A macrobiotic lifestyle can be valuable to maintain health, to heal an unwanted illness, or to prevent a recurrence, especially if medical therapy is questioned or has been limited or unsuccessful. There are many ways to learn macrobiotic principles and practice. Books, cooking guides and lessons, a personal health consultation with an experienced macrobiotic counselor, support groups, and web sites all offer myriad macrobiotic services. Where is the best place to begin?

BEGIN HERE

In my opinion the most important place to begin a macrobiotic practice is in the kitchen. And, the most important thing to learn in macrobiotic cooking is the application of yin-yang principles. Otherwise you become a slave to recipes without understanding why you are preparing the food you eat. A cookbook can be very useful supplement, but I also recommend cooking lessons from a qualified macrobiotic teacher.

I began practicing macrobiotics without personal guidance. Only after a consultation with a qualified counselor did I realize that I had to change my cooking habits and learn proper macrobiotic cooking. During the twenty-one years that followed I took many cooking lessons with numerous macrobiotic teachers—each has his or her own style, and the details varied according to personal energy and experience. Once I had the fortune to attend a cooking class with Michio Kushi at the Kushi Institute in Becket, Massachusetts. Five different groups of students prepared the same dish using the same ingredients following the same instructions—none of the dishes tasted or looked the same.

My recommendation is to have a consultation with a macrobiotic counselor as soon as possible after deciding to adopt a macrobiotic lifestyle, and to follow that consultation with cooking lessons. If a consultation is postponed for any reason, then begin cooking lessons as soon as possible.

Some people create a weekly menu plan to ensure preparation of all the dishes and cooking styles necessary for their health condition. This schedule can be an intricate and comprehensive task that requires several hours to prepare. It may best be done with a computer spreadsheet to allow for flexibility and easy update.

WHO DOES THE COOKING

A macrobiotic lifestyle means taking responsibility for your own
health—including cooking. If your health condition does not allow you to cook, at least assist in the food preparation for the time being. Consistently allowing someone else to feed you creates a dependency that cannot be sustained over a long period of time. After all, your partner may be working, or may want to spend a day away without having the obligation of cooking your meals. Even if your significant other does most or even all of the cooking, it is important that you be able to put together a meal. Your contribution in the kitchen will be appreciated, and is an important step toward wellness.

Restaurant fare is not a substitute for good-quality macrobiotic home cooking. Restaurant food embodies yang (contractive, stressful, and harsh) energy that is hard to balance. The menu seldom varies and is inevitably full of hidden ingredients that you would not readily choose. The amount of oil and salt used is excessive in order to please the general palate. The menu caters to those seeking a broad, sensorial eating experience rather than presenting food appropriate to a specific health condition. In other words, restaurants are an occasional treat rather than a source of daily nourishment.

**Chew Well**

Chewing is very important for many reasons:

- The beginning of carbohydrate digestion is in the mouth. Since we do not have teeth in our stomachs, we need to chew grains well before swallowing.
- Chewing strengthens the immune system.
- Chewing stimulates the digestive, nervous, and circulatory systems.
- Chewing stimulates the production of saliva, which provides antibacterial properties.
- Chewing aids in maintaining a sense of balance and a calm disposition. Try it for a week and see how much calmer you become.

Chew each mouthful until the food liquefies, especially in order to heal a significant illness. Whole grains become sweeter as the starch is converted to sugar in the mouth.

Even when food is served warm, thorough chewing will soon leave the remaining food on your plate at room temperature. Macrobiotic food cools to room temperature quickly, yet remains tasty through mastication. Chewed food actually warms in the mouth before it is swallowed. Conversely, conventional foods rely on heat for taste, and are often swallowed quickly with a minimum of chewing.

**PREPARING MEALS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS SEEKING CONVENTIONAL FOODS**

Enforcing change in someone else's life is a frustrating experience at best. Initiative for change must come from within. Making “healthy” foods attractive to meat, dairy, egg, and sugar eaters is a challenge that requires extraordinary patience and planning, and an investment of time.

The rewards for this special effort are well worth it as it simplifies the ordeal of cooking separate food for different family members, and makes kitchen management much easier.

At the beginning of macrobiotic practice before cooking habits have been established, other family members may present frustrating demands. You may feel obligated to cook separately for yourself and your family. This is a time for great patience. Contact a macrobiotic counselor frequently to help you through the rough spots and to guide you in shortcut techniques to save time. Here are some helpful guidelines for this situation.

1. Eating on a regular basis with those having animal food and sugar can be chaotic. Waiting until they finish may tempt you to nibble food in order to overcome hunger, or to rush the others to eat quickly. You also need clean up time and other follow-through activities when they finish, leaving you famished and out of control of good eating habits. By eating ahead of the others, you will have calm energy to enjoy your food, chew properly, and ensure that you are properly taking care of yourself. The food you prepare for your family will be warm when they are ready to eat.

2. If you do not have time to finish your meal, eat only part of it, chewing well during the time you have. Leave the rest until a second opportunity arises. It is better to eat less than to be pressured to finish all that you have prepared.

3. Plan, plan, plan. Take the time to design a daily menu for yourself and your family, whether you are eating the same or different food. A Chinese adage says, “If you don’t know where you are going, every road will take you there.” If you haven’t thought in advance about your direction, you may find the experience stressful and unproductive. With experience, planning time will be reduced considerably until you can dispense with many preplanning details.
DEVELOP A SUPPORT GROUP

Support is crucial to maintaining your new lifestyle. Family members are the most important source of daily support, followed by your health counselor and macrobiotic friends. Call on these resources liberally to resolve the various difficulties that arise from time to time.

A support group does not have to be formal, and may consist of one or more friends who share a similar macrobiotic lifestyle. Alternate meals at each other’s homes, or organize potlucks so that everyone contributes a dish toward communal meals. Even if all the participants are new to macrobiotics, you can support each other by sharing experiences. Invite speakers to answer questions that arise, especially at the beginning of your practice.

THOUGHT MANAGEMENT

Your life is a manifestation of your thoughts. Therefore, focus on what you want—a joyful life, pleasant socializing, travel, health, adventure with someone you care for, and the love of your family. If you eschew the negative aspects of why your desires cannot or will not materialize, the universe will grant you the object of those thoughts. Therefore, align your thoughts with what you want.

If you focus constantly on your illness, you perpetuate it. Find moments when you are free of pain and then train your thoughts toward higher goals. This doesn’t mean to avoid pain or difficulty, but rather to accept it and then refocus toward your desire.

Practice gratification as much as possible. Write down all the things in your life for which you are grateful and review the list from time to time. Gratitude opens you to positive, healing energy; complaining in thoughts or words blocks and drains the flow of energy.

For a more detailed understanding of the importance of thought management please refer to the two following websites: www.managingthought.com and www.abraham-hicks.com. Both sites provide excellent and practical life-changing guidance to enhance healing and optimize joy and success in your life.

CONCLUSION

Macrobiotics is a health management tool benefiting every aspect of life. Getting ill is not a punishment or bad luck, but rather an unexpected opportunity to readjust life habits. As you heal, allow your eating and lifestyle patterns to develop, and your thoughts to broaden with the progress of your health. There is no limit to the benefits you will receive as your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self grows and develops.

This renewed energy can only be appreciated through experience. Know that one day you will look back and understand the good fortune you had in becoming ill. Though you did not consciously choose this path for enlightenment, you will see the great opportunities it opens for you as you recover vibrant health. One day you will recognize that your illness has, in fact, healed your life.

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