

## CHAPTER 8

# Common nutrition and health issues

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### Contents

Food trends	159
What is healthy?	160
Illusory world of diets	162
An unexpected approach	164
Regional and seasonal food	165
Again potatoes?	167
What about alcohol?	168
References	169

### Food trends

In the reconstruction phase following the Second World War quantity and tastiness dominated the diets of most people in Western Europe. Today it reflects a late trickle-down effect. The consumption of large quantities of food used to be an upper-class privilege, as did obesity. This is now reversed. The upper classes consume expensive and exotic food, but in relatively small quantities. Stoutness, once a striking corpulence advertisement for one's well-fed status, is no longer socially acceptable.

After all sections of the population had enough to eat, it became generally important to eat very healthy. The myth of healthy nutrition is characterized by more or less rapid changes in food fashions.<sup>a</sup> Availability is of course important. The last half of the 20th century saw an increase in the availability of a greater range of good quality fresh products and greater willingness to vary diets and select dishes from all over the world. As waves of different foods hit Europe, eating habits changed. At first these foreign foods and spices, like new fashion trends, were a privilege of a few insiders, but they were soon imitated and adapted for a wider audience. Once the supply of the foods become plentiful and varied, fashion took over, and the novelty became a trend. There are all kinds of good and clever arguments why this new food trend is exceptionally healthy, and it seems easy to overlook some unwished side-effects.

<sup>a</sup> It is a myth wanting to know what a healthy diet is. It is subject to fashion streaming: in the 1980s only sunflower and thistle oil was considered healthy, olive oil and rapeseed oil were unhealthy. Olive oil became healthy in the 1990s, rapeseed oil in the 2000s, sunflower oil became than unhealthy.

Thus, vegan diets (Mann, 2008), high fiber diets (Clark and Slavin, 2013) and low carb diets (Paoli, 2014), all masquerade as healthy. It goes along with the modern obsession with diets. In fact, they are all nutritionally suspicious, but are used to show how up to date we are. As with all fashion industries, food trends thrives on change. The industry can only survive if people's tastes are constantly induced to change. This is reflected by the increasing numbers of food books and food broadcasts which lead educated and literate middle-class readers to feel guilty if they don't keep up. Previously, diets were only for medical reasons, rarely to do with weight and appearance as such. The rheumatism regime, the macrobiotic diet or the Gerson therapy are ostensive examples. Now for most people diets are mainly concerned with weight reduction, significantly referred to slimming, the slim figure rather than the healthy body being the aim despite pious claims to the contrary. They are a major part of the food-fashion industry. In fact, none of them work. If any of them did, then there would not be so many and we would not be faced almost weekly with the announcement of a new and infallible one.

## What is healthy?

A new evidence-based guideline of the German Nutrition Society recommends: "A diet based on wholemeal products, 5 portions of vegetables and fruit per day and low-fat variants of milk and dairy products as well as meat and meat products lower the consumption of animal fats. Under consideration of an equal energy balance, vegetable oils with a high proportion of  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (ALA) and oily fish rich in long-chain  $n$ -3 fatty acids can therefore be additionally integrated into the diet. This favors an increase in the intake of  $n$ -3 fatty acids. Vegetable oils with a favorable ratio of linoleic acid to ALA should be preferred. Considering the German dietary habits, rapeseed oil and walnut oil best fulfill this criterion" (Wolfram et al., 2015). That sounds good but how can we transfer this in our daily life with canteen food and how long do we have to wait for the next guideline? I try to make it simple and tell my clients in my consultation hours: If they really want a guideline, they could follow two simple rules: divide your plate in four parts and fill it to one part with a source of protein (fish, meat or vegetable sources), one part with cereals and the rest with fruits, vegetables and salads. Also, they should eat colorful food.

Colorful is healthy: Anyone who takes care to provide his body throughout the week with different colored fruits and vegetables, nourishes balanced in any case. If you follow the 5-per-day rule, you are already doing a lot right. But it gets even better if not only cucumbers, apples and tomatoes are on the menu, but also yellow peppers, carrots, blue grapes and cauliflower. Because it's not just the amount of fruits and vegetables that matter, but diversity is just as important.

Think of the colors of the rainbow! The plant pigment lycopene ensures that fruits and vegetables are red (American Institute for cancer recherche, 2016). It belongs to the

group of carotenoids. Among other things (Djuric and Powell, 2001), lycopene-containing foods should have a stimulating effect and get blood and heart moving. Red vegetables are tomatoes, red peppers, chili, radishes and the berries such as raspberries, strawberries and cranberries, but also rosehips, cherries and watermelons belong to the red group.

For the orange and yellow coloring carotenoids (Szalay, 2018) are responsible. Among other things, these antioxidants protect against free radicals and thus slow down skin aging. In addition, the foods with the sun color are said to stimulate the immune system, digestion and metabolism. Yellow and orange vegetables are yellow zucchini, pumpkin, carrots, yellow and orange peppers. Among the fruits, there are lemons, pineapple, sea buckthorn, mirabelles, bananas, apricots, oranges and mangoes. Also, some spices with health promoting effect can be found in this color group such as ginger, saffron and turmeric.

Chlorophyll makes plants appear green. The dye is said to have a cleansing and detoxifying effect. In addition, green foods often contain lutein, which is thought to protect the eyes and aid in cell building (AOK Vigozone, 2007). Green vegetables are kohlrabi, green peppers and broccoli, various types of lettuce, various types of cabbage, green asparagus, cucumbers and herbs like rosemary, basil, dill and parsley. Regarding fruits, apples, green grapes, pears and kiwis are high up on the popularity scale.

Collective experience rather discourages eating blue or purple foods. These colors are reminiscent of putrefaction and poison, and from a nutritional point of view rather have a deterrent character. But in our modern world we know that many blue or purple foods have a delicious taste and healthy effects, above all because of the blue and violet plant dyes (anthocyanins (Römer 2012)), which are often even considered as miracle anti-aging weapons. They should improve vision and memory and have an anti-inflammatory effect. Finally, they are said to have a preventive effect against premature skin aging and a positive influence on the blood vessels. As vegetables there are blue beans, eggplant, beetroot, lolo rosso salad. In fruits it is: elderberries, blackberries, blueberries, plums, figs and black currants.

White is not a color represented in the rainbow, but it is worth to also eat white foods. They are full of vitamins and minerals. Particularly noteworthy are garlic and onion, as they contain allicin—a sulfur-containing substance, which is responsible for the typical smell (PubChem Open Chemistry Database, 2018). Allicin has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, protects the blood vessels and promotes blood circulation. The white vegetables include asparagus, fennel, celery and cauliflower. White fruits are rare. Some nutritionists add apples, pears and bananas in this category because the pulp is white.

Even if nutritionists are not always in agreement, whether apple, pear and cucumber are now green or white and bananas yellow or white, diet by color is still a viable principle with which you cannot go wrong. It ensures that diversity comes to the table and thus a colorful mix of nutrients.

## Illusory world of diets

To lose weight (and this is only healthy in extreme cases), the only useful diet is to eat much less food and do exercise. Obese people tend to sit 2 h more per day than slim people. By changing their lifestyle habits, they would be able to save 350 kcal per day, which could add up to 14 kg per year. To lose 10 kg only with a diet, they would have to save around 90.000 kcal, which equals 180 bars of chocolate or 350 sausages or 2800 kg of carrots (Stahl, 2018), and this without considering all the metabolic changes in diets.

The business of how not to eat too much has paradoxically turned into one of the biggest topics of food industries. It has become the science of what to eat without gaining weight. However, it is more or less impossible to lose weight with any reasonable calorific regime. Studies have shown that diets lead to weight gain (Kärkkäinen et al., 2018). Because the body does not know the difference between dieting and starving, once a severe dietary regime is concluded, it will voraciously store food as fat as a protection against further unreasonable famine. We have 158 different biological mechanisms to prevent starvation (Stahl, 2018) and none to prevent overweight. But that's the way it is with diets, trends and fads play off their largest part. Diets are part of a general utopianism that characterizes Western society: the search for the perfect life comes to embrace the search for the perfect food. And, like other utopianisms, this easily tips over into fanaticism. With religious zeal people organize to hunt down restaurants that offend against the latest dietary fads. Political parties, with missionary ardors, try to enlighten others with veggie days in factory canteens or with tax on sugar to prevent poor children from obesity. In the pursuit of perfection, to be on a diet illustrates that you are a worthy and serious person, not a philistine. It is the Puritan Ethic applied to food.

To feel guilty because of meal consumption is now concerning more and more people who thought until now that their eating habits are completely normal. The bookstores have long bookshelves full of recent publications on the issue “clean eating” with recipes for Detox-Soups. In Internet blogs, we see legions of beautiful young people with plates full of meat free, carbohydrate free, gluten- and lactose-free trend dishes. The advertising message is modern food is healthy food. People should care about the short- and long-term consequences of their meals to their body and soul. Who does not heed the rules will come to regret tomorrow and guzzle himself to death. This lead to a kind of mass hysteria called “Orthorexia nervosa” an eating disorder characterized by an excessive preoccupation with healthy food (Bratmann, 2014). Some people feel better when they drink their fair-trade coffee with organic milk and later with lactose-free and then with almond- or soya milk. When the coffee tastes great, it is fine. If they have allergies, intolerances or an irritable bowel syndrome, it is a good approach. But if not, this could be a problem. About 10–15% of the European population has a lactose intolerance (Enattah, 2002). 80% of people who buy lactose-free food have none (Bundeszentrale für Ernährung, 2018). The annual growth rates in this segment are 10–20%. Only 0.2–0.4% of all

Germans (Schuppan and Zimmer, 2013) and up to 1% of all Europeans have a medical reason for a benefit of gluten-free food. It is an issue of spirit of the age that foodstuff is seen as an “enemy on my plate” by healthy people. It is a paradox in a time where the food is better controlled and safer than ever before. People are better and better informed about the structure of their aliment. But they often become overtaxed by the large quantity of information. Some people react in a pseudo-religious way. It is a matter of good and bad behavior, guilt, conscience, sacrifice and the wish of eternal life. Who points the way through the jungle of huge surplus on food, nutrition studies and contradicting dietary recommendations becomes a savior. To pay homage to the health-food-religion let the modern men be part of something in the post factual time. And they find their high priest in food bloggers with photos from their latest Açai-Bowl on Instagram.

The problem is that the number of overweight people or diabetics doesn't decrease. And there is not even a placebo effect that people who subsist with healthy food feel much better.

The brave new world of eating better is only achieved by those who have succeeded before: thin, attractive, wealthy people who can afford neo food supplements like maca, reishi, chaga-mushrooms. For all others the conclusion of the Cochrane study for artificial antioxidant supplements apply: “We found no evidence to support antioxidant supplements for primary or secondary prevention. Beta-carotene and vitamin E as supplements seem to increase mortality, and so may higher doses of vitamin A. Antioxidant supplements need to be considered as medicinal products and should undergo sufficient evaluation before marketing” (Bjelakovic et al., 2012).

To ensure the antioxidant power of vitamin E, it is sufficient to use plant oils such as wheat germ oil, elevated levels of beta-carotene include orange, red and deep green vegetables (e.g., carrots, cabbages, spinach, peppers, tomatoes) and orange fruits (e.g., apricots and mangoes).

Even in case of a seasonal cold you do not need any vitamin supplements. Home remedies such as a chicken soup contain a complex mixture, which influence the immune system in many ways. While having a cold, white blood cells, including so-called neutrophils, are released, which are responsible for inflammatory processes. The soup can block these blood cells in the organism and thus reduce inflammatory processes in the body. At the same time, the chicken soup contains the protein cysteine. This also has an anti-inflammatory effect and has a decongestant effect on the mucous membranes. Furthermore, the contained high zinc concentration helps a lot better than for example vitamin C. A problem with the common cold is often the dried out mucous membranes. Hot soup keeps the mucous membranes moist and thus protects against further germs. Even the hot steam can prevent the spread of viruses. The best way to enrich the chicken soup is by adding chili or ginger, which can increase the effect.

## An unexpected approach

An apparent countertrend is the proletarian chic style of cooking with the wide popularity of the barbecue, including rich spicy sauces along with large cuts of meat. Why, we might ask, are men responsible for cooking outdoors and women for cooking indoors? Because the myths have it that cooking with fire is dangerous and should be left to the men. This is probably a hangover from the romanticizing of the caveman in a time of political correctness and a way for men to feel macho while wearing aprons and preparing food. This may explain why the working class, which usually lags in the food fad business, is right on top of the cookout. Usually the workers had neither the time nor the means to be faddists. But times have changed. Today, you can stand hours in front of your smoker for a pulled pork or grill a steak on a BBQ with the price of a compact car.

What is the health effect of this? Contrary to what is commonly believed, the highest health hazard when you grill something is the risk of burns (4000 injured per year in Germany ([Deutsche Gesellschaft für Plastische, 2010](#))). The second largest danger is the use of a wire to clean the cooking grid (1500 injured in the United States in 12 years ([Baught et al., 2016](#))). Beside this, you can almost ignore the risk of adenoma genesis from heterocyclic aromatic amines (HAA) ([Rohrmann et al., 2009](#)) and of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) ([Gassmann, 2013](#)). The way from an adenoma to colorectal cancer is far and in case of doubt you can participate in a colon cancer prevention. It is undoubted that high temperature grilling over glowing coals forms several carcinogens. The question is the in vivo effect in human body and what influences has the preparation of the food.

Stavric shows the unexpected protective effect of burned sausages and steaks ([Food & Hygiene, 2014](#)). They act as active carbon, absorb benzopyrene, and let them pass unresorbed the digestive tract. The considered dangerous charred meat parts turn into a prophylactic treatment. Vegetable substances as quercetin in caper and lovage reduce the benzopyrene absorption whereas corn oil solves benzopyrene and increase it. Since over 20 years, there is no doubt that it is possible with commercial marinades to prepare grilled products with reduced mutagenicity without compromising their sensory quality ([Tikkanen et al., 1996](#)). Smith illustrates the antioxidative effect of self-made-marinades. His rosemary-thyme marinade reduces the HAA by 87%. Similar effects have oregano-thyme-garlic and mustard-sage-basil ([Zittlau, 2014](#)). The effect of marinating meat with Pilsner beer, nonalcoholic Pilsner beer and Black beer on the foaming of PAHs in charcoal-grilled pork is convincing too ([Viegas et al., 2014](#)). The antiradical activity in a so-called DPPH assay<sup>b</sup> of Black beer was 68.0%. Followed with nonalcoholic beer with 36.5% and the Pilsner with 29.5%.

<sup>b</sup> The 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl radical scavenging assay is routinely practiced for the assessment of antiradical properties of different compounds.

And, of course, there is the question of the dosis. You must eat the equivalent of 50 kg of burned chicken meat, that generate much more HAA than red meat, to absorb as much toxic substances as in one single cigarette (Jirku, 2014).

Grilling is the healthiest way to prepare food. It is low in fat because the fat is baked. It is flavorful and protects our gastric mucosa. The high temperatures reduce the bioavailability of heavy metals like mercury and kill off strong dangerous *Escherichia coli* strains (Luchansky et al., 2011).

## Regional and seasonal food

And beside this? There is the trend of regional and seasonal food, awareness of the environmental impacts of what we eat and the return to so called old plants.

But what is regional? Regional cuisine is a cuisine based on national, state or local regions. There is no common definition of the size of the region concerned. Sometimes the boundaries of regionality are a few miles around a place, sometimes it can affect a whole country. Regional cuisine may vary depending on availability and trade, different climatic conditions, cooking traditions and practices, and cultural differences. Regional traditions, customs and ingredients for preparing food often combine with dishes that are unique to a particular region.

The terminus local can be expanded. The American historian Steven Ozment has described German contemporary eating habits and draws the picture of five identities in one (Ozment, 2005). And this may be a good template to illustrate the situation for most Western Europeans. First, they identify themselves with local specialties e.g. if they are from Nuremberg they might like Nuremberg Rostbratwurst. On the next level is the region e.g. as Franconians, they likely prefer their sauerkraut, accompanying their sausages, milder than in other regions and with caraway seeds. As Bavarians, they drink their beer less bitter than in the northern countries. When they are traveling around, they are looking for good German sourdough bread and, if they are very far away, they become Europeans, missing their morning coffee or tea with milk, or bread and butter.

The claim to want to eat locally is certainly reasonable and understandable. As in many other areas of life, there is often a field of conflict between “should,” “want” and “can” in nutrition: If you ask in asparagus regions, people are proud of their regional delicacy and in any region with asparagus cultivation people think their asparagus is the best. The taste depends on the local soil conditions and taste preferences are formed in the youth. Maybe the best advice to those liking asparagus: whenever it is possible to eat regional asparagus, do it.

There will be different answers when asking passers-by on the Basle marketplace whether Alsatian or Baden asparagus, which was perhaps harvested a few kilometers away over the Rhine, is a regional asparagus. Does it have to be from the city area and the

canton of Baselland? What about the Swiss asparagus from the Zurich region? Even if the definition of local asparagus is broad, the harvest is not enough.

We have seen an increase in asparagus consumption per capita and year since the 1980s. In Switzerland it increased for example by 300% to approximately 1.5 kg. Only about 30 years ago, the consumption of green asparagus was discovered as a “real” vegetable. Today, asparagus consumption is divided equally into white and green asparagus. The local production does not supply these needs (Marinello, 2018).

Swiss and Germans both eat 1.5 kg per capita and year, French and Dutch a little less. Switzerland around Chur and Zurich produced 250 t in 2014 (Marinello, 2018). This is two percent of the demand. In the Netherlands around Limburg, the harvest was 14.000 t, all over France in the south east, south west and Loire valley 20.550 t and throughout Germany around Beeltiz, Nienburg or Schwetzingen 114.000 t. All this is too little to satisfy the hunger for this fine vegetable. In the emerging countries with the largest production volume like Peru (378.000 t) and China (6.850.000 t) the needed asparagus was harvested (Statista, 2016).

We must come to terms with the fact that not all our food can be produced for the local market and that the days of local self-sufficiency are over (self-sufficiency means that, at least in the case of failure, there is not enough for everyone). We must let farmers work efficiently so that they can feed all humanity and if we do not want to give up certain foods, we must buy them also from outside.

So, what does seasonal mean? In a time where you can buy strawberries and asparagus all the time, some people start to reflect the traditional value of food and feel deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the happiness of a good harvest. Seasonal food is rightly regarded as especially digestible. Even if berries are available in the supermarket all year round, we connect them with special sweetness in their season. Here they have also the shortest transport routes and mostly the best ecological balance.

Also, only fully ripened fruits and vegetables also develop their complete nutrient profile. Fruits harvested unripe at the other end of the world were prematurely separated from the strain, through which nutrients are sourced. As a result, at least on the nutrient side, development was stopped. Since the bioactive substances are formed only at the end of the ripening period, naturally mature vegetables and fruits contain much more of it. And because these mostly cell protecting substances also include countless flavors, mature foods are more aromatic. A diet that is based largely on regional products that are harvested in a ripe state, ensures the nutrient richness of the food: a lettuce head harvested in the summer has up five times higher content of flavonoids, phytochemicals important for staying healthy, as a specimen harvested in the spring. If it comes from a greenhouse in the winter, it contains less vitamins, but more nitrate, which plants degrade worse in the absence of light.

There is more that speaks for the right harvest time. In September the time for shellfish and mussels starts in the Netherlands, Belgium, the British Islands and the coast regions of France and Germany. The traditional time is to eat them in the months with



“r” until end of February or April, depending on the water temperature. This is due to algal bloom, mostly occurring during summer months. This refers to high concentrations of an algae toxin (saxitoxin) that causes the “paralytic shellfish poisoning” to humans. Symptoms can occur 10–30 min after ingestion, and include abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, burning lips, gums, tongue, face, neck, arms, legs, and toes. Today shellfish are regularly inspected and tested for toxin levels. It’s not very likely that any shellfish reaching the market would contain harmful levels of the toxin. Many shellfish, especially oysters and mussels, are also now farmed instead of harvested from the wild, further decreasing the chance of contamination. But the other argument for the “r” rule is that shellfish usually spawn during the summer months. A rest is needed to let the shellfish repopulate. Spawning shellfish also taste different than at other times of the year, and they have a flavor and texture that makes them for many people inedible.

When I started to work in Switzerland, I have learned that cheese have seasonality too. Between September and April, when the high mountains are snow-covered, Swiss Mont-d’Or Vacherin pops-up in cheese shops, as it has for the last century. His French brother is available from September to May. This soft, pungent cow cheese is freshly made from the villages around the Jura region. Covered with white wine and garlic, then cooked in its round wooden packaging, digging into this viscously, creamy cheese, served warm over boiled potatoes, is a delightful winter ritual. Especially in the winter time, the health-promoting properties of cheese can be distinguished. It has a lot of protein, which helps to build the cells, to renew the muscle tissue and the skin and to strengthen the immune system. Cheese is very rich in B vitamins, which also have a positive effect on the energy balance and the immune system and are involved in the development of the nervous system. Among other things, vitamin B12 is responsible for the production of red blood cells.

Its high calcium content is very conducive to bone growth in children and adolescents, prevents osteoporosis in the elderly and generally provides healthy teeth. Cheese also provides the body with many important minerals, such as zinc and selenium, that help maintain muscle mass, reduce fatigue, and act as antioxidants.

## **Again potatoes?**

I have already written in chapter two about the ritual meaning of new potatoes in June for example in Ireland, but all over the rest of Europe too. It is the symbol for a new period of opulence. They were harvest when they are very young, with thin skin and taste creamy when they are cooked or roasted. There are over 5000 potato varieties in the world, but we only use a few hundred in Europe. The common classification depends on the maturing time and the cooking characteristics. But again, from the medical point of view, the color is very interesting, too. They could be yellow as usual, red or even violet/blue. All the colored potatoes have, compared with «normal» potatoes, a high rate of potent natural antioxidants. Old potato varieties are currently experiencing a renaissance.

They have sonorous names like Shetland Black, La Ratte or Bamberger Hoernchen and look with their excessive coloring even a little exotic. The effort to go to the weekly market is worthwhile. Like all potatoes, they are an excellent source of vitamin C and support the immune system, especially in winter. The contained potassium has a dehydrating effect, the B vitamins strengthen the nerves and stimulate the metabolism. Their fiber also ensures good digestion. The old potato varieties have even more to offer: Since they have adapted to the conditions of a region over many generations, they need less fertilizer or pesticides. They grow more slowly and therefore form more valuable ingredients than their mass-grown relatives. In addition, the historic varieties contain a greater variety of phytochemicals and have more anti-inflammatory effects. The red and blue/violet varieties contain plenty of anthocyanins: these lower the cholesterol level, keep the vessels elastic and thus prevent cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, their Kukoamine counteracts increased blood pressure. Therefore, the old potato varieties are not only a real gain for our palates, but also for our health.

### **What about alcohol?**

Those who engage in regional and seasonal specialties should never forget the beverages. The return to seasonal specialties promotes the increasing popularity of festival beers in recent years. A “German-Style-Festbier” is a special beer brewed for a special occasion. Especially good opportunities for these beers are very big festivals, such as Christmas, but also church days and beer festivals. “Festbier” is available in many flavors, from tasty—strong, mildly hopped to piquant and full-bodied. There are dark and light beers, but also mixed. It is usually brewed in the south of Germany in autumn, but sometimes beer is also produced as a spring specialty. The name “Festbier” is closely related to “Maerzenbier,” like the famous Oktoberfest. Since it only used to be possible to brew without refrigerated warehouses until March, due to the likelihood of the beer spoiling while fermenting in the summer, because of high airborne bacteria activity. The longer lasting beer, which was brewed stronger, was named Maerzenbier (March beer).

To have enough beer, it had to be brewed for the long summer in larger quantities. From October, the brewery’s marketing year started again, because it was cold enough to be able to start beer production again. To celebrate the new brewing year, the Oktoberfest was celebrated and the rest of the “Maerzenbier,” was distributed as a “Festbier.”

Two other examples are the Belgian style Saison Beer, also called Farmhouse Ale from Wallonia and the “Bière de Garde” (beer for keeping), a strong pale ale traditionally brewed in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais of France, both brewed in the cooler, less active winter months in farmhouses and stored for drinking in the summer months. Farmers possibly also brewed during the quieter period to provide work for their staff. They were originally served until the End of summer when the main consumers were seasonal farm workers.

Drinking these beers has also a health effect. Moderate alcohol consumption reduces the likelihood of cognitive dysfunction and Alzheimer's disease in old age—by as much as 23% (Neafsey and Collins, 2011). In particular, beer is good because the plant polyphenol Xanthohumol in hops protects brain cells from decay (Yao et al., 2015). Xanthohumol also has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant properties. These seasonal beers are rich in hops for the long storages. A study by the Italian Fondazione di Ricerca e Cura showed that moderate consumption of alcohol is generally good for cholesterol levels and reduces the risk of heart disease by about 31%. Previously, this property was mainly attributed to wine, but on beer it is according to the study as well (Costanzo et al., 2011).

Winter is the time for a red wine called “Beaujolais Nouveau” which is released in November as a “vin de l'année.” It is a wine for immediate drinking, and there is no reason to keep it for a few years. The standard Beaujolais AOC wine is released the following year and can be stored much better.

But the most important winter wine is mulled wine. Mulled wine is a hot wine drink, usually seasoned with sugar, cinnamon and cloves, which is drunk mainly in winter. But there are also connoisseurs who appreciate lemon and tangerine, nutmeg, eucalyptus, ginger, vanilla, star anise, and even blackberry recipe varieties.

As a wintry hot drink, mulled wine prevents seasonal illnesses such as colds and viral infections of the lungs. This is due, on the one hand, to the antiviral effect of the tannins contained in the wine, which specifically attack the proteins in the viruses. On the other hand, the antiviral and antibacterial effect of carnations and cinnamon, which is known since ancient times as a cure for colds. Nevertheless, caution is required when enjoying mulled wine, because as a hot drink the alcohol gets into your blood more quickly. In addition, sugar has a similar effect—you get drunk faster. So, we go back 2300 years and quote Aristotle: “And just as food and drink destroys their health if they are consumed in too much or too greedy a mass.” Although it sounds so easy, in our time of abundance it is so difficult to follow this rule. The balancing of measure and reason was struggled just as much over 2000 years ago as it is today.

In the meantime, by writing all of this, I have decided to maybe go on a diet. American scientists call it “Intuitive Eating.” We physicians call it “Sensory Intelligence.” It is extremely healthy and easy to follow, unless you have a severe clean eating neurosis. The most important rule: eat everything you like, do not be afraid of colorful food and move.

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