

Macrobiotics America

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Why Avoid Certain Foods? by David Briscoe

In the macrobiotic literature and on the “Foods to Avoid List” of the Getting Started section of the Macrobiotics America web site, you will come across many foods that are recommended to be avoided according to the macrobiotic view. Among them will be some foods that are commonly sold in natural foods stores and commonly considered “healthy” foods. One example is soymilk. There are many others.

It is important to understand that macrobiotics views food not only through the modern nutritional lens of “protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals,” but also through the traditional understanding that each food has unique qualities. This is the macrobiotic “energetic” view, or what I sometimes refer to as the “invisible nutrition” of food. We can’t see it under a microscope but it is there nonetheless. And, depending on the food and drink we choose, this energy quality will have positive or negative effects on our cells, tissue, organs and all system functions within the body, including the nervous and immune systems.

Basically, every food has its unique energetic quality that can be generally labeled as “contractive” or “expansive.” Sugar, fruit, hot spices, and alcohol, for example, all have extremely expansive qualities. Eggs, chicken, baked flour products, overly salty food, for example, all have extremely contractive qualities. This doesn’t imply that a food is “good” or “bad,” it is simply expressing the energy effects that a food’s “energetic quality” has on the human body and personal behavior. This can be very subtle and insidious, not showing up as a health problem for many years or decades, or it can be immediate as when a person gets a headache from eating ice cream or, even more obviously, when someone overuses alcohol or takes drugs. When taken regularly, foods with extremely contracting or extremely expanding qualities will lead to various types of imbalances in the body, resulting in a variety of physical symptoms as well as unstable psychological and emotional states.

In many cases, foods and drinks that might be considered useful from the modern nutritional view or even an alternative medical viewpoint, are not recommended from a macrobiotic view. This can be confusing in the beginning of one’s macrobiotic practice, since certain foods and supplements that we may have been using because a book or advertisement extolled their benefits, are to be avoided from a macrobiotic view because of energetic properties that can contribute to health problems. The foods listed in macrobiotic books and literature as those to be avoided are listed as such because they are considered energetically extreme and/or artificially produced and processed.

Macrobiotics teaches us to rely on our own judgment by applying macrobiotic principles to the selection and preparation of food and drink. Instead of relying on the marketing campaigns of the health food industry, constantly fluctuating government and scientific food pyramids, or this year’s nutritional pronouncements from best-selling books and popular TV diet gurus, macrobiotics teaches us to use time-tested traditional principles when deciding what to eat and not to eat.

If this all seems a bit mysterious or esoteric to you right now, don’t worry. It did to me, too. Eventually, if you continue to study and develop your understanding of food from a macrobiotic view, you will see the beauty and benefits of applying this way to your life.

On last thing: A wonderful macrobiotic teacher, the late Herman Aihara, said, “When it comes to food, always remember that mass popularity equals lowest quality.” So, if you want to know what NOT to eat just stand at the door of any supermarket or natural food store and watch what is bought the most. Then, don’t eat that yourself. You’ll do yourself a big favor! Whatever is the most popular food and drink, or the current diet, supplement or quick-fix health gismo getting the most media hype, will be best avoided by those who want genuine health. Best wishes for a healthy life.