

More On Functional Foods...

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I was delighted to present **Phytochemicals, Functional Foods, Nutraceuticals ... What You Need to Know ... How They Affect Your Health**, to an enthusiastic group of Master Gardeners in July for advanced training.

Issues relating to health have gained a prominent role in our contemporary discussion of food. Healthy eating has become a target of public health campaigns, the marketing of foods, research and government regulations. By definition functional foods are foods or dietary components that may provide a health benefit beyond basic nutrition. Examples can include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fortified or enhanced foods and beverages. They can come from either plant or animal sources. These foods may help prevent disease, reduce the risk of developing a disease or enhance health.

Even our ancestors discovered relationships between food and health. Historically a number of cultivated crop plants, including vegetable crops, were domesticated for medicinal purposes prior to their current use as food. One of the earliest examples of a functional food is iodine that was added to salt to prevent goiter in 1924. More recently orange juice was fortified with calcium because science has found a relationship between optimal bone health and calcium.

My presentation explored the relationship of plants to disease-fighting properties, defined words like phytochemicals, anti-oxidants and genetically modified foods and provided research-based web sites for self exploration. The terms can be confusing and sometimes used interchangeably. In the United States no legal, universally-accepted definitions exist for functional foods and nutraceuticals. Many food manufacturers use these terms to market products. Consumers are responding by spending large sums of money on foods and beverages that will improve their health status.

In summary the list of food components

that may protect human health has grown rapidly. However, much more research is needed to understand and clarify which foods or groups of foods play particular roles in health maintenance. The important message for consumers continues to be that there are no magic foods that will make up for a poor diet and a lack of physical activity. People should strive to consume a wide variety of foods each day. OSU Extension recommends that consumers follow the Dietary Guidelines and the New Food Guide Pyramid. Log on to www.mypyramid.gov. You can personalize a healthy prescription based on your age, gender, lifestyle and physical activity levels.

A handout defining these new "food words" is included with the newsletter. The fact sheet was prepared by Angela Almsay a dietetic student from the University of Akron.

I would be delighted to repeat the presentation in 2009. Susan Shapiro suggested that a modest registration fee be charged and include a healthy lunch representing some of the nutrition messages discussed in the talk. Please let me know if you are interested by sending me an email at warrix.1@cfaes.osu.edu or leave a voice mail at (216) 429-8217. I will coordinate efforts with Michael Loos.

