

Fruits & Vegetables Transcript Feb 15, 2024

Mary Perry

We have a hot topic here that's come across our Instagram feed on the role of fruits in the Zone diet. But today we're going to really talk about the science behind vegetables and fruit and how they fit within the Zone.

Dr. Barry Sears

One thing that we're always told is you should eat your fruits and vegetables. That's not quite right. It should say we should be told you should always eat your vegetables and fruits, because the vegetables, as I'll try to explain in this podcast, are very much more powerful players in controlling metabolism and therefore controlling your future than fruits are.

And there's three reasons for this. One is the ratio of protein to carbohydrate that's different between fruits and vegetables. Another is their polyphenol content. And the third, their amount of fermentable fiber. So this sounds kind of complex. Well, it is, but so is your metabolism. So is how your diet controls metabolism. And the more science you know, the better you can control your metabolism.

So let's take the first point. The balance of protein to carbohydrate. One of the keys to living in the Zone is balancing protein and carbohydrate at every meal. Now, if you take vegetables and especially the ABCs, that's asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, they have an ideal ratio of protein to carbohydrate. They maintain the hormonal balance needed for the Zone diet to be effective.

Another aspect is what's called the glycemic load. That is, how much of a fruit or vegetable do I have to have before I basically take in too many carbohydrates. It's easy to overconsume fruits, it's almost impossible to overconsume vegetables, and especially the ABCs. So again, now we look at on the scorecard. Vegetables, they're probably better than fruit in regards to this.

Another aspect is the amount of polyphenols. Polyphenols are the chemicals that give fruits and vegetables their color, but they do far more. They're basically powerful modulators of our genes, but only if they get into the blood. And so now we have the aspect of looking at the polyphenol contents. Now they're important, but they're not found in fruits and vegetables in very high concentrations.

Maybe .02 of 1% of the weight of a piece of fruit are polyphenols. Vegetables, about half that, about 1/10 of 1%, which means I've got to eat a lot of fruits and vegetables to get enough polyphenols. Assuming they get in the bloodstream. Now, there's other sources of polyphenols, one is called spices. Now, do you often use spices in your cooking?

Mary Perry

Always

Dr. Barry Sears

Now they are very high in polyphenols, about 5% of the weight. Now, would you take a tablespoon of curcumin and basically put in your mouth?

Mary Perry

No.

Dr. Barry Sears

No, it's bitter! Polyphenols are incredibly bitter. And so that's why people like to eat fruits more than vegetables, because fruits have more simple sugars to cover up the taste of polyphenols.

And finally, why do we want to basically look at fiber? There's two parts of fiber. There's the insoluble fiber and the fermentable fiber. And so I don't it. Fiber is fiber. Wrong. Both parts of fiber are useful. Now in terms of the insoluble fiber, this is what is really a bulking agent. It makes the stools larger. Okay. They go through the GI tract easier, but they have no metabolic benefits.

You find these insoluble fibers primarily in whole grains, nuts, beans. So they have fiber. But the fact is, it's not the fiber that can really help you out. The fiber that can help you out is the fermentable fiber. We can't absorb it, but the bacteria in our gut can break it down to basically what we call short chain fatty acids.

Short chain fatty acids are things like butyric acid. Well, one might say, "I'll just take butyric acid from the health food store. Probably not a good choice because butyric acid is also the primary component of vomit. So these characteristics somewhat complement, but the bacteria can break it down. And basically this provides the source of energy for the bacteria and the cells that line the gut.

Not only the small intestine, but also the colon, which is most of our gut and most of our action takes place there. So if the cells lining the gut are not being fed, they're not going to work very well. What does that mean? Little microbes start getting in the blood and causing more problems. But these short chain fatty acids do more.

They're also signaling agents. They act as traffic signals to control the flow of information. And so basically, this is why fermentable fiber is so important in your diet. Now, we go back to the aspect of fruits and vegetables. They're both good. However, we have the the ranking reversed. Rather than saying fruits and vegetables, we should be saying vegetables and fruits.

And really we should be saying not fruits and vegetables, but the ABCs and fruits and primarily the ABCs.

Mary Perry

One question I had as you were talking, you highlighted the ABCs for the vegetables. But even though you are recommending that fruits are consumed less, I know you have fruits that are higher on your list than others. So can you share what your top fruit picks are?

Dr Barry Sears

Well, it's not my top picks. It's basically what the science tells us. The fruits that have the greatest impact on health are berries. Well, great. I love berries. Now, remember, we talked about the sugar content of berries? So if you really want the health benefits, eat the berries that have the least sugar content.

So what is the least sweet berry? We eat it on Thanksgiving all the time. Cranberries. Ugh, it's bitter! Well, you're getting your polyphenols. That's why it's bitter. So berries are more concentrated and have less of the sugars of other fruits. So again, so our our scientific knowledge says yes, berry consumption, if we look at all fruits, has the greatest health benefits.

Now, do you want to eat cranberries the rest of your life? No way. So again, great sources would be things such as blueberries. They can be a little bitter and that's because they don't

have as much sugar. So, again, if your focus is looking at fruit, really focus on the berries. So we should say vegetables and berries are your greatest choices for a longer and better life.

Mary Perry

Perfect. And one other thing I wanted to highlight, too, Dr. Sears, that you've talked about, especially with females as we age, is that it's really important, this concept of having vegetables be the primary source of your vegetable and fruit intake over fruits, because as we age, our estrogen levels go down and insulin goes up. So we're also more susceptible to these sugars that you were just talking about that come in fruits.

Dr. Barry Sears

Well, that's true for women. It's also true for males. As we age, we have to be more careful about the glycemic load of the diet we're consuming because our body, our metabolism, is no longer as efficient as it was an earlier age. And therefore we have less room for making mistakes. And that's why you can't go wrong—and your grandmother knew this—by saying you can't leave the table until you eat all your vegetables.