



Energized Eating

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Daos* 4:1) tells us since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of Hashem, one must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthy and helps the body become stronger. Indeed, the *Mishna Brura* (231:5) writes, "I saw men of great deeds, who before they would eat would say, 'Behold I want to eat and drink in order to be healthy and strong to serve Hashem.'"

Just as a car can transport us from one point to another when it is in good working order, so too the body is a vehicle that allows the soul to accomplish its goals in This World. Therefore, one should guard his health to keep his body working properly so he can keep on doing what he is supposed to do.

Today it is known that there are many foods that cause harm to the body – deep-fried foods, foods containing margarine, white flour, sugar and so on. The *Sefer Hachinuch* (147) writes it is a matter of common knowledge among people that one's body is affected by the food he eats – whether for health or for sickness.

Let us take sugar for instance, which is contained in numerous foods. It removes calcium and other essential vitamins from the body. It also causes tooth decay, obesity, complications with the arteries, digestive problems, among other things, *lo aleinu*.

At an institute in New York to help children who need special care, it was decided to give them – about 5,000 children – only whole grain bread, fresh fruit etc. – everything natural without artificial additives, white flour and white sugar. Nearly every child improved astonishingly, as the wild ones became quiet, the apathetic ones became normal, and the children with normal skills began to excel. After the children were cured of their problems, mentally and physically, their parents were taught how to feed them when they return home. The parents reported that as long as they were strict about giving them healthful food, everything was fine. But, after indulging a child in a bag of candy and sweets, there would be a drastic decline in their child's health and behavior. Only after several days of strict diet would their children return to excellent health after that.

Let us mention what some of our greats have commented on this topic:

1) The *Sefer Hachinuch* (117) instructs us only to eat foods that are beneficial for the body and that preserves one's health.

2) In the *Rambam's* ethical will, he tells his son, "Hate harmful foods as a person hates one who wants to murder him."

3) The *Divrei Malkiel* writes that it is certainly forbidden to eat anything that brings forth an illness because of *v'nishmartem meod v'nafshosaihem* (*Devarim* 4:15). Because of this, we must guard ourselves from that which may harm our health. We must bear in mind *bal tashchis d'gufai adif li* (*Shabbos* 129a.), *bal tashchis* with respect to one's body is more important, meaning one's health should always come first.

4) The *Mishna Brura* (170:45) writes that one should eat that which is good and helpful for healing, and not the temporarily-enjoyable sweets.

5) The *Shelah* instructs us to be careful from excessive eating and drinking. He writes that we should only consume that which is healthy for the body, so that we may serve Hashem. When a person follows these guidelines, then each of his meals can be considered a *Seudas Mitzva*.

6) In the words of R' Shmshon Rafael Hirsch: "eat only healthful food and taste nothing of harmful foods. Of non-healthful foods, taste only a little."

7) Here are the astounding words of the *Derech Pikudecha*: A subcategory

of murder, *lo sirtzach*, is one who eats and drinks... to fill his desire, without considering whether the food is healthful or harmful for his body (*Derech Pikudecha, Lo Saaseh, 34, Chelek Hadibur, 4*).

Some compare a person who doesn't watch what he eats to an abandoned house, where the doors are broken, the paint is peeling off, the plumbing system is in disarray, and total chaos reigns. The same can be said of one who mistreats his health.

Another analogy given is that of a car. A car ages better if it is properly maintained. It must be well-cared for and be kept in active use if one wants it to last and continue to function at its best. A major reason a 62-year-old might look, feel, and behave younger than his similar-aged colleagues is because he pays attention to his body's maintenance.

In addition to causing illness, unhealthy eating also affects one's moods and feelings in a negative way. We see today that improper eating can cause many disorders, like hyperactivity. A study at the University of Southampton in England observed 3,781 three-year-olds for one week as the children were fed an exclusively natural diet, containing no artificial colorings or preservatives. During the second week, half of the children continued as before, while the other half ate foods containing artificial food coloring and preservatives. The results showed that those in the second group displayed significantly more hyperactive behavior than the first group.

One can learn much more Torah and with better concentration if only they eat more healthful foods. Successful professional athletes don't eat junk food during their playing season, so as not to hinder their performance. We should do the same, so as not to hinder our performance in the service of Hashem.

Someone once remarked, "When I discipline myself to eat properly, live morally, exercise regularly, grow mentally and spiritually, and not put any drugs or alcohol in my body, then I have given myself the freedom to be at my best, perform at my best, and reap all the rewards that go along with it."

We must also realize that sometimes doctors will treat a patient's specific illness but might not tell him the link between his unhealthy lifestyle and illness. The doctor simply reads the test results and prescribes medicine, without telling the person the cause of the illness. In general, medicine treats the symptom, not the illness. Doctors typically fail to explain to their patients what other modalities can treat this particular illness, and do not help them weigh the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches.

The *Rambam* (introduction to *Seder Zeraim*) writes that a doctor will never prescribe medicine when he can prescribe food. In the words of the Meiri (introduction to his commentary on the Talmud): "one of the soundest principles in medicine is that as long as a doctor can prescribe nutritious food, he should not prescribe medicine." In China, over a hundred years ago, one only paid the doctor when he was well. If one went about his normal daily life free of pain and healthy from disease, then the doctor would receive his money. But, if a patient became ill, then the payments to his doctor would stop, because the doctor hadn't done his job which was to keep his patient healthy. The doctor then had to treat this person for free until he was well again. One would see the doctor on a regular basis for acupuncture, herbs, diet and lifestyle guidance. The doctor would still be under a contract to look after the patient, but he wouldn't be paid again until the patient was healthy.

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