. Well, it describes the rate at which your body turns food into energy. And the rate at which your body uses that energy is called your metabolic rate. Just like your fingerprint, your metabolism and metabolic rate are unique to you. In essence, we all have our *metabolic fingerprint*.

Your metabolism is measured in calories, with your metabolic rate showing the number of calories needed to maintain your everyday lifestyle. That includes the various functions of the body itself that take place to stay alive, along with your daily activity, both for fun, work, and the exercise you do. The standard way of measuring this is known as the RMR: Resting Metabolic Rate. The minimum number of calories needed to support your body's functions if you did nothing but rest for 24 hours. Surprisingly, this figure can be as much as 75% of your actual energy expenditure in an average day and is affected by several factors, including:

* Gender
* Age
* Weight
* Body Composition (The ratio of muscle to fat)
* Fitness Levels
* The amount of physical activity you do
* Diet
* Stimulants taken
* Stress

Body composition is an incredibly important factor. Even at rest, muscles burn through more energy than fat. And so, a muscled body will use energy at a much higher rate than a less muscled one, or those where fat is a predominant component. An example of this comes from a recent weight management study where we can directly compare two women's metabolism.

Women A weighs 158 lbs. and has 33% body fat with a measured RMR of 1570 calories per day. Women B also weighs 158 lbs. but has a body fat of 48%. The result is a measured RMR of 1250 calories per day. As we can see, despite being roughly the same age, weight, and height, their RMR is drastically different, at least in part, to the difference in body composition. While your metabolism is unique to your body, that doesn't mean you can't change it. Exercise can create lean tissue, especially if you incorporate a lot of resistance training, which will positively affect your RMR over time. Because muscle is a metabolically active tissue, it consumes high energy levels to maintain as we begin to lose muscle mass with age.

RMR tends to decline in adults at the rate of between 2% and 3% per decade. In general, men have a higher RMR than women due to having higher muscle mass. However, whatever your current metabolic rate is, there is a great need to understand how it is connected to your most suitable diet. By balancing the amount of energy consumed with the amount your body needs, you can also control weight and improve overall wellness.

## You Are What You Eat

While your unique metabolism has a broad influence on the exact makeup of the ideal nutrition for your total wellness, the type of food is crucial. Quality food is better for your body. Part of that is understanding ingredients and knowing what is in the food you buy, so you are always aware of what is going into your body. Avoid any food items that are full of chemicals and preservatives where possible. Unfortunately, in today's world, avoiding foods that include additives of one form or another is almost impossible, but you can always try to minimize your intake for the best results. If you look at a list of ingredients and it stretches on forever or is full of unpronounceable chemical names that give you no clue as to what they are, it is probably something that won't be good for your body.

This is where the phrase 'you are what you eat' comes in, and it is a truism. As we have already discussed, your body is built from the nutrients, vitamins, and minerals consumed from what we eat. If we look at the process in its simplest terms, consuming quality food provides quality materials to create new cells, new tissues, and powers the body. Conversely, consuming food full of chemicals you can barely pronounce does one thing, fill your body with chemicals you can barely pronounce. There's a reason that you run race cars on the best fuels available, and it's the same reason you should provide the best quality food for your body: It makes them perform better. What that means in practical terms is stick to fresh and natural food items wherever it's possible. As a general rule, the more ingredients something has, the more processes it has gone through, and the less likely it is to be good for your body. In most cases, processed food takes something away from them, usually the nutrients your body needs.

By eating heavily processed food, you feel full, and your brain tells you that you have eaten enough. However, the food you have eaten may not have all the nutrients your body needs, and as a result, it is unable to perform at its best. This can manifest sub-par performance as an athlete, a sense of sluggishness, or lethargy during your daily life. It can even cause you to have trouble focusing on the task at hand or any number of other issues.

Getting the right nutrients is essential for total wellness, so choose your food carefully. Focus on fresh, healthy food, and if you have to buy anything processed, make sure there are five or less natural ingredients. A higher intake of protein and fiber over fats is a generally healthy approach to your food.

## The 80/20 Rule

For proper functional health, you want to focus on ensuring that 80% of your meals are clean and healthy with lean proteins and fiber, plenty of fruit and vegetables alongside good fats. If you are an athlete in training or seeking to get to the next level, that should be 90% of your meals.

## Know your Numbers

The theme with total wellness is that your body is unique, and the special diet and healthy lifestyle required to reach your goals is just as individual as you are. There is a good reason for repeating this as there is so much misinformation out there that has taught us from a young age that there is a single approach that works for all in terms of food and fitness.

There isn't, and here is what you do need to do; get personal. When embarking on a total wellness program, complete your essential lab work and if available, a comprehensive assessment of your health metrics as well. With this data and a consultation with your physician, it is much easier to develop a tailored roadmap for improvement that optimizes health and performance, spotting any potential issues early. It is also useful as a baseline to assess progress. Retesting after 6 or 12 months gives you a directly comparable data set to determine how far you have traveled towards your goals. It is often a welcome boost to your morale. Regular checkups also provide an 'early warning' system for problems that have either not gone away or materialized in a way that could lead to further health issues or disease down the line.

Lab results also put the idea of your biochemical individuality into an easily understood setting. Your health metrics will be very different from your spouse's, your friends, or even your siblings' and this illustrates why you need a personalized approach to achieving the functional health goals that you have.

## Your Supplement Plan

With total wellness as your goal, you meet several challenges along the way. That is why it is essential to avoid any issues that can easily be avoided. One of those is your nutritional intake. If you leave this to chance, you are at the mercy of the whims of your brain, which may tell you it needs fats when in reality, you need proteins. This is also known as cravings, the feeling that you have to have a bag of chips right now. The result of this process is that most people tend to eat incorrectly. That is, you probably don't have the perfect diet for achieving your goals. Not all of it is down to a lack of willpower or the whims of our cravings, either. Life is complicated, time is often limited, and it can only be impractical to craft the perfect dietary or balanced meal every time you need to eat.

Many books and experts talk about diet in the perfect scenario, where you can source every superfood and vegetable that provides each nutrient that your body needs, and you also have the time to turn them into meals that you can eat. But life isn't like that. Sometimes your Whole Food doesn't have everything you want. Sometimes you can't afford some of the more obscure superfoods, and sometimes, you don't have time to spend a couple of hours creating the perfect meal. It doesn't mean you should forget it and accept anything less than total wellness; it just means you need a slightly different approach. When you create your personalized nutrition plan, be practical. Don't fill it with ingredients and meals you know you can't get or won't make. It's essential not just for the practicality of maintaining the right dietary approach, but because once you have a realistic plan, you can see where you are missing out on some essential nutrients.

That is where the supplement plan comes in. You may not have time to craft the ideal meal every time, but with supplements, you can still make sure your body benefits from all the nutrients it needs. If you have access to a nutritionist, they can help with this process, and if it is at all possible, use one. It is worthwhile.

The key with supplements is to start slowly, let your body adjust to the additional nutrients and minerals over time. Not all supplements are created equal, either. Supplements made from whole food ingredients offer easier absorption by your body, which means it is easier for your body to use the nutrients they provide. As with food, quality supplements deliver quality outcomes.

Through supplements, your body has an insurance policy. If, for any reason, you don't eat correctly or your diet misses some essential nutrients, the supplements will fill those gaps for you. That doesn't mean you can ignore your nutrition plan and rely on supplements entirely. Understand that supplements are there to support your nutrition plan, not the other way around. Your lab results will help out here, too, ensuring you include supplements that you need rather than just buying everything and hoping for the best, which can be a great way to waste a lot of money.

## Weight Loss and Weight Management

Finding your ideal weight is an essential aspect of total wellness, and there are several things you can do along the way to manage your weight easier. We have already talked about metabolism and how high metabolic rates burn more calories per day without changing anything else. The thing is, if your body is burning 1700 calories per day while resting, and you consume 1200, then your body will seek that calorie deficit from your fat reserves.

In effect, by boosting metabolism, you can lose weight without doing anything else. As easy as it sounds, that is not the way to go through. Yes, boosting metabolism is a part of it. But by changing your daily routine and diet, including more movement in your day; quality water, lean protein, fiber, and vegetables, while at the same time avoiding; bad fats, dairy, gluten, low-quality food, fast food, calories, sitting, alcohol, and carbohydrates as much as possible, in turn, will aid weight management. How you eat is as important as what you eat when it comes to boosting metabolism. If you stick to a couple of large meals per day, it will slow your metabolic rate as your body works to absorb all those nutrients in one go. However, numerous small meals with clean, healthy food throughout the day keep the body working and boost metabolism, which is what you should want if you want to be healthy.

One of the biggest challenges for weight loss is that diets tend to leave you feeling hungry and never full. It's precisely why they never seem to work for you. By loading up on lean protein, the body will feel fuller for longer, avoiding the hunger and cravings that lead to compulsive eating of harmful foods and a failed diet.

If you reduce your carbohydrate intake at the same time, you will not only eat less but surprisingly quickly. You will begin to notice the difference as you feel healthier all day. One downside to losing weight that often surprises and concerns people is that your metabolism may initially decrease as the weight disappears. However, this is your body's natural reaction to a decrease in calorie intake and can be associated with tissue loss, including both fat and muscle. However, because you want to focus on fat rather than muscle loss, this is an excellent time to maintain an effective exercise regime, which can help keep muscle and focus tissue loss on fat.

It is also essential to recognize that weight loss is not a comfortable journey. Losing the first few excess pounds may go quickly. However, after that, it can become much more challenging. There may come a time where you will feel stagnant, as if you are making no progress at all. Always remember that your metabolic rate may be changing too. Adjust your calorie intake and add exercise to your daily routine to increase your calorie burn. Once you reach the desired weight and stabilize, it is normal for your metabolism to increase again.

But whatever happens, it is worth tracking your metabolic rate throughout the weight loss to ensure you have the right calorific intake at all times. Take things steady. There are no instant fixes. Once you understand that, you can reach your ideal weight safely and then maintain that weight for as long as you wish.

## Be Health Organized

A lot is going on when it comes to nutrition and weight on your journey to total wellness. However, keeping track of nutrition and supplement plans, lab results, calories, and metabolic rates are essential parts of this process and the key to your success. Whether you keep a journal or use one of the numerous excellent apps available today, such as MyFitnessPal, it is essential to be on top of your status and the progress you are making.

It is far too easy to stray from your plan if you are not accountable, but when written down or entered into an app, you see your plan right there in front of you, and it is harder to ignore it. If you need extra help with motivation, have your spouse or partner, friend, or anyone tracks things for you. That way, someone will directly question you if you don't keep up with something. Be honest with yourself at this point. Not everyone needs others to keep them going, but if you do, don't ignore it, get someone involved, and make sure you stick to your plan. Understand that it doesn't change or lessen your achievements. It merely helps you get to where you want to be on time.

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