

Circadian Dieting

If you have ever been interested in dieting or making sure that you are on the right nutritional program, this article might be the most important you will ever read. For years I have been researching different dietary programs to determine what foods are the best for achieving optimal health. This has been an arduous task since there are so many different variables between each individual. However, in a new book by Sidney M. Baker, MD titled The Circadian Prescription, he points out that one constant that effects all human beings and the way they respond to different foods is circadian rhythm.

Circadian rhythm is the natural biologic sequence of events that occurs in our bodies with each passing day. It is the internal clock that dictates not only when it is time to wake up or go to sleep, but also when it is time for specific physiologic processes to take place in the body. This orderly sequence is a result of thousands of generations of evolution, and is programmed by cues such as light and darkness, social stimulation and specific foods that drive our system. For example, in the morning, your body is required to perform duties of consciousness and action. At night, the main processes of the body are directed towards repair and detoxification. Throughout the entire 24-hour span, specific organ systems work in "shifts" to accomplish their specific tasks. For example, the liver accomplishes most of its detoxifying on the night shift. The peak of your capacity for performing muscular activities occurs just a little after 6:00pm. And brain activity peaks around 2:00pm. Each body system has different times of maximum efficiency; therefore we should make sure that we eat foods that will support those functions at the right time. That is what the circadian diet is all about. We are not only what we eat, but also when we eat.

Since most of the daytime activities require muscular action and brain function, human beings would be best suited to eat proteins in the morning and at lunch. These proteins drive the adrenergic chemistry that is needed for the initiation of these activities. Adrenergic means adrenal gland modulated. These glands located at the top of your kidneys, produce hormones and neurotransmitters that are responsible for controlling consciousness and action. They include cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine. Studies have shown that these chemical messengers are at their peak concentration in the blood during daylight hours. Eating protein in the first part of the day will ensure that the body has the raw material necessary to produce these important chemicals so they can carry out necessary daytime functions. Conversely, it is important to eat carbohydrates in the evening, since most of the nighttime activities of the body require sugars for energy. Most people believe that at night your body is resting, but in fact, your body is doing healing and repair work, as well as detoxification. Carbohydrates provide a large amount of fuel your body requires overnight for the synthesis of new molecules. They also sustain your blood sugar levels throughout the night so that the liver can use this energy for detoxification. Carbohydrates at night also relieve insomnia, since fundamental sleep chemicals like tryptophan use sugars to transport themselves into the brain.

Eating primarily proteins in the morning will prevent sugar regulation problems like insulin resistance, syndrome X, hypoglycemia, and the mid-day blahs. It is also a great idea for anyone who is trying to get to their optimum weight, since excessive carbohydrates have been directly linked to obesity and fat storage. Limiting carbohydrates is part of a big craze in this country, and people are becoming aware of the adverse effects excessive carbohydrates have not only on weight but cardiovascular health. This program agrees with the idea of carbohydrate restriction, but also emphasizes the important role they do play in our health. If you are on a low or no carb diet, you might want to reevaluate the situation and limit necessary carbohydrates to the evening hours. Not only will adding carbohydrates help your internal organs perform their healing and detoxification functions better; you will achieve a better nights sleep.

The Circadian diet is the one nutritional program that is good for everyone, since circadian rhythm is the one constant that we all live by. Eating proteins in the day and carbohydrates at night makes sense since the body requires those foods during those times. It is one plan that is not so concerned about what you eat, but when you eat it, and just might be one of the most important pieces of the nutritional puzzle.

Dr. Bernhard J. Sengstock is a licensed Chiropractor in the state of New York with 300 hours of post-doctorate training in the field of Rehabilitation. Clinical Nutrition is a large part of his practice located at Universal Health & Rehabilitation, 152 Islip Ave., Suite 23, Islip, NY 11751. For more information on the Circadian Diet and individualized nutritional programs come to our FREE Health Care Workshop on August 16, 2000 @ 7:30pm. Please call (631) 277-6767 for a consultation and appointment.