

Discipline in Eating

by KC Stallsmith

Having discipline in eating is not totally new for me. I have always been experimenting with different types of eating since I was 15 years old. However, between the ages of birth to 14, I ate whatever my mom made for me, and then some. There were no restrictions on my eating, my parents let me basically eat whatever I wanted. This meant that I could have Ding-Dongs, Ho-Hos, Twinkies, ice cream every night, and lots of bread, butter, cookies, crackers, chips, and chocolate along with considerable quantities of other unmentionables.

I now know this is a recipe for disaster as far as optimal health and nutrition goes. I was a sickly kid, overweight, un-athletic, depressed, and diagnosed with asthma and many other allergies. I had asthma so bad that I owned a breathing machine I puffed on daily and took with me on sleepovers as a kid. My weekly trip to the allergist for shots was the norm. To be honest, it really sucked to be a kid like this. My parents did their best, but I received no nutritional education from them, only that I should always be part of the 'clean plate club' which meant devouring every last morsel on my plate. As one of my favorite yogic authors, Swami Chidvilasananda states in her book *The Yoga of Discipline*, "Food is supposed to be healing, to have medicinal properties. But when eating habits become unnatural, then food turns into poison. What is meant to be life-sustaining becomes life-threatening."

When I turned 15 my brother gave me the book "Diet for a New America" by John Robbins and this book changed my life. I became vegetarian overnight, mostly to be like my brother, but also because I started to believe that I had a choice and wanted to take charge of my eating to attain optimal health. A short time later I decided to go vegan, eating absolutely no animal products including dairy (milk, cheese, etc.) This lasted 17 years, over half my life so far. I began to have respect for the kind of food I ingested and felt responsible for my health. As Swami states, "Everyone should take great care of his health because health is great wealth."

I felt better eating this way, but still didn't have the discipline part figured out. I ate vegan, but I ate LOTS of it, and didn't really keep track of what macro and micro nutrients were going into my diet, and totally didn't keep track of portion size or meal frequency. Then something happened and *everything* changed.

By luck, by chance or by divine blessing I met a trainer who kept me accountable to what was going into my body by asking me to keep a food journal. In addition to this, I began eating a strict paleolithic diet as an experiment. At present, two and a half years later I still write down everything I eat, every day, and this practice helps me keep my integrity with my food choices and more importantly, my food intentions.

The paleo diet is defined as eating lean meat, fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, NO sugar, and very little starch, and that is it. This means no bread, pasta, beans, rice, legumes,

soy, dairy, milk, cheese, or processed foods of any kind. Basically, food according to this philosophy should only have one ingredient, and that is the food itself.

So I began my journey on this path and it has been the greatest decision of my life. I have developed great respect for food, for whole foods. I have learned great restraint towards foods that do not take me to that which is life affirming. As Swami states, "If restraint is difficult for you, if you have a tendency to go toward foods that are detrimental to your health, then you must learn to exercise great vigilance about food.....add reverence to restraint."

This simple exercise of awareness and consciousness about food and nutrition has expanded my mind universally. By putting only the purest foods into my body, and being consistent with portions and frequency (5 small meals spread throughout the day, high in protein, moderate in fat, and low in carbohydrate) it allows my body the healthiest vehicle for physical performance, as well as mental consciousness. The increasingly measurable athletic performance gains I have made are notable. And the mental clarity I experience is ever expanding.

The choice to eat a paleolithic diet, or simply to have an awareness of what foods you choose to go into your body can only be made by yourself.

Swami reminds us, "What is within our power is the ability to choose from what is before us. And we should feel very fortunate, because there are thousands of people on earth who don't have this privilege. They can't even get enough food to nourish themselves, let alone have some choice about what they eat. Keeping this in mind, with gratitude for our good fortune, we should take full advantage of this gift of abundance and use it wisely. The Upanishad says that if your food is pure, it will make your mind pure. With a pure mind, your character, your personality, and your higher understanding will all evolve."

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