

CAM Concepts

CAM Concept of Whole Foods Nutrition

(Disclaimer: This mini-review is intended to explain this naturopathic concept and is not intended to discuss the evidence supporting it)

(Naturopathy)

Theory

Whole Foods nutrition is based on the concept described by Hippocrates, “let food be your medicine and medicine be your food.” Naturopathic medicine believes that nutrition is one of the most important requirements for achieving, maintaining, and/or restoring health and wellness. Whole foods nutrition is the practice of acquiring, preparing, and eating foods that are minimally processed in order to maximize the macro and micro-nutritional content of food, as well as to minimize the additives and toxins in food. Whole foods nutrition philosophy holds that food provides much more than carbohydrates, fats, and protein. Micronutrients including vitamins, minerals, and other substances provide critical health promoting and disease preventing actions. Foods often become depleted of these micronutrients during food processing and some cooking methods. In addition, some agricultural practices lead to devitalized food and incorporation of heavy metals, pesticides, and other toxins which are harmful to human and planetary health. The cultivation and eating of organic whole foods is thought to be a health promoting behavior.

Practical application

Naturopathic physicians will counsel patients on whole foods nutrition almost universally as a critical component of every therapeutic intervention. Unless there are clinical contraindications for certain foods (insoluble fiber for IBS, specific food allergies, gluten for celiac disease, etc.), the ND will advise patients to eat a wide variety of organic, minimally processed, healthfully prepared fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and animal and/or vegetable protein foods. In addition, depending on the situation, the ND may recommend specific foods to be eaten. An example will illustrate this approach:

A 50 year old female comes in for advice about her high cholesterol levels. An ND would likely recommend that she eat a whole foods diet low in saturated fat, and especially to emphasize wild salmon, whole oats, whole soy foods, flaxseeds, cinnamon, garlic, olive oil, avocado, and walnuts.