



By DR. TOM FLASS AND BRITTANY COBURN NP-C

A FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE APPROACH TO HEALTH

Pillar #1 Nutrition

In our previous article, we did an overview of functional medicine and its emphasis on supporting upstream, root-cause principles of health. We believe that there are six core pillars of health that we all need to maintain to restore health to our bodies.

The Six Pillars

1. Nutrition
2. Sleep
3. Exercise and Activity
4. Stress reduction and mental health
5. Connection and Community
6. Nature, Sunlight and a clean environment

Nutrition is always a controversial topic, with loads of opposing strong opinions and beliefs, disinformation, conflicting information and to be honest, very poor guidance from our regulatory authorities. Despite this controversy, it is still one of the most important things to examine in regard to our health.

Why is nutrition important? Western medicine is finally admitting that the majority of premature death and disease in America is directly related to diet and lifestyle. Type 2 diabetes, which costs the US \$350 billion annually is directly related to poor nutrition, as is most heart disease. Alzheimer's disease (referred to in some circles as Type 3 diabetes) in addition to other brain and mental health disorders are also strongly related to diet and lifestyle. Nutrition during pregnancy and early life can impact

a child's health decades down the line but is still not being prioritized. Just about every disease or disorder that afflicts us has its roots in nutrition, yet the western medical system is woefully underprepared to tackle this issue.

Libraries could be filled with the number of diet and nutrition books that have been written (these authors contributions included). Let's take a step back and look at some fundamental principles that cut through the hype and should be the cornerstone of any *healthy eating plan*.

We are not eating REAL food.

The rise in chronic disease in the US directly parallels the explosion of highly processed foods introduced starting in the 1970s and 1980's. A huge proportion of the "food" on our shelves is not really food at all, but more a "food-like substance" made from ingredients extracted and manipulated from what was once real food. During this manipulation, fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients are removed, and preservatives, thickeners and flavor modifiers are added in. It is being revealed that many of these additives are not legal for use in other countries and may have adverse health effects. Highly processed foods are convenient but deadly when consumed chronically.

Choosing *simple whole foods* with natural (as opposed to synthetic) ingredients and cooking for yourself pays dividends down the road. Invest in yourself and your kid's future by cutting way back on highly processed fast foods, snack foods, and convenience foods. Read labels and put back the foods with ingredient lists that read like a chemistry set. Rediscover how delicious *Real Food* can be—meat, vegetables, fruit, nuts, whole grains, herbs and spices!

We are eating WAY too much sugar. Make no mistake, excessive sugar is a killer. Sugar increases your risk of heart disease and diabetes, increases inflammation in your body, messes with your gut bacteria (the microbiome) and may contribute to leaky gut (a root cause of autoimmune and many brain disorders). We are referring to added sugar, not natural sugar in whole fruit. All sugar is not created equal, and the main danger comes from excessive fructose mostly from table sugar (sucrose) or high fructose corn syrup. Americans went from eating a half pound of sugar per year in the early 1900s to eating upwards of 100 pounds per year currently. An interesting fact is that your body cannot use fructose directly for energy, it uses glucose, fat and ketones. Fructose should be considered an energy storage molecule, so it is great if you want to stockpile calories for the winter, which Americans have been excelling at while getting heart disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's along the way.

Do a Sugar Scan and add up the grams of added sugar you or your child gets daily. Do your best to limit added sugar to 26 grams per day for women and children, 36 grams daily for men. Quick tip—Ditch all sweetened drinks, including the fancy coffee drinks that can have 70 grams of added sugar!

Many of us are not getting enough protein, or not enough quality protein.

New research has suggested that the old recommendations for daily protein intake were too low and did not consider protein quality. Proteins are made up of 20 building blocks called amino acids, several of which are more rate limiting and important to get in our diets to build and maintain muscle and other tissues includ-

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ing our bones as we age. An important point to remember is that **MUSCLE=METABOLISM**. Having healthy muscle mass and function as we age has less to do with being buff, and more to do with reducing your risk of diabetes, heart disease, cognitive decline and accidental falls and fractures that pose a major risk to people as they age.

Quick tip- Make all your meals protein based. The average 150 lb woman should try to get 25-30 grams of quality protein with every meal. (e.g. 3 oz of meat, fish or poultry, 4 eggs) For vegetarians/vegans 1 cup of beans or tofu served with rice or quinoa approaches this amount but keep in mind the lower protein quality and digestibility.

We are starving our good gut bacteria. Science continues to demonstrate the importance of a healthy gut microbiome. Almost every aspect of our physiology is impacted by these “belly bugs.” Your digestion, metabolism, hormones, brain function and immune system are all influenced by the types and numbers of bacteria in your gut. The good bacteria don’t run on good intentions, they need fuel in the form of soluble fiber and phytonutrients from vegetables, fruit, and whole grains. Guess what the Standard American Diet is sorely lacking...

If we starve our good belly bugs, things generally don’t go well for us health wise. For adults, getting 8-10 grams of fiber per meal and/or taking a fiber supplement such as psyllium, flax or chia can have a multitude of downstream health benefits. Make fiber a priority in your diet.

If Americans could just start with these basics and stop looking for the “hack” that leads us down the wrong path, we would be a vastly healthier society.

Tom Flass MD and Brittany Coburn NP-C are medical providers at Functional Medicine Associates of Montana and the hosts of “The Aware Families Podcast” available on all major platforms.

Flass is also the author of two books on nutrition “**Feeding Our Children**” and “**Eating for Two**” both available on Amazon.

Coburn is also an associate professor of Nursing for Montana State University.

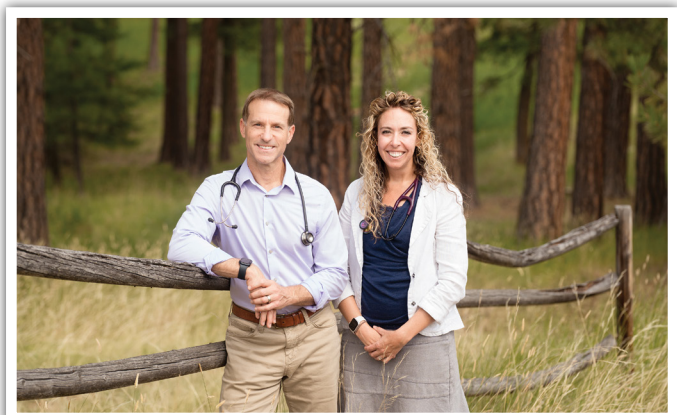


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Personalized Root-Cause Science-Based Healthcare



Tom Flass MD

Brittany Coburn NP-C

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195 Commons Loop Suite D
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 501-6570



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