

one back to the basics

Okinawa, a small village in the southernmost part of Japan, stands as one of the most ideal models of health and longevity in the world. In addition to having the longest-living people on the planet, Okinawa boasts some of the lowest rates of coronary heart disease and breast, colon, and prostate cancer. Of a population of 1 million, there are 900 centenarians (people aged 100 or older) enjoying active living and a disease-free state. This percentage is more than four times higher than the population of the United Kingdom and the United States. In Okinawa, it is not unusual for men and women in their nineties and beyond to be tending their gardens, making a homemade meal, or going for a long walk.

Okinawans believe in the principle of *nusci gushci*, which means “food should nourish life ... this is the best medicine.” Unfortunately, somewhere along the way North Americans lost touch with this sentiment and the true essence of health. The good news is, with the current surge in natural health care and integrative medicine, the importance of diet, exercise, and lifestyle is now being discussed in doctors’ offices across North America. Today, we are seeing more money than ever before being poured into double-blind research studies dedicated to integrative health care and the role it plays in prevention of disease and extension of lifespan. From understanding the effects of omega-3 essential fats on brain function to recognizing the antioxidant and disease-preventing effects of fruits and vegetables, we’ve certainly come a long way.

And yet, when we consider the top “killers” of the twenty-first century—including heart disease, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and even cancer—many are intimately

linked with the way we eat and live. In other words, while information on how to keep ourselves healthy is readily available, the “implementation factor” hasn’t yet been perfected. One of my main goals in writing *Healthy Sin Foods* is to put a little Okinawan lifestyle into the North American way. If you combine the fresh, tasty, easy-to-make recipes with all the need-to-know nutritional information and the top 50 must-have superfoods, you’ll live a healthier, more vibrant life.

an ounce of prevention ...

Everyone is born with his or her own genetic map. Most view their genetic map, or family health history, as a predictor of what their future health will hold. If your dad suffered from heart disease, you may think that that’s your health destiny as well. In fact, research has determined that a certain degree of genetics can be quite malleable. While your genetic map can play a role in your future health, it’s not necessarily the absolute predictor of what lies ahead. The level of your health and wellness can be influenced by several nutritional, environmental, and lifestyle factors. Of course, there are certain unexplainable and heart-wrenching situations that take our breath away, such as when a young child is diagnosed with a tumour or an apparently healthy, fit 20-year-old is diagnosed with terminal cancer. While these cases are beyond sad and make us question why, they thankfully make up a much smaller part of our health care system. For the most part, lifestyle changes can be made and risk factors can be reduced dramatically.

In 2004, Harvard researchers investigated the risk factors that increase the chances of developing cancer. (A variety of cancers were studied, such as breast, ovarian, skin, stomach, pancreatic, uterine, prostate, and colon cancer.) What they determined was truly fascinating. More than one-third of the 7 million cancer deaths worldwide were linked to nine “modifiable risk factors”:

1. tobacco use (smoking was by far the biggest risk to mortality at 21 percent)
2. excess alcohol intake (5 percent of all deaths)
3. low fruit and vegetable intake (5 percent of all deaths)
4. physical inactivity
5. overweight/obesity
6. unsafe sex

7. urban air pollution
8. indoor smoke from household fuels
9. contaminated injections in health care settings

This study's main goal was to focus on prevention and recommend activities that could reduce cancer risk from an early age. As you can see, simply not smoking, limiting alcohol, maintaining a healthy body weight, eating fruits and vegetables, and working out significantly reduces the risk of cancer. So why are cancer rates still at an all-time high? While we may be making new advances daily in detection and treatment processes, the root of prevention through lifestyle needs far greater emphasis, research, and follow-through.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading killers for men and women in North America (unintentional injuries aside) can all be linked to significant modifiable risk factors. Keep in mind that this is good news. Why? Because, just like the Harvard cancer study, there are considerable steps we can all take to prolong our healthy lives.

heart disease

Heart disease is the leading killer of men and women. Men typically develop heart disease 10 to 15 years prior to women. In fact, as much as one-fourth of all heart disease deaths in men occur between the ages of 35 and 65. In women, the condition is responsible for approximately 29 percent of deaths. To reduce the risk of heart disease dramatically, exercise, eat colourful fruits and vegetables, practise stress management, maintain a healthy body weight, and don't smoke. Certain supplements such as omega-3 distilled fish oils and coenzyme Q10 can also be very beneficial for blood flow and the heart muscle.

Omega-3 fatty acids, a type of polyunsaturated fat, may decrease your risk of heart attack, protect against irregular heartbeat, and lower blood pressure.

cancer

While breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, lung cancer is the leading cause of death for men and women (90 percent caused by cigarette smoking). Prostate cancer and colorectal cancer are the second and third leading causes of death in men. Similar to heart disease, preventable measures include maintaining a healthy body weight, eating high-fibre foods and colourful fruits and vegetables, avoiding cigarette smoke and other carcinogenic substances, and exercising 30 minutes a day. Consuming high-antioxidant foods (see Top 50 Superfoods) and opting for certified organic food choices are also good preventable steps to take.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found an increased risk of all types of cancer (to varying degrees) in those with excess weight and a body mass index above the healthy range (>25).

stroke

Strokes affect men and women equally, yet men have a better chance of surviving a stroke than women. To prevent the onset of a stroke, eliminate saturated fats and trans fatty acids from your diet (see Chapter 4). In addition, supplement your diet with foods rich in omega-3 fats (fortified foods, oily fish, fish oils, nuts, and seeds) and fruits and vegetables, and manage stress, maintain a healthy body weight, and exercise regularly.

leading causes of death for men (2003)

RANK	CAUSE	PERCENTAGE OF MALE DEATHS
1	Heart disease	28.0
2	Cancer	24.0
3	Unintentional injuries	5.9
4	Stroke	5.1

leading causes of death for men (2003) (continued)

5	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)	5.1
6	Diabetes	2.9
7	Influenza and pneumonia	2.4
8	Suicide	2.1
9	Kidney disease	1.7
10	Alzheimer's disease	1.5

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

leading causes of death for women (2004)

RANK	CAUSE	PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE DEATHS
1	Heart disease	27.2
2	Cancer	22.0
3	Stroke	7.5
4	Chronic lower respiratory diseases	5.2
5	Alzheimer's disease	3.9
6	Unintentional injuries	3.3
7	Diabetes	3.1
8	Influenza and pneumonia	2.7
9	Kidney disease	1.8
10	Septicemia	1.5

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

body talk: the seven principles of health

By reviewing the disease processes and the preventable steps that can be taken, it is clear that our bodies respond positively once we've implemented the right approach. Keep in mind that at all times your body is trying to be perfectly healthy by using its innate self-healing and self-regulating ability, called homeostatic balance. For example, the body knows precisely what temperature to maintain to preserve life, how to fight off the countless micro-organisms we face every day such as bacteria, viruses, and

allergens, and how to eliminate a toxic substance that may enter the body through a food source (e.g., food poisoning). It is only when we “get in the way of ourselves” with faulty nutritional choices, stress, lack of activity, and smoking that we weaken immune system function and allow symptoms and even disease to proliferate.

In order to stay healthy, it is prudent to be aware of the seven principles that help the body thrive. By simply knowing these principles and allowing them to become part of your daily habits, you will change your life and health dramatically.

1. your body has a voice ... listen to it!

While your body cannot literally say to you, “Hey ... cut that out! I don’t want to eat any more packaged or processed foods!” it does communicate with you quite effectively in another manner: symptoms. When you have knocked yourself off balance due to a variety of circumstances, your body’s first response will be to send you a red flag, an indication that it’s working to take care of the problem. Symptoms can be as small and simple as a runny nose, a headache, or some reflux after a meal.

If you tend to ignore your symptoms or quiet them with medication (e.g., take an antacid to dull the reflux pain or an anti-inflammatory for your inflamed shoulder), your body over time will typically send you another symptom. This isn’t to say there isn’t a time and a place for medication; indeed, there is. However, if you don’t take care of the underlying problem and continue with the abusive behaviour—be it smoking, eating poorly, or high stress—the symptoms will get louder and more serious, such as heart palpitations, dizziness, or extreme abdominal discomfort. After a period of time, the body will desperately try to maintain balance and restore functions that may have damaging effects (e.g., high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or an inflamed colon). It does not matter if you are young or old, pre- or post-menopausal: You need to put the body back into a state of balance—hormonally, calorie-wise, and lifestyle-wise. The information in *Healthy Sin Foods* will help you to do exactly that.

2. your body thrives on routine.

Your body responds beautifully to a routine—whether it’s sleep, nutrition, exercise, or stress management. I often see the struggles of clients who work shifts (e.g., nurses) and

have irregular sleeping patterns. Symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, headaches, and excess weight gain are common. Because of the back-and-forth change in schedule, the body is never allowed to settle into a flow and starts sending out red flags in the form of symptoms. If you are in this situation (and of course cannot change your work schedule), it is important to “stay sharp” in other areas such as eating fresh live foods, avoiding all refined flours and sugars, working out regularly, supplementing your diet with high-quality multivitamins, and drinking plenty of fresh clean water and high-antioxidant tea (green or white tea). These steps will help to keep your immune system strong even under the stress of an ever-changing sleep pattern.

A nutrition routine is equally important. Skipping meals (e.g., breakfast) or eating erratically will promote excess weight gain and a decrease in insulin sensitivity (see Chapter 2). When excess insulin is secreted, excess fat will be stored, especially around the abdominal region. Simple routine steps such as eating three meals and two snacks a day, stopping eating by 7 p.m. (or a minimum of three hours prior to going to sleep), and slowing down while you eat can change health and weight in a very short time.

You need a healthy sleep routine to lose weight! Several research studies show that individuals who were sleep deprived had an increase in the hunger hormone ghrelin. In addition to having difficulty losing weight, sleep-deprived individuals experienced more cravings and greater degrees of hunger throughout the day.

3. your body responds to nutrient-dense foods quickly.

I always say you need to “eat live to feel live.” Consider how you feel when you eat a meal of refined flours, sugars, and high-fat dairy products. If you order in a pepperoni pizza, have a large pop, and perhaps a doughnut or cookie a little while later, do you feel like jumping off the couch and going to the gym for a terrific workout? Of course not! You’re probably lying on the couch, surfing channels, and nodding off because of the food fog you’ve just put yourself in.

On the flipside, if you did have a meal of nutrient-dense foods such as vegetables, fruits, fish, poultry, high-quality dairy products, eggs, nuts, seeds, and/or whole

grains, your energy would not dip at all. You'd still have your "get up and go" to continue on with your day as a full participant (not a sleepy couch potato). While it is expected that you may eat yourself into a food fog once in a blue moon (seasonal holidays, your birthday, weddings), I encourage you to watch and monitor your energy fluctuations in relation to the food you're consuming. While it is normal after a long day to feel tired and plop into bed for a restful and restorative sleep, it is not normal or healthy to continually experience energy fluctuations, intense hunger, and sugar cravings throughout your day. If you do, this is another symptom you can treat by introducing nutrient-dense choices into your diet.

If you experience the "3 p.m. slump," take a moment to examine the last thing you ate. Was it a sugary or starchy processed muffin, cookie, or white flour item? If so, chances are your energy has taken a dive due to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) because of what you've eaten.

4. one of your body's key systems is the digestive system.

The body is made up of several systems, such as cardiovascular, lymphatic, respiratory, nervous, and so on. While all the systems are equally important and overlap to be "one orchestra of health," one of the master systems is the digestive system. The digestive system begins with the mouth (chewing) and ends with elimination (you must do so daily!). When this system is compromised due to stress, inflammation, faulty food choices, and/or lack of water, the body is in a dire situation and cannot perform to its top ability. In other words, the body cannot break down and absorb all the nutrients and eliminate all waste required for health on a daily basis. Common symptoms that indicate a compromised digestive system include:

- constipation
- diarrhea
- bloating
- belching and excessive gas

- dark circles under the eyes (often referred to as allergic shiners)
- skin breakouts (e.g., eczema or acne)
- fatigue
- inability to lose weight

More serious conditions include:

- a bowel blockage
- diverticulosis: a condition marked by small sacs or pouches (diverticula) in the walls of an organ such as the stomach or colon
- irritable bowel syndrome
- inflammatory bowel disease (e.g., colitis or Crohn's)

A healthy digestive system will eliminate a minimum of once a day without strain. Without getting too detailed, an ideal bowel movement should be S- or C-shaped (reflecting the shape of your sigmoid colon) and should float.

If your digestive system is not responding properly and you do experience some of these symptoms, the following simple tips may help:

- Be sure to include both insoluble and soluble fibre in your diet (many foods contain both). *Insoluble fibre* promotes regular bowel movement, prevents constipation, and reduces toxic waste from building up in the intestinal tract. Examples include dark leafy greens (such as spinach), fruit skins, whole grain products, tomatoes, nuts, and seeds. *Soluble fibre* will partially dissolve in water and is different from insoluble fibre. It helps to reduce cholesterol and slows entry of sugars into the bloodstream (ideal for diabetics). Soluble fibre sources include strawberries, blueberries, oranges, apples, sweet potatoes, oatmeal, and quinoa. Ground flaxseed contains a combination of both soluble and insoluble fibre and promotes regularity. One tablespoon (15 mL) a day is recommended.
- Ensure you are well hydrated. Drink a minimum of 8 cups (2 L) of water a day to flush the system properly. Watch beverages that cause water loss, such as coffee, tea, and sugary juice or pop. Include mint tea and/or warm water with lemon into your daily routine as they both help to soothe the bowel and promote elimination.

- Exercise often. Cardiovascular exercise will help to stimulate daily elimination.
- Supplement with fish oils and probiotics (the friendly bacteria) daily. A high-quality fish oil supplement is anti-inflammatory and will help to soften the stool naturally. Mixed-strain probiotics will help to normalize a healthy digestive microflora that is critical to healthy elimination and absorption of nutrients.
- Add chlorophyll to your daily water intake. Chlorophyll is the substance responsible for the green colour in plants and may be useful for a number of bowel disorders. In a preliminary trial, chlorophyll supplementation eased chronic constipation in elderly people. Chlorophyll can be found in most health food stores and is available in mint flavour.

If your condition does not improve, or if you are experiencing an intense flare-up, speak to your primary health care practitioner.

5. your body prefers an alkaline environment to an acidic one.

An alkaline environment is believed to be one of the major deterrents to tissue damage, aging, and the growth of disease organisms. Virtually all degenerative diseases—including cancer, heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, kidney and gall stones, and tooth decay—are associated with excess acidity in the body. To measure if your body is alkaline or acidic, a scale called the potential of hydrogen, or pH, is used. A pH test involves dipping pH paper into a sample of your saliva or urine to determine your body's pH. If the pH paper turns bluish-green, your pH is more basic and ideal for health and digestion. If it turns greenish-yellow, your pH is more acidic and is not ideal for health. A healthy salivary pH would be anywhere from 6.75 to 7.2, whereas a healthy urine pH would have a slightly higher pH of 7.5. On average, the pH of the typical Western diet is about 5.5 to 6.0. This may not seem too much lower; however, it is important to remember that the pH scale is logarithmic, which means each step is 10 times the previous (e.g., 4.5 is 10 times more acidic than 5.5, which is 100 times more acidic than 6.5, and so on).

When testing your pH, for accuracy's sake, it is recommended that you test two to three times a day to get the average reading. If testing with saliva, it is best not to eat one to two hours prior to testing. Rinse your mouth out by swallowing a few times (not with water, with your own saliva).

If your pH does indicate a strong acidic reading, it is possible to shift this to an alkaline state with diet. All foods consumed possess a pH rating of extremely acidic, mildly acidic, extremely alkaline, or mildly alkaline. Foods that are “strongly” acidic are red meats, cheeses, fish, and eggs. This is not to say all fish and eggs must be removed from the diet, as they provide wonderful lean protein, essential fats, and so on. However, to maintain a proper pH balance, the diet should be composed of approximately 70 percent alkaline-forming foods and 30 percent acid-forming foods.

alkaline foods

VEGETABLES

Artichokes	Courgette	Lettuce
Asparagus	Cucumber	Onion
Beetroot	Garlic	Peas
Broccoli	Grasses (wheat, straw,	Radish
Brussels sprouts	barley, dog, kamut,	Red cabbage
Cabbage	etc.)	Spinach
Carrot	Green beans	Swede
Cauliflower	Kale	Turnip
Celery	Lamb’s lettuce	Watercress
Chives	Leeks	

FATS & OILS

Avocado	Hemp	Olive
Borage	Oil blends (such as	
Evening primrose	Udo’s Choice)	
Flax		

FRUITS

Avocado	Lime	Tomato
Grapefruit	Rhubarb	Watermelon (is neutral)
Lemon		

DRINKS

Almond milk	Lemon water (pure water +	Pure water (distilled,
Fresh vegetable juice	fresh lemon or lime)	reverse osmosis, ionized)
“Green drinks”	Non-sweetened soy milk	Vegetable broth
Herbal tea		

alkaline foods *(continued)***SEEDS, NUTS, & GRAINS**

Almonds	Flax	Spelt
Any sprouted seed	Lentils	Sunflower
Buckwheat groats	Pumpkin	
Cumin seeds	Sesame	

OTHERS

Aminos (soy sauce alternative)	Hummus	Tahini
Bragg Liquid	Sprouts (soy, alfalfa, mung bean, wheat, little radish, chickpea, broccoli, etc.)	

acid foods**MEATS**

Beef	Other seafood (apart from occasional oily fish such as salmon)	Pork
Chicken		Turkey
Crustaceans		
Lamb		

OTHERS

Artificial sweeteners	Honey	White bread
Biscuits	Soy sauce	White pasta
Condiments (tomato sauce, mayonnaise, etc.)	Tamari	Whole meal bread
	Vinegar	

CONVENIENCE FOODS

Chocolate	Microwaveable meals	Tinned foods
Fast food	Powdered soups	
Instant meals	Sweets	

FRUITS

All fruits except for those listed in the alkaline column

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Cheese	Eggs	Milk
Cream	Ice cream	Yogurt

acid foods *(continued)***DRINKS**

Beer	Fizzy drinks	Spirits
Coffee	Fruit juice	Tea
Dairy smoothies	Milk	Traditional tea

FATS & OILS

Corn oil	Saturated fats	Vegetable oil
Hydrogenated oils	Sunflower oil	
Margarine (worse than butter)		

SEEDS & NUTS

Cashews	Peanuts	Pistachios
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6. your body needs movement.

From reducing cancer risk to improving mood and digestion, exercise is a must-do. For optimal health benefits, it is ideal to engage in your favourite form of physical activity four times a week or more. Your joints, muscles, spinal alignment, and discs thrive on motion and mobility. Whether it is going for a walk, getting up earlier to hop on your treadmill or elliptical, or investing in free weights, you will feel an instant surge in energy, mood, and vitality along with a decrease in body weight when on a routine exercise schedule. As a bonus, you will sleep better in the evening and will enter a disease-prevention mode.

7. your body needs sufficient fuel.

In North America, we tend to gobble up our food very quickly in order to make our next meeting, drop the kids off at school, or run to our next big event. Unfortunately, this fast eating pace creates the tendency to consume excess calories without realizing it. Considering it takes the brain 20 minutes to register a full signal once eating commences, it is common practice in North America to eat until we are stuffed and our pants actually feel too tight!

To avoid this tendency, it is recommended you eat like you were living in Okinawa. Take your time, use your utensils, chew your foods, and be conscious of when you are hungry versus mindless eating. In Okinawa, the elders are in tune with their satiety cues and tend to stop eating when they are about 80 percent full. Sounds hard to do at first? It is not so much a difficult practice as it is a mind shift toward awareness eating. Follow these tips to focus on your true hunger cues.

- Wait until you hear your stomach grumbling a little to begin eating. Don't eat according to the clock.
- Put an ink dot on the outside of your thumb. When you're eating, look at the dot as a reminder to slow down, chew your food, and enjoy.
- Chew your food! For optimal digestion and to slow down your meals, chew your food completely until it is small enough and dissolved enough to be swallowed with ease.
- Talk to your loved ones at the table about their day when there isn't food in your mouth. This will force you to take breaks between bites.
- If eating alone, practise awareness eating and chewing. Do not eat in front of the television or computer screen.
- When you feel comfortably full, stop eating. Do not force yourself to clean your plate.

your personal health journey

Now that you're aware of the seven principles of health, you're on your way to improving overall health, vitality, and wellness. Keep in mind, health is an extremely personal topic and has different meanings for different people. For some, the word *health* may simply refer to the absence of a symptom or a disease process. For a growing number of people, the word *health* refers to being at the top of your game—hitting your target weight, feeling vibrant and energetic day in and day out, sleeping well, exercising, not smoking, drinking in moderation, and feeling balanced in life and work.

Before moving on to the next chapter, take a moment to reflect on your definition of health and what steps you could take to be at the top of your health game.

My definition of optimal health is:

Five ways I could improve my health are (exercise more, drink more water, etc.):

In writing this book, one of my goals was to ensure that *Healthy Sin Foods* wasn't just a "Jacuzzi experience" for readers. What do I mean? When you're in a Jacuzzi, you feel bubbly, warm, content, and have the best intentions to take on any new change. After reading this book, you may become extremely motivated and dedicated to change your health, wellness, and day-to-day vitality. However, as life comes back into the picture and you're focusing on carpool and work, by next Thursday you've forgotten all about your plan to implement new health habits and have unconsciously gone back to your old ways.

My sincere objective is to help you make easy, long-term changes—whether weight loss or otherwise—that can prolong life, increase your sense of daily wellness, and put you into a disease-prevention mode. And let's not forget one key aspect of *Healthy Sin Foods*—this all has to be done in a delicious and non-depriving manner (and it can be).

You will find that whatever your health changes, the body has an incredibly forgiving nature. When given the proper environment, it always gravitates toward a state of health. It is truly an incredible experience to watch your well-being respond in a positive way simply by implementing a few baby steps toward health, such as eating more fruits and vegetables, drinking more water, and exercising regularly. Are you ready to learn all the need-to-know nutritional information to keep you at your very best? Let's read on!