

Yumtastic healthiness

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1 Introduction

Do you believe
your health is a chore?
Always demanding
you give up some more?

I view healthy eating as a fun challenge. For me it's about finding the right fuel that will help my body to be strong, my mind to be alert, and my energy to be vibrant and balanced. Along the way, I've learned that eating this way is not a nuisance that means I can't enjoy my food. On the contrary; I love eating more now than ever! And it's in no small part because while I'm eating I get to enjoy thoughts about how great I'm going to feel as a result of what I'm putting in my body. If you're eating something and thinking "I'm going to eat this but it's going to come back and haunt me" then you can never truly enjoy your food.

To make changes to
the food that you eat;
it may seem at times
an impossible feat

Changing our physical and mental patterns takes time. If you immediately jump from a conventional western diet into the diet I eat (fairly strict macrobiotic veganism; no meat, dairy, sugar or gluten; only sparing amounts of oil and soy), not only will your mind cry out with shock, but your body may react so strongly that you could even faint (it's happened). The digestive system needs time to learn how to process your new diet.

The good news is that we can change our eating habits, and make the changes stick, by being patient and methodical and reminding ourselves of the benefits of our relationship to food. There is a certain humility and concentration required to remember the big

picture when faced with temptation. I've found that the best way to build up new habits is to run experiments on my eating habits. You'll have better results if you keep the following in mind:

1. Set an attainable yet challenging goal with a very specific timeline. Some good starting examples:
 - I will eat absolutely no sugar or sugar substitutes this week.
 - I will go vegetarian for 1 month.
 - I will drink no coffee for two weeks.
2. Stick to the experiment at all costs. If it means you have to skip a meal or two because nothing that meets your criteria is available, so be it! Do not falter, or your results will be tainted.
3. Don't worry about what happens after the experiment. If you go back to your previous habits completely, that's fine. The point is to flex your habit-changing muscles. Facing a permanent diet change without having some experimentation under your belt is neigh on impossible. Besides, why would you want to commit to a lifestyle before you've tried it and understand the consequences?
4. Don't commit to a permanent or long-term (6 months or more) diet change until you've gotten enough experience to know you can follow through.
5. In between experiments, let yourself gravitate towards foods that attract you. Listen to your body, not your old habits. You probably won't even have to make any life-changing commitments—once you start to feel the benefits of your experiments, you'll naturally start to gravitate towards healthier foods, not because you *should* but because you know what it feels like and you *want* it.
6. Be open to changes in your life more broadly. You may find that when you eat different foods you feel different and you

actually need to act differently to stay in balance. For example, I used to feel out of balance unless I got vigorous cardio exercise every one or two days. Now, with a much lower intake of simple sugars (a little fruit now and then), I feel great with only moderate exercise each day.

2 Recipes

2.1 Flax Crackers

I got the idea for these from some raw foods recipes. The raw foods people would dehydrate instead of cooking in the oven, but other than that they're the same.

I've made a bunch of varieties now, and they all fall into two categories: savory and sweet. The difference is just what you mix in.

This recipe is enough to fill one large baking pan. I like to make two batches at a time because I have two baking pans that fit into my oven. You can make a lot at once — they keep for at least a week out on the counter.

sweet variety

- 1 cup flax seeds (brown or golden)
- about 1 cup water
- half an apple or so (you can probably use the whole thing)
- 1-2 tsp cinnamon
- (optional) brown rice syrup, honey, or another sweetener

savory variety

- 1 cup flax seeds (brown or golden)
- about 1 cup water
- a half or a whole carrot
- 1/4 cup sesame seeds

- 1 tsp spices (curry powder, cumin, turmeric are all good)
 - pinch salt
 - (optional) 1 tsp dulse (a seaweed) flakes
 - (optional) 2-3 leaves lacinato (aka "dino") kale
1. Rinse the flax seeds, drain, then put in a mixing bowl with the water and soak for at least 30 minutes, and no longer than a few hours. It will become a gooey consistency.
 2. Dump a little (1/4 cup or so) of the goo into a blender with either the apple, cinnamon, and sweetener or the carrot, spices, salt, dulse, and kale. Blend it. If you have to add a little more goo or some water to get the blender to blend, that's fine. (You can also blend all the goo if you like. This will make your crackers have a different consistency. Experiment!)
 3. Put everything back in your mixing bowl and stir it together.
 4. Spread the resulting goo onto a parchment-covered baking sheet and bake at 170 overnight, maybe 12 hours, until the crackers are crisp and dry.
 5. Sometimes it doesn't get dried on the bottom; if you can figure out how to turn them over that will speed the process up, or you can just wait longer.
 6. Break them into cracker-sized pieces, and enjoy!

2.2 Diversion: On Seaweed

Seaweed has loads of benefits for your health. The key reasons I use seaweed are:

- It's alkalizing. I actively seek alkalizing foods to balance out the other acid-forming things I eat (primarily brown rice and beans). Most people need this even more, because they eat *highly* acid-forming foods such as coffee, sugar, and alcohol.
- It has loads of good minerals. Once you switch to a superior sea salt, for example, you'll need a good source of iodine. Sea vegetables have that and loads more. Lots of healthy minerals provide what chemists call a "buffer", which helps maintain pH balance in the body even in the face of the occasional acid or alkaline agent.
- It's salty. Sea veggies are a great way to make food saltier while getting a healthy mix of other minerals too.

2.3 Beans

I just got a pressure cooker and I hear that cooks beans in 15 minutes that normally take 4 hours to cook. Nevertheless I'll probably keep cooking them in a slow cooker because it's so easy and automatic.

You may have heard of soaking beans before you cook them. That's fine, and I recommend it if you have plenty of time to soak and only an hour or two to cook. I have discovered, however, that the beans come out even better when you just slow cook them without presoaking them. It has the added benefit of being really easy. Here's my favorite way to cook my favorite bean:

- 2-3 cups adzuki beans. This is a smallish dark-brown bean, which when cooked looks somewhat like a black bean. Scrump-tious.
 - 2-3 whole pieces of wakame seaweed. This adds some saltiness and a whole load of awesome minerals.
 - (optional) a pinch or two of turmeric
1. rinse the beans thoroughly. I find the easiest way is to put the beans in a wire strainer, put the strainer into a pot, fill the pot with water, and swish the strainer around. Whatever works.
 2. put the beans in a slow cooker with the wakame. You can just throw the wakame on top.
 3. cover with water 3x as high as the beans. Getting enough water is critical – the beans will soak up water like crazy, and if they run out they'll burn. Getting too much water will only make them a little watery, so err on the side of too much water until you get the hang of it. You probably need about twice as much water as you initially think, so really go nuts.
 4. cook on the low heat setting for 8 or 10 hours. I like to start them before I go to bed, or before I leave for work.

5. when they're done, you may want to fish out the "stem" of the wakame pieces as the texture is a little chewy (it won't hurt you though).

You can eat these right away, and put the leftovers in the fridge up to a week to reheat in a frying pan.

I also make chickpeas this way. The only difference is that instead of wakame I put a big piece of kombu (another sea vegetable) in, and then remove the entire kombu piece when it's done cooking. The kombu is just there to share its minerals and flavor with the chickpeas.

2.4 Bean Burritos/Wraps

This is my favorite way to eat adzuki beans.

- cooked adzuki beans
 - a few large collard green leaves (best), or brown rice tortillas (also good)
 - (optional) 1/2 tsp umeboshi paste¹
 - (optional) 1 tsp miso – I like a light chickpea miso but whatever miso you have will be fine
 - (optional) 1 tsp kuzu (aka arrowroot)
 - (optional) fresh cilantro and/or parsley
1. If you're reheating refrigerated beans, throw them in the frying pan with a little water. If you cooked them with seaweed, pull out any chunks that may be a little unpleasant texture-wise.
 2. Prepare a "slurry" of miso and/or kuzu. Basically this just means put the miso/kuzu into a small bowl or cup, add a dash of water, and stir it up with a fork. You want it to all mix up but remain fairly thick so it doesn't run out of your burrito.
 3. Prepare your wrap. If you're working with collards, boil a little water and throw the collards in and cover for 1-2 minutes, just enough to make them bright green but still sturdy. If you're working with rice tortillas, heat one in a frying pan.
 4. Put the beans, slurry, and some chopped herbs into your wrap and roll it up. Garnish with a little umeboshi.

¹Umeboshi paste is the puree of a salty and sour pickled plum. It's found in health food stores. It's a great way to add a lot of saltiness and it's super-alkalizing. Use it carefully though as too much salt will throw your system out of balance.

2.5 Roasted Chickpeas

A fantastic high-protein snack. Like the flax crackers, you can make a lot and store them for later, though I recommend keeping these in the fridge.

I use my trusty favorite spices in this recipe, namely cumin, turmeric, and dulse. I've also used ground mustard, curry powder, oregano, and basil. You can really use whatever you want. Dulse adds a saltiness, so if you don't do dulse I recommend adding a little salt.

If you have parchment paper to line your baking dish, you can skip the oil (though you may want to keep it for a little bit of fat flavor).

- 2 cups chickpeas, cooked
- 2 tbsp oil (olive, sesame, sunflower, safflower)
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1/2 - 1 tsp dulse flakes

1. Preheat oven to 375
2. Wash your hands, they're going to get involved.
3. Line a large cookie sheet with parchment paper. Spread the chickpeas onto the sheet, add the spices and oil, and mix everything around with your hands.
4. Rinse your hands again, then bake the chickpeas for 10-15 minutes.
5. Lower the heat to 325, and bake another 10-30 minutes. The longer you bake, the more dried out they will be.

2.6 Quinoa Casserole

This is my favorite quinoa dish. It's well rounded and always satisfies my hunger.

- 2 cups quinoa, soaked 2-12 hours, then rinsed thoroughly. Soaking before washing will make the soap-like *saponins*—naturally occurring substances which protect the quinoa in the wild by making it bitter and harder to digest—come off easier. Getting this right may make a difference in digestibility.
 - 4-5 cups(?) water
 - half a medium or large butternut squash, washed and cut into roughly 1 inch cubes (peeling not necessary)
 - 1 carrot, cut into thick slices
 - 2-4 cups of your favorite dark leafy greens, chopped or torn into 2-4 inch pieces.
 - a few handfuls of pumpkin and/or sunflower seeds
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - a few pinches of salt
1. Preheat oven to 350. Oil an 8x8 or 8x12 pyrex baking dish with some of the olive oil.
 2. In a medium or large pot, start bringing the water to a boil with a pinch of salt. Add the butternut squash and carrot pieces. Let them boil for about 5 minutes, until they just start to get soft.
 3. Stir in the quinoa, and simmer it all for about 10 minutes, until the quinoa starts to absorb the water.

4. Put the mixture into the pyrex baking dish. Add greens, mix it up with the remaining olive oil, and sprinkle the seeds on top.
5. Bake for 10-20 minutes, stir, then bake for another 10-20 minutes.

Other vegetables you can add/use: summer squash, cabbage, parsnips, turnips.

3 A few last thoughts

Here are a few other miscellaneous ideas for making food and life yumtastically healthy:

- **Things to do with popcorn.**
 - eat organic, non-GMO popcorn.
 - substitute flax oil for butter. rich in flavor and health benefits it is!
 - spices to try: cumin, turmeric
 - read the ingredients on your salt. is it just salt or does it have chemical anticaking agents? Celtic sea salt is my favorite.
- **Stop eating completely three hours before bed.** This single change revolutionized my life.
- **Sweeten with fruit.** Forget stevia, splenda, agave, and other sugar-avoidance techniques. Once you wean yourself off sugar, fruit tastes super-sweet and fruit juice is all the sweetener you'll ever need.
- **Learn to respect salt.** Salt has an extremely powerful effect on the body. Use it in moderation, and consider experimenting with a few days or even a week with no salt, just to get in touch with how much of an effect it has on you.
- **Learn to respect water.** Drink when thirsty, before and between meals, and take it easy during and after. I used to drink tons of water and had to supplement with minerals because I was washing them all out every couple of hours. Lots of water is really important when you're constantly adding toxins and lots of sugar and salt to your body. Once you stop doing these things, you need less water.

- **Mix it up between meals.** Eat a variety of foods. Challenge yourself with a new vegetable, bean, or grain each time you visit the grocery.
- **Don't mix it up within meals.** Don't eat too many different foods all at once. The stomach uses different enzymes to digest different foods, and you'll have trouble digesting if you eat e.g. quinoa, popcorn, raw carrots, a sweet potato, and an apple all at once. This is more important for raw foods than cooked foods.
- **Allow yourself to eat less.** As you eat more nutritious food, you'll need less of it than before. This is great, as your digestive system gets time to rest and you get more energy to spend on other non-digestion activities. If you're worried that you might not get enough of this or that nutrient, remember that people fast completely for days on end. Putting off that nutrient for a day or two isn't going to kill you (and you might learn something!) For a powerful lesson on just how resourceful your system is, try fasting.
- **Stay positive.** Your thoughts about your food matter more than the food itself. Visualize your food nourishing your cells and satisfying your hunger. Have fun!