BY LINDA HUTCHISON

The holidays are a time to enjoy friends, family, and food. But indulging ourselves may lead to more than gaining a few pounds. What we eat affects our brains and moods as well.

For more than forty years, UC San Diego School of Medicine nutritionist Vicky Newman has been researching and teaching the benefits of eating well to maximize physical and mental health. When it comes to diet, Newman’s motto is “Go for the bold, big color and strong flavor.” She says that choosing unprocessed and naturally colorful and flavorful foods can directly brighten our mood and strengthen our motivation, energy level, and ability to cope with stress.

Newman’s approach to eating for mental health includes four main recommendations: normalizing blood sugar, and getting enough lean protein, B vitamins, and essential fatty acids. All of these impact how well the brain functions and, therefore, how we feel.

1. Normalize blood sugar. Sugar is the brain’s primary fuel, and it’s important to keep blood sugar levels from getting too high or too low. Symptoms of impaired blood sugar control include fatigue, irritability, poor concentration, and forgetfulness. Frequent mood swings from highs to the low “sugar blues” are a direct reflection of out-of-control blood sugar levels.

To keep levels within normal range, Newman recommends limiting carbohydrates (especially sugar, refined grains, and potatoes), eating whole foods low in sugar and high in fiber, eating regular meals with some protein and healthy fat at each meal, and being physically active. She also suggests staying away from sodas, even those with artificial sweeteners. “Artificial sweeteners stimulate the appetite and contribute to weight gain,” she said.

2. Get enough lean protein. Lean protein provides amino acids, which help the body produce serotonin and dopamine. Our brains need these neurotransmitters to function well, to keep our mood levels up, to enhance sleep, and to maintain motivation. Because antidepressants have side effects, Newman thinks it is important to “do what we can with diet.”

We should aim for between 0.4 to 0.9 grams of protein per pound of body weight daily. For example, a 120-pound woman should eat about 72 grams of lean protein a day, and a 180-pound man should eat 108 grams of protein.

3. Choose foods rich in B vitamins, choline, and magnesium. A lack of these vitamins and essential nutrients can cause depression, anxiety, emotional instability, confusion, forgetfulness, irritability, and inability to cope with problems. The best sources of B vitamins and magnesium are dark-green leafy vegetables, legumes, whole grains, seeds, nuts, meat, fish, poultry, and milk products. Dark chocolate is also a good source of magnesium, although Newman suggests small amounts. The best source of choline is egg yolks. Newman recommends eating eggs cooked without fat or just a small amount of olive oil and avoiding the less healthy foods often served with eggs, such as breakfast meats, sweet rolls, and pancakes.

4. Eat more foods rich in omega-3 fats. Studies have shown these fats (especially DHA and EPA) can help with both heart health and brain functioning, with less depression and memory loss. Newman recommends enjoying small fatty fish (like sardines) two to three times per week, as these are excellent sources of these anti-inflammatory fats. Other good sources of these essential fats include wild salmon and pastured (not feedlot-fattened) livestock, as well as flax and chia seeds.

For those who need encouragement, Newman suggests talking to your health care provider about the benefits of eating well for mental health.
Directions Garren Auditorium from I-5 North or South
• Exit La Jolla Village Drive and drive west on La Jolla Village Drive.
• Turn right onto Villa La Jolla Drive.
• Go straight into Gilman Parking Structure.
• From Gilman Parking Structure, cross the street toward the Stein Clinical Research Building.
• Cross the lawn to the Medical Teaching Facility Building (MTF).
• Walk under the MTF building bridge, continue along the sidewalk to enter the Biomedical Sciences Building through large sliding glass doors.

• Turn left at the first hallway. Garren Auditorium is in Room 1105.

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Recent Advancements in Geriatrics
Roopali Gupta, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Primary Care Physician, Primary Care and Geriatric Medicine
UC San Diego Health System
January 21, 2015, 5:30–7:00 p.m.
Garren Auditorium, Biomedical Sciences Building, UC San Diego

JANUARY’S LECTURE
Just as a pediatrician tends to the needs of a child, a geriatrician cares for the special needs of older adults. Learn more about the recent advancements in geriatrics from Roopali Gupta, MD. She provides primary care for older adults, with an emphasis on health maintenance, disease prevention, and treatment of acute and chronic illnesses.

Dr. Gupta values the importance of creating a strong relationship with patients—as well as family members and caregivers—and strives for individualized decision making in the context of high quality medical care.

She also holds a passion for medical education and has been the recipient of regional and national academic teaching awards to further her development as a clinician-educator. As an assistant professor of medicine, she trains medical students, residents, and fellows at UC San Diego School of Medicine, and has presented her medical education research nationally.

Dr. Gupta earned her medical degree at University of Michigan Medical School. She completed her residency and fellowship training at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and is board-certified in geriatric and internal medicine.

What Can We Learn about Cognitive and Emotional Aging from a Blood Sample
January 8, 8:00 p.m.
January 9, 10:00 p.m.

What do blood tests show? And what can information can they provide about our aging brains? Join Lisa Eyler, PhD, as she makes sense of it all. Dr. Eyler is an associate professor in UC San Diego’s Department of Psychiatry and the associate director of the Neuroimaging Unit of the San Diego VA Mental Illness, Research and Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC). Her research focuses on the biological basis of neurocognitive and emotional functioning in aging, development, and mental illness.

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Marianne McDonald

BY LINDA HUTCHISON

Marianne McDonald may be an expert in classical literature, but she prefers to live in the present. “There are so many good things in my life,” she said. “It’s important to be here now and appreciate everything fully. Nothing else matters.”

At seventy-seven, Marianne could deservedly rest after a lifetime of scholarly and philanthropic achievement, but she has no plans to retire soon. She is a Distinguished Professor of theatre and classics at UC San Diego, the first professor—and the first woman—in the department to earn that title.

“I love teaching. I love having students, love talking to those eager for knowledge,” said Marianne, who works with doctoral candidates. “I learn new things with each new student.”

In addition to teaching, Marianne writes and publishes constantly. In all, she has written and translated hundreds of articles, books, plays, and poems. Her most recent book is Space, Time, and Silence: The Craft of Athol Fugard (Fugard is a South African playwright who teaches at UC San Diego). She is currently writing her autobiography and articles on American directors and Irish playwright Seamus Heaney, who died last year.

Marianne was born in 1937 in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother was an American pianist who spoke several languages, and her father an Irish immigrant who went to work at the age of twelve to support his family in New York City. Deaf in one ear, he invented the Zenith hearing aid and started the Zenith Radio Corporation. Marianne credits her father with instilling in her a love of learning and helping others. She also enjoyed her early education in Greek and Latin in Catholic schools.

When Marianne’s father died in 1958, he left Marianne and her brother his fortune. At that point, she could have chosen to live a life of leisure, but instead she graduated magna cum laude from Bryn Mawr College with degrees in classics and music, earned a master’s degree from the University of Chicago, and then a doctorate from UC Irvine. Marianne then went on to teach and study in France, Ireland, and Greece, earning many awards and honorary doctorates, honorary Irish citizenship, and induction into the Royal Irish Academy. While teaching at UC Irvine, she funded and helped create a computerized compilation of Greek literature, the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae. She later created the Thesaurus Linguae Hiberniae for Irish literature in Ireland.

In 1960, Marianne bought her current home in Rancho Santa Fe, a rambling Spanish colonial revival estate. It was originally built for Reverend Ellis Bishop in 1929 by Pasadena architect Sylvanus Marsten and is sometimes referred to as the Bishop House.

Widowed twice, Marianne had six children (two daughters and four sons) and now has nine grandchildren. She has been married more than twice but declined to reveal the exact number: “Less than Elizabeth Taylor,” she said.

Marianne’s life has included many challenges. Like her father, she is deaf in one ear, but she never considered herself handicapped. “We have to overcome handicaps,” she said. She lost her brother and one of her daughters to a combination of drugs and gun violence. Her brother committed suicide, and her daughter died in a bizarre shooting accident while taking drugs. Both were in their twenties.

As a result, much of Marianne’s philanthropy has included helping those with drug and alcohol problems, and she is active in Al-Anon, an organization for friends and families of problem drinkers. She is the founder of the McDonald Center at Sharp Hospital, one of the most successful treatment centers in the country. In 2008, she was inducted into the San Diego Women’s Hall of Fame.

Today, Marianne shares her home with a caretaker, who has lived on the property with his family since 1979; a boarder; occasional visitors; and five rescue dogs from the Helen Woodward Animal Center. The two larger dogs guard the exterior of the house and protect the peacocks. Three small terriers, which she calls her “holy terriers,” keep her company in the many book-filled rooms. Marianne tutors students, takes private tai chi lessons, and enjoys healthy meals cooked by a personal chef: lots of fresh veggies and fruit, whole grains, and salmon—no sugar.

She savors her solitude and gets up at 4:00 a.m. without an alarm clock. “I love the dawn,” she said. Despite having had a shoulder and two hip replacements, Marianne works out in her home gym for an hour and a half every morning before work. She enjoys reading and plays the piano and harp. She also finds a half hour every day to meditate and attends the Buddhist temple in Vista. Although Marianne embraces the mythology of her Catholic upbringing and other religions, she finds solace in the Buddhist philosophy of acceptance and compassion, which is not unlike her own view of life.

Marianne’s advice for healthy aging is “Don’t complain unless you can change something for the better. Don’t dwell on the past and be a taker, which can leave you bitter and unhappy. Be a giver.”

Do you know a Successful Ager?

If you know someone who is an example of successful aging, please contact us at (858) 534-6299 or aging@ucsd.edu with the person’s name and contact information and a brief description of why you feel he or she is successfully aging. We will feature some of these individuals in future newsletters.
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provider for a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN).

Since 1984, Newman has been a member of the voluntary faculty at the UC San Diego School of Medicine as an associate clinical professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine. For nearly twenty years, she was also the director of nutrition services for the Cancer Prevention and Control Program at UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center. She has written extensively, and her latest book is Food for Thought—Healing Foods to Savor.

Though retired from full-time work this year, Newman plans to continue sharing her “Go for the BOLD” message with consulting, telephone coaching, and teaching through a variety of organizations such as OASIS, the UC San Diego Retirement Association, and Rancho La Puerta Spa in Tecate, Mexico.

“I’ve enjoyed most helping people appreciate and experience the healing power of food,’’ she said.

Newman attributes her love of good food to her father, who owned a restaurant in La Cañada Flintridge for several years. “My dad was fond of telling folks that he taught his wife and his three daughters how to cook,’’ she said.

For More Information

Vicky Newman’s website:
http://www.mindfulnutritionsolutions.com
Food for Thought—Healing Foods to Savor


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