Enzymes

The Sparks of Life

Anthony J. Cichoke, DC, PhD

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Let's face it: times have changed. We've adopted a modern lifestyle with faster-paced, more hectic days and, probably more significantly, eating habits that include the consumption of industrialized, processed food.

People today are sick. They're overweight and out of shape. Too many of us smoke cigarettes or drink coffee, tea and alcohol, and we're all under too much stress. We don't get enough exercise and we eat too many calories, too much bad fat, too many refined carbohydrates, and too many toxin-filled, over-heated or radiated foods—enzyme-dead foods. And we've got the chronic diseases to prove it.

What's the solution? It's time to return to the basics, back to enzyme-rich foods, including fresh vegetables and fruits. What did you have for breakfast this morning? Bacon and eggs? Toast and coffee? A bagel with processed cream
cheese and reconstituted orange juice? A donut and a Coke? How about dinner last night? When was the last time you ate something fresh and enzyme-rich—something that hadn’t been processed, baked, fried, treated or heated in any way?

What Are Enzymes?
Enzymes are proteins, composed of amino acids, produced by the human body and by all animals and plants. Enzymes are catalysts that either begin or cause a reaction to speed up. Enzymes are fermenters; they help our bodies break down foods. They are at work in any fermentation process and during the metabolic process. Enzymes cause biological reactions in the body without themselves being changed and are able to be used over and over again. Unlike vitamins and minerals, enzymes are not destroyed as they work.

Enzymes are all around us—in every animal and every plant. In fact, anything that is alive needs enzymes in order to function. All living things are run and governed by chemical reactions. In the human body, enzymes are the components that catalyze (or kick start) the chemical reactions that are involved in breathing, digestion, growth, reproduction, blood coagulation, healing, combating disease and everything else that goes on.

Enzymes in the Diet
In fact, our bodies contain some 3,000 different types of enzymes that are constantly regenerating, repairing and protecting us. For most of us, our bodies (if they’re healthy) make many of the enzymes we need to function. In addition, many enzymes are also available in the foods we eat, if those foods aren’t enzyme-dead. What kills enzymes? Heat, primarily. So any food that has been baked, fried, boiled or canned is enzyme-dead.

In addition to canning, any processing, including irradiating, drying and freezing also either kills enzymes or diminishes their viability, as does the addition of preservatives (including salt!). Humans have been cooking their food for only a few thousand years. We evolved in an environment of raw vegetables, fruits and grains, with little meat. Over several million years, our bodies’ metabolisms have genetically
adapted to this diet. Preserving, pasteurizing, processing and chemically tampering with our food has taken place only in relatively recent years, and destroys and eliminates their active enzymes as well as many of their vital nutrients. In addition, some of the chemicals used in food processing are toxic and may be carcinogenic.

**Are You Enzyme Deficient?**

For the human body, surviving in today’s world is a two-step process. First, the body must maintain proper function, with everything in the body working at an optimal level. Second, the body must be strong enough to fight off the adverse effects of toxins originating from outside the body, including pollution, radiation and other free-radical producers. If your body is enzyme-deficient, sooner or later the lack of enzymes will begin to show itself. One of the first and most obvious signs of an enzyme deficiency is poor or disturbed digestion, including excess gas, indigestion, heartburn, diarrhea and constipation.

Other signs include premature skin wrinkles, joint stiffness, gray hair, and a decrease in or a general lack of energy. These are all signs usually associated with aging. After all, aging is nothing more than a gradual breakdown in body function. In fact, as we age, the enzymes produced by our bodies decrease in number and in activity level. In other words, we have fewer body enzymes and those enzymes that we do produce can’t work as hard. Hence, as we age, sustain injuries, incur illnesses and are exposed to more and more stress, we need to eat more enzyme-rich foods and take enzyme supplements.

**How to Shop Smart**

In these days of processed and prepackaged foods, it is important to follow a few simple rules when buying fresh enzyme-rich foods.

- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season.
- Buy only organically grown foods (look for a label or ask the grocer).
- Buy foods with a “fresh” smell (such as tomatoes).
- Buy foods that are locally grown, if possible.
- Buy the “whole” fruit or vegetable. Cutting the food initiates enzymatic changes and also may provide an opening for bacteria to enter.
Energizing Enzymes

Enzyme supplements fall into one of about four major categories: protease, amylase, lipase and antioxidant enzymes. Protease enzymes break down proteins (such as meat and fish). Amylase enzymes break down carbohydrates (such as bread, noodles and pasta). Lipase enzymes break down lipids and fats, while antioxidant enzymes fight tissue free-radicals, which actually cause the tissues to rust. Some enzymes, such as pancreatin and pancelipase, contain protease, amylase and lipase enzymes so they can work on proteins, carbohydrates and fats.

How do they get the enzymes into a supplement? It is possible to isolate individual enzymes from plants and animals and use them as sources of supplemental enzymes for humans to augment those enzymes in our foods. These supplements are sold at every health food store and are available as tablets, capsules, pills and powders. Enzymes can also be administered by injection or by enemas, but this usually occurs in a hospital or clinic setting. There are even topical enzyme products used to treat burns, and enzymes are also used as ingredients in beauty creams.

Increasing Your Enzyme Intake

If you are free of all the symptoms associated with enzyme deficiency, and at least half of the food you eat is whole and uncooked, and you drink unpasteurized milk (which is most unlikely since it’s not available), you will probably get enough enzymes. If this isn’t the case, as it is for most of us, you need to take additional enzymes. There are basically two ways to increase your enzyme intake.

The first is to eat more fresh foods. Since most cooking methods have a tendency to kill off enzymes or render them inert, raw fruits and vegetables are the best sources of food enzymes. Eating fermented foods including sauerkraut, yogurt, kefir and miso is also an effective and tasty way to improve your body’s enzyme status. Improving your diet by eating more enzyme-rich food is one step of the Five-Step Jump-Start Enzyme Program I discuss in my new book, Enzymes: The Sparks of Life. The second way to increase your body’s enzyme status is to take enzyme supplements. Just these two initiatives will help you to stay healthy and prevent and treat disease.

Dr. Anthony Cichoke, better known as Dr. Enzyme, is an internationally recognized author, researcher, lecturer, radio personality and chiropractic physician. His many book titles include The Complete Book of Enzyme Therapy, Enzymes: Nature’s Energizers and now Enzymes: The Sparks of Life, a new Natural Health Guide published by alive Books.