Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 4:1

A PUBLICATION OF PRIMAL HEALTH

Food Isn't as Simple as It Looks — Part One

Why "Real Food" Matters More Than Ever

Nutrition Advice Can Feel So Confusing

If you've tried to follow nutrition advice over the years, you've probably noticed how often the rules seem to change.

One year fat's the problem. The next year it's carbohydrates. Sugar takes center stage for a while, and then suddenly the conversation shifts to calories, portion sizes, or protein.

With so many shifting messages, it can start to feel as though eating well requires learning a complicated and constantly evolving system of rules. Even while I was getting my Masters in Nutrition, the discussions/arguments we had demonstrated how differing our opinions and biases were.

But here's something worth remembering: the human body hasn't changed nearly to the degree as the nutrition advice has.

For most of human history, food was fairly simple. Meals were built from foods that looked like what they were — vegetables, fruits, meat, eggs, dairy, grains, nuts, and seeds. Those foods might be cooked, fermented, or preserved in different ways, but they still resembled the foods that came from the land or from animals.

Over the past several decades, however, a large portion of the modern diet has shifted toward something quite different: manufactured food products.

These foods are often built from refined starches, added sugars, vegetable oils, stabilizers, and flavor enhancers. Many are designed to be extremely convenient, shelf-stable, and very appealing to the taste buds.

Because these products are now everywhere, it can actually be surprisingly difficult to recognize how different they are from the foods our bodies originally learned to process.

And that difference turns out to matter much more than most people realize.

Why the Structure of Food Matters to Your Body

One of the things people often notice when they start paying attention to food is

that some meals seem to hold them for hours, while others leave them hungry again surprisingly quickly.

You might eat one meal and feel steady and satisfied well into the afternoon. Then another meal — even one that looked perfectly reasonable — leaves you looking for something else an hour or two later.

Many people assume the difference must come down to portion size or calories.

But often the explanation is much simpler than that.

Very often, it has to do with the **structure of the food itself.**

What Happens When Food Digests Slowly

Let's look at a simple example.

When you eat foods that remain close to their natural form — things like vegetables, whole fruits, beans, eggs, or meats — your body has to work its way through that food gradually.

Dr. Marlene's
NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

For subscriptions and customer service inquiries:
877-300-7849 · support@primalhealthlp.com

Natural Health Connections is a monthly publication of Primal Health LP.

Primal Health, LP
3100 Technology Drive, Suite 200
Plano, Texas 75074

Fiber slows digestion. Proteins take time to break apart. Natural fats help regulate how quickly food leaves the stomach.

Because digestion happens step by step, the carbohydrates in those foods enter the bloodstream slowly.

This slower process produces a much steadier rise in blood sugar. The hormone insulin, which moves sugar from the bloodstream into your cells, is released in moderate amounts. Energy enters the body gradually instead of all at once.

That steady rhythm is exactly what the body is designed to handle.

Most people notice the effect fairly quickly. Energy feels more stable, hunger signals are calmer, and meals tend to last longer before the next wave of hunger appears.

What Changes When Food Is Heavily Processed

Now here's where the story changes a bit.

When foods are heavily processed, their natural structure is often broken apart.

Grains are a clear example. When whole grains are milled into fine flour and their fiber is removed, the starch becomes much easier for digestive enzymes to break down. Instead of being absorbed gradually, the resulting glucose can enter the bloodstream very quickly.

This is what people often experience as a blood sugar spike.

When blood sugar rises quickly, the body releases a larger amount of insulin to bring those levels back down. If this happens only once in a while,

your system handles it fine.

But when meals and snacks repeatedly create these rapid spikes, your system has to try to adapt to this new, unfamiliar, and most importantly, not-normal-for-how-humans-evolved process.

Over time, this pattern can contribute to stronger hunger signals, increased fat storage, and the metabolic disruptions associated with insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.

In other words, the way a food is processed can completely change how the body experiences that food.

Two foods that look similar on a plate can behave very differently once digestion begins.

The Ingredient List Tells a Story

One of the easiest ways to see this difference is simply to look at the ingredient list.

Foods that remain close to their natural form usually contain very few ingredients — and the ingredients are familiar. So when you read them, it's normal words, not chemical words.

Butter is a good example. It contains cream and if it has anything added to it, it's salt and that's it.

Now, sometimes people hear the phrase "eat real food" and imagine it means returning to old-fashioned kitchen practices like grinding flour or churning butter at home. Fortunately, that isn't necessary because I can tell you right now, I won't be doing that and probably you won't either.

So even though this butter is packaged and transported, it's basically in its natural form. You just didn't have to churn it (whew!).

Now compare that with many spreads that sit beside butter on grocery store shelves.

Some contain long lists of ingredients — refined vegetable oils, emulsifiers, stabilizers, preservatives, and artificial flavorings designed to imitate the taste and texture of butter.

From the body's perspective, those are very different "foods".

The simpler, more traditional food tends to digest more gradually and produce a more stable metabolic response, while highly refined foods can often digest quickly and create the blood sugar swings we discussed earlier.

Once you begin noticing this difference, the grocery store starts to look a little different.

Putting This Into Practice: Looking at Food a Little More Closely

Once you understand how food ingredients and structure affect digestion, everyday eating patterns often become much easier to evaluate.

Many foods that appear "normal" at first glance have actually been altered in ways that change how they behave in the body. Because these changes are subtle, people often assume they're making healthy choices without realizing how much processing has occurred.

Bread is a good example.

Traditional bread contained only a few ingredients — flour, water, yeast, and salt — and it was typically fermented slowly. Modern commercial bread, however, is often produced using refined flour along with dough conditioners, preservatives, and additives that allow the bread to be made faster and remain soft for longer periods of time.

Both foods are called bread, but they can behave quite differently in your system once digestion begins.

The same pattern appears with many breakfast foods and snack products. Cereals made from refined grains digest far more quickly than intact grains. Just consider — that flaked, mesh, or "O" shape isn't found in nature. Packaged snack foods often combine refined starches with more sugar, oils and flavor enhancers actually scientifically designed to encourage addiction and overeating.

When you begin looking at foods through this lens, something interesting happens.

You start realizing that many products in the grocery store are not really foods in their original form at all — they are carefully engineered combinations of refined ingredients.

That doesn't mean every processed food must be avoided. Modern life would make that nearly impossible. I still buy crackers, dark chocolate, and wine because I'm certainly NOT going to be making those myself!

But simply becoming aware of how food is constructed can make many nutrition decisions far easier.

Once you recognize the difference between foods that remain close to their natural state and foods that have been heavily reconstructed, the patterns begin to reveal themselves.

Try This Today: Two Small Observations

1. Look at the Ingredient List

Over the next few days, try a simple experiment that can help you notice how different foods affect your energy and appetite.

First, look at the ingredient list on one or two packaged foods you commonly eat. Count how many ingredients appear and notice whether those ingredients are familiar or difficult to recognize. Foods that remain close to their natural form usually contain only a few simple ingredients.

2. Pay Attention to How You Feel

Second, pay attention to how you feel after different meals. Meals built mostly from whole or minimally processed foods can make you feel a bit steadier for several hours. Meals built from refined or heavily processed foods may leave you feeling hungry, tired, or craving something sweet sooner than expected.

This exercise isn't about perfection, and it certainly isn't about eliminating foods overnight.

Instead, just start noticing how different foods behave in the body.

And once you begin recognizing those patterns, many nutrition decisions become much clearer.

What's Next?

Part Two of Food Isn't as Simple as It Looks

Next week we'll look at something that surprises many people once they start reading labels more closely. Some foods that appear perfectly healthy — especially certain breads, grains, and low-fat products — are actually far more processed than they seem.

Understanding how those foods are made will make it much easier to recognize which choices truly support steady energy and long-term metabolic health.

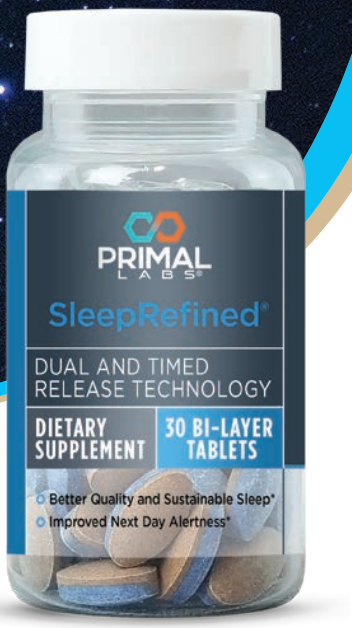
About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,™ a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of Smart Blood Sugar and The Blood Pressure Solution.

Fall Asleep Faster *and* Stay Asleep Longer!



Problems sleeping at night? Not anymore with Primal Labs' **SleepRefined**® and it's unique "dual-release" technology.

SleepRefined® takes the proven better-sleep supplement melatonin to a whole new level of effectiveness.

Melatonin has been clinically shown to reduce the time it takes to fall asleep… improve sleep quality… reset your nighttime sleep cycle… and improve next-day alertness.

But typical melatonin clears out of your body quickly, so it may not work all night long.

Yet **SleepRefined**® provides two layers of melatonin to mimic "all night" melatonin production. The first 2.5 mg is released when you go to bed to activate your natural sleep cycle. Then, throughout the night, the remaining 1.5 mg is gradually released to help you sleep longer and deeper.

That's not all. **SleepRefined**® includes…

- **Suntheanine**, a proprietary form of the amino acid L-Theanine, found in green tea. Its "quick release" dose helps calm your mind and prepares it for sleep.
- **Venetron**, a plant prized in Chinese medicine for calming the mind and soothing anxious nerves. It is also clinically shown to improve sleep quality in the middle of the night and later in the sleep cycle.

With **SleepRefined**® you'll fall asleep faster… stay asleep longer… and wake up refreshed and energized, with no groggy feelings. Safe, natural, non-habit forming.

*"With **SleepRefined**® I sleep better and do not have that sleepy feeling in the morning."* — Barbara

*"**SleepRefined**® works better than any sleep aids I've used!"* — Bets

Fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer when you get your bottle of Primal Labs' **SleepRefined**®!

Order Your Bottle Today!

GetSleepRefined.com/NHC6

For faster service, call 1-888-309-0629

Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST • Saturday-Sunday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST

Q&A

Q: **Why do my joints hurt more when I try to exercise? — Elaine W.**

A: Joint discomfort during activity can come from several different factors, and it doesn't always mean there's damage in the joint itself. Often, the issue is related to the muscles surrounding the joint. If those muscles are tight, weak, or imbalanced, the joint may take on more stress than it's designed to handle. Poor alignment or movement patterns can also place uneven pressure on certain areas, which can lead to discomfort during activity.

When muscles aren't doing their share of the work, joints tend to compensate — and that's when irritation can develop. Over time, this can create a cycle where discomfort leads to less movement, and less movement leads to more weakness and instability. Starting with gentle strengthening, improving flexibility, and focusing on proper form can often reduce discomfort as the body becomes more balanced and supported.

It's also important to distinguish between normal adjustment and warning signs. Mild soreness when starting a new activity can be expected, but sharp, persistent, or worsening pain should be evaluated.

In many cases, modifying the type of exercise can make a big difference. Lower-impact activities like swimming, cycling, or controlled resistance training — allows joints to improve while staying active.

Q: **Can poor gut health contribute to weight gain?— Laura S.**

A: Emerging research suggests that the microbiome may play a meaningful role in weight regulation. Certain gut bacteria can influence how efficiently calories are extracted from food, how inflammation is managed, and even how appetite hormones signal hunger and fullness.

When the gut is inflamed or out of balance, those signals can become less precise. Some individuals may experience increased cravings, less satiety after meals, or more frequent blood sugar swings. An imbalanced microbiome can also worsen insulin resistance, which encourages fat storage — particularly around the abdomen.

There's also a digestive component. If food isn't being broken down and absorbed efficiently, the body may not get consistent access to nutrients, which can affect energy levels and appetite regulation. Over time, that can contribute to irregular eating patterns or increased intake.

Additionally, chronic low-grade inflammation originating in the gut can influence metabolic hormones and make it harder for the body to maintain a steady weight. This creates a situation where even small dietary imbalances can have a larger impact.

While gut health alone doesn't determine body weight, it does influence how efficiently the body processes and responds to food. Supporting the microbiome through fiber-rich vegetables, adequate protein, healthy fats, and reducing refined carbohydrates often helps stabilize both digestion and metabolism.

Q: **Is occasional heartburn normal? — Steven P.**

A: Occasional heartburn can happen, particularly after large meals or when lying down too soon after eating. Certain foods, alcohol, or eating quickly can also contribute to temporary symptoms.

However, frequent reflux may indicate that digestion isn't functioning optimally. Contrary to common belief, heartburn isn't always caused by excess stomach acid.

In some people, low stomach acid allows food to linger longer in the stomach, increasing pressure that pushes contents upward.

That pressure, combined with a relaxed or weakened lower esophageal valve, makes it easier for stomach contents to move in the wrong direction. Over time, repeated reflux can irritate the lining of the esophagus and make symptoms more frequent.

Supporting digestion, slowing down meals, and adjusting timing — especially avoiding late-night eating — often improves symptoms.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.