



## How what's in your sandwich can influence the decisions you make



By Dr. Delia Roberts

Most of us think about food in terms of satisfying hunger, adding to the fun of getting together with friends and family, and maybe, to either increase health or at least avoid disease. But have you considered how what you eat can impact the very way you think?

Every decision we make affects how good we are at our jobs, how well we behave in relationships, and what level of risk exposure we accept. So making sure that we provide our brains with the fuel needed to power up good decisions is one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves and ensure a long, safe, productive and enjoyable life.

### Getting good information

Unfortunately, knowing what to eat isn't quite as simple as we were once led to believe. The good old Canada Food Guide has been questioned, and it seems that nearly every day there is an announcement of some food having magically beneficial properties. What we used to think of as 'scientifically-proven' may not have been true after all. It can all be a bit overwhelming, and leave you without the information that you need to feed yourself and your family. Here are a few basic rules you can use to help make sure that your brain gets the energy it needs, along with a little bit of background to show you why you can have faith in these recommendations.

### Reaction times best when blood sugar is stable

Your brain only makes up about 2% of your body weight, but consumes about 20% of your daily energy needs. Of this, about 2/3 of the energy consumed goes towards neural signaling, and 1/3 to keeping the tissue healthy. Making sure this energy supply is maintained is so important that there is a very tightly controlled chemical and hormonal system to preserve the supply of glucose to your brain at all costs – including suppressing the immune system and breaking down muscle and other important molecules in your blood.

Tests with fallers, haulers, tree planters and other groups show that every measure of cognitive function including memory, reaction time, alertness and mood are better when blood sugar is stable. That means no highs or lows, which is best done by eating small amounts of food low in free sugars every 2-3 hours when you need your brain to be working at its best. The evidence comes from practical studies done in small numbers, but it's consistent across groups.

### Ketosis effects on humans are still not all known

Newer research has shown that saturated fats and blood lipid levels do not actually cause heart disease. There is also quite a bit of evidence that high fat, low carbohydrate diets can improve weight loss and some of the health problems that are seen in obese people like type II diabetes and lipid profiles. There are also studies that show that ketosis is helpful for neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's and even Alzheimer's. But these findings don't necessarily translate into good health for the average person. First of all, it takes about four days of a very strict restriction of carbs to get into ketosis. During this time your brain is deprived of glucose but hasn't yet adapted to burn ketones, so moodiness, poor attention and slowing of reflexes are problematic. Stress hormones are also elevated and the immune system is suppressed. These symptoms go away if you stay in ketosis, but the diet limits many foods that are full of vitamins, minerals, and other healthful compounds not the least of which is fibre, absolutely essential for gut health. And the studies that show the positive effects of the ketogenic diet are often done on animals, partly because it's very hard for people to stick with the diet. Currently, we don't know what the long-term effects are in humans, or even what the short-term effects are on mental function.

### Digestion time depends on what you ate

When you work hard your muscle burns fuel at a very high rate. Keeping both muscle and your brain supplied with enough fuel can be time limited. It's a bit like the difference between how much fuel is in the cache and how much is currently being fed into your engine! When the fat content of a meal is more than about 30%, the fat has to be emulsified before it can be digested, so the valve at the bottom of your stomach

closes until the fat can get broken down into little droplets and mixed with water and enzymes. It also takes time to break down fats that are already stored in your body, so any time you need energy to do something fast or powerful, you have to rely on carbs. The one exception to this rule is medium chain triglycerides or MCT, found primarily in coconut oil. These smaller fats can be absorbed and used much faster than other types of fat.

**Tip:** Check the label of your favorite granola bar or snack for the percentage (%) of calories from fat. If this exceeds 30% then it will take 3-4 hours to digest and absorb this meal.

### Energy balance and inflammation

Many of the dietary factors that we know cause diseases are not simply due to eating either carbs or fats. Rather, they come from the inflammation that results from eating more than is needed for body functions, especially when the excess calories come from highly processed foods. Whether it's sugars or fatty foods, highly processed, cooked foods have a tendency to increase the level of inflammation in the body. Whole foods that are high in fibre, low in calories and nutrient-rich have a tendency to lower inflammation. And finally, people who are obese have higher levels of inflammation that are lowered if they lose weight.

### Packing your lunch

If you pull all this information together there are a few clear messages.

Choose whole foods that are less processed and eat them in amounts that are in balance with your energy needs. Don't skip breakfast, and split your meals so that you eat smaller amounts more frequently when you are at work. High fibre foods that balance fats (less than 30%), complex carbs (high in fibre) and proteins (20% range) for a steady supply of fuel for your brain, will keep you alert and making good decisions all day long.

For breakfast, eggs and leaner meats with whole grain toast or cooked cereal (rolled oats, 7-grain, buckwheat) are good choices. Greek style unsweetened yogurt with fresh or frozen chopped fruit will also provide protein, fat, and carbs in the right amounts to start your day. Snack on cottage cheese, fresh veggies with humus, and whole fruit, or just a few nuts mixed with flaked coconut and a bit of dried fruit. Left over dinner can be hard to eat in the field, but sandwiches work any time. Choose from a variety of whole grain breads, bagels, buns or wraps. Add a thin smear of mustard, mayo, chutney, or humus for flavor, then pile on the veggies, beginning with the drier ones like lettuce or spinach, and finishing with moisture containing cucumber or tomato slices. Mix it up with peppers, zucchini, sprouts and thin strips of avocado, and then add your protein. Left-over chicken, turkey or thin sliced red

meats are a better choice than commercially prepared lunchmeat. It's less expensive and will keep the amount of salt and nitrites in your diet much lower. Tuna or salmon, beans mashed with spices or cooked eggs are also good. Cut your sandwich in half or even thirds and wrap separately to help you spread out your food intake across the day.

## Time well spent

It takes a bit more time to make your lunch from scratch, but the payback is there in helping to keep your energy level high throughout the day. You'll concentrate better, react quicker to unexpected events, and even your mood will be more stable, something that is sure to be appreciated by your co-workers! Your immune system will be stronger and the levels of disease-causing chemical signals in your body will be lower. And best of all, it starts you on the path of making good decisions in every aspect of your life. So much goodness to be found in a simple sandwich! 🍷



## Never ignore your health

Over the past year or so, we have seen the loss to families of five forestry workers involved in different occupations have who died on the job as a result of natural causes.

Please take care of you! If not for you, then consider doing it for the people who love you and want to grow older with you.

Three things that make a difference in everyone's health: Losing extra kilos by eating healthy, balanced meals and snacks and limiting food intake to meet your physical output; giving up smoking; and reducing alcoholic drink consumption.

Canadian Heart and Stroke have developed a quick risk assessment tool you can use online to test your risk factors for heart attacks and strokes. Please see: <http://www.heartandstroke.ca/> for good, simple advice; and for the assessment, see: <http://www.heartandstroke.ca/get-healthy>



Small changes will add years to your life. Start today! 🍷

# Men's health focus in November

Whether it's Movember <https://ca.movember.com/> or any other health and wellness initiative, November is a good month for men – and their significant others – to help all the men in their lives take a serious health status check.

When last did you see your doctor? A year ago? Five years ago? 10 years ago? Don't remember? Quit stalling. Preventative visits to check blood pressure, heart, lungs, prostate, blood and urine screens – are all painless measures that can potentially save your life. In health as in life, you don't know what you don't know. Information is power and health awareness, early on = much better outcomes. Treatments have advanced so much in all medical fields that the earlier anything is caught or anticipated, the better the prognosis. Quality of life in your well-deserved retirement years, takes a little bit of effort now, starting with regular doctor's visits and your own increased awareness of your body and changes to it.

## Some quick health checks that could save your life

### Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in men 15-39 years of age

Did you know in Canada, testicular cancer strikes the young most? It is the most common cancer in men between 15 (yes, 15) and 39 years of age. Share these self-test tools with your kids and grandkids too: <https://ca.movember.com/mens-health/testicular-cancer> and consider signing up for the email health reminders accessible via the link above.

### Simple blood test for prostate cancer saves lives

A simple blood test (PSA) for prostate cancer does save lives. In Canada, if detected early, there is a 98% chance of survival beyond 5 years. If detected late, this is reduced to 26%. Learn more here, and book that appointment today: <https://ca.movember.com/mens-health/prostate-cancer>. For more resources, see Prostate Cancer Canada: <http://prostatecancer.ca/Prostate-Cancer>.

### Mental health is part of the total package

Whether it's stress related to work, change, money, health, home, relationships, fires, or depression, or a bit of everything, mental and emotional well-being is critical. If you ever feel you can't or don't want to talk to those closest to you, know you are not alone. There are many resources available to support you in your health recovery. Learn more here: <https://ca.movember.com/mens-health/mental-health>; <http://mantherapy.org/> and at the Canadian Mental Health Association <https://cmha.ca/>.

If you or someone you love is having a mental/emotional crisis, call 911 or go to your nearest hospital. If you just need to talk to a qualified stranger who will never judge you, or say the wrong thing, but be a good listener, call 310 Mental Health Support Line (province wide), a 24-hour crisis help line. Call **310-6789** (no area code required) or **1-800-SUICIDE** (1-800-784-2433). See [www.crisislines.bc.ca](http://www.crisislines.bc.ca) 🍷

## All's well that ends well for Tolko log truck driver after heart incident



Read his heart-warming story here: <https://meadowlakenow.com/article/613340/truck-driver-revived-tolko-employees-may-returns-work> 🍷

Screenshot from the Meadow Lake NOW (August 23, 2018 edition) about a Tolko log truck driver who got a second chance at life thanks to the quick action of coworkers.