

Local

'Potholes' can get in health's way

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Posted: 03/30/2014 1:00 AM |

It seems as though I have been writing a number of seasonal articles in anticipation of spring, yet sadly, spring has not yet sprung. So this week, in lieu of anger management — another suitable topic considering our elongated winter 'bliss' — let's shift our focus to something quite well-known to Winnipeggers 'potholes.' Potholes, that is, on our road to optimal health.

With a new season (whenever it comes), many look to "spring-clean" their health. Despite best efforts, hidden potholes of misinformation can throw people off course and at best, slow their journey on the road to renewed vitality.



By exploring some of the common pitfalls, you can speed up your progress to your destination, and set yourself up for a smooth ride along the way.

Artificial sweeteners

Of course we've heard it's all about calories in, calories out, right? Wrong. There's more pieces to the puzzle of weight loss. Artificial sweeteners, such as sucralose, acesulfame-potassium and aspartame (and their brand-name counterparts, with which you may be most familiar) cause your mouth to taste sweet without the calories. However, the pitfall here is your brain is not fooled, and is expecting those sweet calories to come. Your brain will then drive you to eat even more sugar. Studies on artificial sweeteners show people actually gain more weight than if they

Evidence review suggests extra inches raise risk of dying younger, regardless of body weight.

consumed sugar outright.

Sucralose -- the most popular sweetener on the market -- can be especially detrimental to weight gain. It has been linked to low thyroid function.

Instead, temper your taste buds by choosing healthy foods that contain natural sugars, such as fruits. Alternatively, you can add flavour with cinnamon, vanilla extract, unsweetened coconut flakes and when needed, the herbal stevia to best support that sweet need.

Drinking water -- at the wrong times

Do you make sure to have that big glass of water before meals? If so, you might want to think again. Filling up on fluids before eating dilutes your digestive enzymes and stomach acid. Not only does this lead to uncomfortable bloating (which fills you up temporarily), but it impairs the absorption of nutrients and the health of your digestive tract. Long-term, your body will crave more to replenish its nutrient needs, causing you to overeat. That is, if the disturbance in the gut flora doesn't cause you to gain the weight first.

The alternative: Continue drinking ample water between -- not before or during -- meals. To further aid digestion, add a squeeze of fresh lemon juice. And instead of water, fill up on fibre-rich leafy greens to boost your antioxidant intake, supporting your metabolism and elimination of wastes.

Fat phobia

Fats contain the highest amount of calories per mass, nine calories per gram, versus four calories per gram of protein or carb. However, fats have a special place in filling your health potholes: satiation. Not only are they the most satisfying food group, but they have myriad benefits on your body's insulin response and eating behaviour. A common mistake is focusing only on calories at the expense of fat. Eating an apple is good, but eating an apple with some nuts or cheese may be better. The apple alone, although healthy, will cause a sharper rise and fall of glucose, triggering cravings for another snack. The addition of nuts will slow this sugar spike and leave you fuller for longer, while providing your body with brain-calming fatty acids.

Also, if your body is craving fatty foods, you'd best pay attention. This may be a sign of your need for essential fatty acids, most commonly in the form of omega-3s.

Spring weather is almost here... or so I keep telling myself. In any case, now is the time to think of filling those potholes for our health, so we'll be travelling at full speed come summer. What a glorious month that will be.

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Republished from the Winnipeg Free Press print edition March 30, 2014 A7

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