

WHY LEARNING IS VITAL TO YOUR HEALTH!



A simple guide to learning about food, nutrition and good health.

If you are not sure who to listen to when it comes to advice about healthy food, but you are keen to find out so you can make positive changes to your diet and improve your health, then this guide is for you.

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I get it!

If you are anything like me when I started to get interested in food and nutrition, then you are probably feeling very confused by all the contradictory information on the Internet and not sure who the experts really are.

You are keen to do the right thing and improve your health, but what's going on? Why do all the 'experts' seem to disagree? Who should you listen to?

Maybe it's time to pause and take a new approach. I am not going to promote any diet in this guide, nor tell you to eat more or less of any foods; quite the opposite, I am going to suggest you try something different, but much more effective.

I am going to suggest you **start learning**.

Confusion and frustration comes from not knowing. The only way to find what you need to know, is to start learning.

You may need as little as 20 minutes, or 1 hour, or even a week or months; whatever time you want to spend. The truth is until you start learning for yourself, you will always be a victim of the latest fad, fake news or biased story.

It's all very logical when you stop to consider it. Just think, time spent learning how to buy a second hand car, can save you hundreds of dollars, time spent learning how to invest in property, can save you thousands of dollars. Time spent leaning about health...well can you put a price on your health, on being strong, fit and healthy so you can spend quality time with your friends and family?

In this guide, I talk about **7 things** that I think are **essential** to understand when diving into the world of health and nutrition.

Understanding these, will help you on your journey to making a positive, long-term change to your health.

#1 Learning

You know, if you say to a finance expert or a real estate expert, 'listen, I have 30k I want to invest, where should I put it?', the very best experts (I mean the real experts, not the sales guys just making a commission) will say, 'the best thing you can do, is take a couple of grand and take a course - learn how to invest; then **you** can decide how and where to invest your money'.

It's the old adage; '**Teach a person to fish, don't just give them a fish**'.

Otherwise, you will always be the clueless novice, blindly following the advice of others and then probably having a 1% chance of striking it lucky and a 99% chance of landing flat on your back!

Those who are continually looking for a quick fix, or the latest tip, have no control and end up bouncing from one failure to another.

This is particularly true when it comes to changing your diet and getting healthy. A lot of people listen to colleagues at work who tell them about a new diet that it is working wonders for them, and so off they go and try the new diet. You never know, it might work. Some diets work, sometimes, for some people. However, it might not.

It might not for some very basic and, if you think about it, simple reasons. Everyone has different genes, everyone's lifestyle is different (maybe your colleague walks their dog twice a day, for example), everyone's metabolism, digestion and gut microbiome is different.

Basically, two similar people can eat the same food yet digest it differently and be affected by it differently.

In Tim Spector's book, 'The Diet Myth' he quotes studies of twins with the same diet and exercise regime producing **threefold** differences of weight change - yet they were eating the **same** food!

So, to have a better chance of succeeding in changing your diet and achieving better health, you need to be in better control of the information you act upon. You need to learn more. You don't need to become a dietitian (unless you want to), but you should learn enough to make better informed choices.

#2 Habits

There are in my opinion, two key things to learn. Firstly nutrition, as mentioned above, and secondly, learning about habits and how to change them.

There is a huge amount of research on habits, not only of individuals, but also of companies and societies; because one of the biggest challenges all three face in reaching their goals, is not being able to change their habits.

Most people are not even aware of half of the habits they have, and that includes eating habits. You can immediately see the problem; how can you change something you are not even aware of?

What was your new year's resolution this year? (Don't worry if you didn't make one, neither did I). Did you keep it? If you did, that's great, you are well on track. Sadly, most people don't see it through to the end of January, and there is a good reason. Resolutions involve changing habits, and they are not easy to change.

So, having learnt more about nutrition, and feeling confident enough to make decisions on which eating habits you want to change, you also need to understand **how habits work**. Otherwise, you will be trying out a new diet of new foods for several weeks, and very soon be slipping back into old habits.

The good news is there are things you can do to greatly increase your chances of successfully changing your habits and you can read about these and some great resources to help with this in 'The How to Guide to Learning and Nutrition'.

CALVIN AND HOBBS

by Bill Watterson



#3 Deep Learning

Hey, do you want to learn how to fry an egg? I guarantee there's a video on Youtube to teach you. Sorted. What about learning how to take good photos, maybe you need a course for that. There were actually over 50 million people worldwide taking a variety of online courses in 2017.

It seems nowadays, many people equate **learning** with **taking a course**. This may be true, but taking a course may not always lead to learning.

Of course, if the course you take (be it in person or online) is **top quality**, you may learn a lot.

To take a top quality course, you need to find one first, and that is not as easy as it may seem; trust me, there are a lot more mediocre ones than good ones out there.

Once you have found one, you then need to dig deep into your wallet; they are usually not cheap. They tend to cost more, because they require more direct engagement with a teacher who will guide your learning. You often get what you pay for.

But even when you follow a top quality course, teachers there will be the first ones to tell you that you need to go beyond the course to really deepen your learning.

So taking a course, a good one, may lead to great learning, but more is needed.

Superficial learning

Many courses will not stretch you beyond superficial learning. This is particularly true of online courses, and again it is partly down to cost. Online courses can be very cheap, but the sacrifice is you will be left by and large, to **self-study**. So, you get to watch some videos, read some Power Points and pdfs, and sort it out yourself.

Superficial learning happens when students just carry out simple activities to achieve what Benjamin Bloom calls 'knowledge-based goals'. With these low level activities in his framework for learning, you read or listen to some information and 'learn' it. Basically, you memorise it.

Someone says, 'what are apples good for?' and you (having recently read and studied this) proudly say, 'apples contain vitamin C which builds the immune system, and they have lots of fibre which aids digestion and can reduce cholesterol!'

Well done, you have done some superficial learning!

Deep learning

For deep learning to happen, you need to jump up to Bloom's higher level activities, including **applying** what you learn to new situations, **analysing** and **evaluating** the information. Ultimately, the deepest learning happens when you **create** something out of that information. That's one of the reasons it's so useful to write a blog and make podcasts on nutrition (small hint)!

So, it's' really important not just to look at doing a course, but to look at activities beyond the course which can lead to deeper learning.

Deep learning is important because you engage not only with knowledge, but also with your beliefs and your identity about the topic you are studying. More about these shortly.

Basically, (deep) learning changes you.

As your beliefs and identity change and become stronger, you have more confidence to implement your actions and change your habits. You are basically setting yourself up for success.

In a nutshell, if you can find and afford a good course, great! Whatever course you take, you want to make sure you carry out plenty of higher level activities; analysing, evaluating and creating things that will lead to deeper learning.



#4 Beliefs

You behave in certain ways, and when you do this on a daily basis, those behaviours become your habits.

The ways you behave (and your habits) are based on your beliefs. Beliefs are fundamental to everything you do. The more aware we are of that connection, the better.

For example, I get up at 6 o'clock and go for a walk everyday because I believe it helps the cramps I sometimes get when I sit at my computer for long periods during the day.

I wouldn't change that habit until evidence showed me it wasn't true, or someone convinced me to change my belief. If someone proved to me that *swimming* would be much more beneficial then I may change my belief, and then change my behaviour.

But my belief has to change first, otherwise I won't change.

This is why, even when people tell someone '*x is bad for you, you shouldn't eat it*', they often don't change their behaviour. Deep down they haven't really changed their belief that it is bad for them. Or they may hold a stronger belief that stops them changing.

The older and bigger the belief, the harder it is to change

The longer we hold a belief and the bigger it is, then the harder it will be to change. The opposite is also true.

So, what do I mean by a '**big**' belief?

Well, let's say there are different sizes of belief, from small to big. **Big** beliefs may involve your deepest values, and influence how you see the world, for example,

I believe the world is round (A Big Belief)

Medium ones may also influence your behaviour and reflect some important values, but are not life-changing, such as,

I believe children should ask questions in school, not just listen quietly (A Medium Belief)

Small ones, are less important and may even change over time, for instance,

I believe ice cream is the best desert ever (A Small Belief)

Where would you put your beliefs about food? For example, if you believe that drinking honey lemon tea is beneficial, when you have a cold. Or if you believe that fat in bacon makes you fat.

Big, medium or small?

Most people put them either small or medium. The important point is that the smaller the belief the easier it is to change, once you learn or find evidence that it is not true.

You eat the foods you eat, because of certain beliefs you have, although you may not always be fully aware of what these are.

If you want to change your eating habits to improve your health, you must first be open to having your beliefs challenged, and to possibly changing some beliefs. Only after you have changed your beliefs, will you be able to change your habits.



#5 Identity

It was Christmas Eve, and we had a few family and friends around for dinner. Dinner was on the table at 8pm and at about 8:05pm the lights all went out. We had probably been using too many hobs, ovens and lights at the same time.

To nobody's surprise, it was uncle Chris who immediately said, 'where's the fuse box, I'll sort it out'. Uncle Chris isn't an electrician, but he is good at stuff like that. But his confidence doesn't only come from knowing how to do 'stuff like that', it comes from somewhere else too.

He sees himself, and so do others, as the guy who can sort out the electrical stuff. It's one of his identities, and one that is reinforced by those around him.

On the other hand, I am the one who says, 'can someone sort that? I am rubbish at electrical stuff'. You may have guessed, it is not a part of my identity. I am a clueless novice when it comes to electrical stuff.

However, if I wanted, I could change that. I could learn, practice and over time, my identity as a 'fixer' or even an 'electrician' would grow stronger. As it grows, I would also get better and more confident at doing that. It soars in an upward spiral.

People often think you are an electrician or a chef when you qualify as one. However, that certificate is just a part of it; your perception as being an electrician or a chef, is actually a huge part of it.

Identity is a key part of learning, and a key part of behaviour change.

As you learn about food, and as you change your behaviour, you may see yourself moving from being say, a clueless novice at cooking, towards being an amateur who can cook a decent meal for two. As you practice a new behaviour, so your identity (in this case your identity as a chef) becomes stronger.

It's extremely useful to start paying attention to your identity and how it might change.



#6 Motivation

Did you see the film *'The Founder'* with Michael Keaton playing Ray Croc, the founder of MacDonalds? At one point, he stares into the camera and asks the audience, *'how the heck does a 52 year old, over-the-hill milkshake machine salesman, build a fast food empire...one word; persistence!'*

Whatever goal you have, you need persistence. But where do you find persistence? How do you just keep going when nothing seems to be clicking?

Well, you need **motivation**. For many the motivation is the **goal**; seeing yourself with a strong healthy body might be your goal and that image keeps you motivated.

When the goal is far away though, sometimes that is not enough, so you need to find ways to keep motivated. Breaking your goals down into smaller ones can work, acting like small rewards on the way.

There are many things you can do, but the important thing is to remember to keep finding ways to motivate yourself. If you neglect your motivation, then when times get tough, you are at risk of giving up.

Martina Navratilova, who was ranked in the top 3 world women tennis players for 15 years, put it well when she said, *'it's not how well you play when you're at your best that matters, it's how well you play when you are at your worst.'*

Keep focused on your motivation.

#7 Real life

When I was managing an English school in China many years ago, I remember how fascinated I was at the determination of the Chinese and their willingness to work hard. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I saw lots of it around me. Mind you, I also saw lots of people mastering the art of laziness as well, just to balance the stereotype a bit!

Within a few days of arriving at the school, I was introduced to one of the star students of the primary class, Mandy (an English name she had adopted; as many Chinese children do). She proceeded to reel off, with cues from her proud mother, a list of around 20 English expressions she had learnt, including 'Hello', 'How are you?' 'Nice to meet you!' 'How old are you?'. Her mother would say the number of the phrase, and Mandy would say the corresponding English phrase. She did it to perfection. I applauded and congratulated her.

After the 'performance', I then asked her a few questions; 'that was great, how old are you?' She glanced at her mother and looked confused. I tried to slow down, 'how - old - are - you?', more confusion and silence. I went back to 'What is your name?' No answer. I then realised that she had memorised a list of phrases in a specific order, but had no ability to adapt them or use them. She was totally unable to apply what she had learnt to her real life.

This may bring a smile to your face, but we all let this happen to us, sometimes. We read a book, and think 'I understand that'. We learn a list of food items and which vitamins they contain, and then move on. But what does that mean for us? What action should or could we take, if any?

It is so important to be continually asking what we have learnt and what it means for us? And what are we going to do about it?

By connecting learning to our lives, it deepens the learning. It also helps us become more critical, as our actions can help us decide how useful the learning was for us.

The last thing we want to do is accept everything we read as true and relevant. How would we cope with all that conflicting nutritional information, if we did.

You don't want to end up like Mandy's English; impressive but of little use.

(Footnote - After 3 months of a different kind of teaching Mandy was able to hold some basic conversations in English. She already had the motivation and the belief, all she needed was some good guidance).

If you liked this guide, please do visit my website and try taking a new kind of course - a **Learning Journey** - where you will experience some deep learning about food and nutrition. You can register here

www.seriouslyfunfood.com/learning-journey-register/

Please feel free to share this guide with your friends, all I ask is that you make no changes to it and acknowledge where it came from (www.seriouslyfunfood.com)

References:

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The Founder by John Lee Hancock, 2016

Cartoons from *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson courtesy of Universal U Click.

Disclaimer: This guide is meant to be educational, it is not intended or designed to give medical advice. If you need specific medical advice please visit you local doctor or dietitian.