

# Take Pleasure in Your Food!

**Several years ago, my partner David taught a photography workshop at a small villa in southern Italy.**

Up early one morning, David drank his coffee with a couple of students while the owner prepared breakfast and sang operatic arias. The owner spoke passionately about Italians' love of food and family being at the heart of their culture. "Yes, food is very important to us. We care about the preparation and the serving and the sharing of it. We have an expression, '*the food is under the table*'. What really matters is not so much the food itself, but the way we serve and eat and the connection of the people coming together!"

Beneath the theories and ideas of what we should or shouldn't eat, there is in each of us a longing for nourishment of a deeper sort. This deeper nourishment may be even more important for our health than the actual food we eat. Just as we need vitamins and minerals and amino acids, we need the nourishment derived from the pleasure of eating and the pleasure of gathering with others.

**How we eat may be at least as important for our health as what we eat!** Even the most nutritious food, eaten while we are anxious or angry, is difficult to digest. The most delicious, most artfully prepared meal will be wasted on us when we are eating in a rushed or stressful mood. Too much anxiety over what we should eat and rigid correctness in our diet spoils the pleasure of eating and contributes to eating disorders and obesity.

Let's bring to our eating a sense of what really matters and create mealtimes that are harmonious, relaxing, friendly and beautiful. Here are a few suggestions.

## **1. Sit down while you eat.**

One of my clients effortlessly lost ten pounds by committing to this practice. Eating on the go made for poor digestion and left her feeling chronically hungry. Sitting while she ate brought new awareness and a sense of satisfaction to her eating.

## **2. Gather together around a table with family and friends.**

Studies consistently show that children benefit from growing up in families that frequently eat meals together. Adolescents in these families have lower rates of depression, suicide, eating disorders and drug and alcohol use and are better at reading, school performance and social skills.

I haven't seen any studies about the positive effects of shared mealtimes on single people and adults, but I am willing to bet it aids in longevity, happiness, immunity and feelings of well-being.

## **3. Create an environment for eating that is relaxed and pleasurable.**

- Treat yourself and those you love to a beautifully set table. This is a sensory reminder to slow down, to notice and to appreciate your meal and the people you are with.
- Decorate your table as a celebration of your daily meals. This can be very simple and very inexpensive. Use a candle, a fabric cloth, a bowl of fruit, flowers or special objects. Decorate with whatever makes you feel happy to be alive.
- Play music that helps you feel relaxed and peaceful.
- Soft lighting is not only romantic but calming to your nervous system and conducive to digestion.

## **4. KISS: Keep It Simple Sweetie!**

In my early twenties, newly married, I thought that any time we had company I needed to serve impressive meals. Not surprisingly, we didn't entertain often. Now, I think of gathering with people, rather than entertaining, and I know that serving simple foods with a loving spirit is enough.

As the opera-singing Italian chef told David, there are many years when most Italians have very little money. But even when all they have is the simplest and least expensive food, they enjoy it fully. That is what matters.

## **6. Notice the emotional qualities you bring to your eating**

- Rushing, guilt, anxiety and discord make for poor digestion and absorption of nutrients.
- Avoid harsh conversations, distractions and multi-tasking.
- Cultivate enjoyment, relaxation, pleasure, friendly interaction.

## 7. Pause for a few moments of gratitude before eating.

Living in gratitude enhances your immune system, lowers pain and brings a sense of well-being to every cell of your body. Even a few moments of gratitude prepares your body to receive the value of the food, physically and emotionally. Some ways to enjoy basking in gratitude:

- A formal prayer.
- Holding of hands.
- Silent appreciation for all the beings who contributed to the meal.
- Shared breath of appreciation. Ahhh. This earth. This food. This table. These people. This moment.
- A poem of gratitude.

## 8. Enjoy the people you are with.

- Whether you are eating alone, with one person, or a group, wake up and notice.
- Appreciate the ones you are with. Take in their gifts. Look at them and listen to their stories.

## 9. Enjoy your food.

- While you are eating take time to sense and appreciate the food. Savor with all your senses the colors, fragrances, textures, tastes.
- Any foods on your *avoid list* can be a delightful treat occasionally. I don't eat pecan pie very often but when I do, I really let myself love it. Throw out guilt and embrace the pleasure of eating.
- Eating with pleasure and appreciation will help you feel deeply satisfied.

Let your meals be a celebration of life and the bounty of the earth. When we live with care for the everyday pleasures we bring healing and deep nourishment to our bodies, our hearts, our relationships and our world.

# Bon Appetite!

Transformational wellness coach, Lea Houston, MA, helps people of all ages create lives of health, vitality and well-being. Get her Free Special Report, **Let It Be Easy**, and a free subscription to her popular e-zine, **Self Care Celebration!**, rich with soulful and practical resources, tips and inspiration at <http://www.SelfCareCelebration.com>

WANT TO USE THIS ARTICLE IN YOUR E-ZINE, CLASS OR WEBSITE? Great! Just use the whole article and include this complete tag with it: Lea Houston, MA, transformational wellness coach and inspirational speaker, publishes the *Self Care Celebration!* e-zine twice a month. If you're ready to create a life of vibrant health, wellbeing, ease and vitality, get your free report and sign up for the e-zine at [www.SelfCareCelebration.com](http://www.SelfCareCelebration.com) Contact Lea for coaching and speaking: [lea@leahouston.com](mailto:lea@leahouston.com)