

## Health

# Eat for longevity and vitality



**Kathryn Borg**

getting old; the irritating symptoms, such as toenails thickening, the waist thickening and a lack of vitality. I also mentioned William Banting and Michael Montignac, both of whom advocated a low glycaemic index (GI) diet.

Many dismiss the Montignac diet as a variation of the Atkins regime. However, while there are some similarities, there are differences which make Montignac safer in the long term. While both systems concentrate on carbohydrates, the Montignac regime recognises that not all carbohydrates are created equally.

The key to both of these regimes is the GI of carbohydrates. Nutritional guru Patrick Holford has

written extensively on this regime of eating and gives lectures in the UK regarding the benefits of low GI eating.

The GI refers to the relative degree to which blood sugar increases after the consumption of food. In this index, a food is always measured in relation to the effect of pure sugar. High GI foods can raise blood-glucose levels and insulin levels very quickly. In contrast, low GI foods do not significantly raise blood glucose levels and insulin after they have been eaten.

The way the index works is to give pure glucose a value of 100 while other foods are given an index number representing its relative

effect on blood glucose. An example would be sweetcorn, which is assigned an index number of 55. This means that eating sweetcorn raises blood glucose levels 55 per cent, or just over half as much as pure glucose does.

To simplify the regime, in general, low GI foods have an index number below 55. From 55 to 70 is a mid-GI and those over 70 are considered high GI foods.

In the past, it was widely believed that simple sugars dramatically increased blood glucose levels, while starches such as potatoes and bread were digested slowly. However, the results of numerous studies show that this is not the case. One

of the most interesting surprises is the potato, which is reported to have an average GI of 84.

During tests in the 1980s, it was found that all carbohydrates caused a glucose peak around 30 minutes after ingestion. It had previously been thought that simple carbohydrates such as sugar and honey were fast-acting, while complex carbohydrates, such as potatoes and cereals, were slow-acting. It was also found that cooking has a major effect on the GI. Carrots produce three times the blood glucose level when cooked rather than being eaten raw.

This rules out any processed foods, snacks, sweets, food made from white flour, some pastas and white rice. The Montignac method also excludes potatoes with the exception of sweet potatoes or yams.

By comparison, the good carbs lead to only a slight increase of glucose in the blood. These include whole grains, brown rice, pulses such as lentils and dried beans, most fruits (ideally eaten first thing in the morning on an empty stomach), most vegetables, such as leeks, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, salads and green beans.

Other foods which produce a relatively low glycaemic response include dried white pasta, barley, bulgar wheat and wholegrain breads such as pumpernickel or rye. Incorporating these foods into the diet has

**“An overhaul of everything you eat would certainly change you and your health”**

been associated with reduced blood glucose, insulin and lipid (fat) levels (*World Rev. Nutr. Diet 1990*).

A study from Hammersmith Hospital in London found that high GI foods can decrease levels of HDL cholesterol (the ‘good’ cholesterol), which safeguards against cardiovascular disease (*Lancet 1999*).

Unlike calorie counting, the GI index isn’t a quantity, but a rank score in a range both up and down from 100. So whether you eat one slice or the whole loaf of bread, its GI score remains the same. Also, GI scores vary according to the source and the study technique.

It is useful to check out the most recent publications of the GI index and Patrick Holford seems to have found a sensible way of following this lifestyle change, which helps lose the weight that older people cannot shift while replacing lost vitality and energy.

The advantage of changing your eating regime as you grow older is that, generally, most people have fallen into a routine of eating the same type of food. Invariably they are not always the best foods, so an overhaul of everything you eat would certainly change you and your health.

Finally, a change in your lifestyle as you grow older must include some type of exercise. Exercise physiologists have found that the best programme is a combination of both cardiovascular and resistance training for a minimum of 30 minutes per day.

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Last week I discussed the symptoms that tell us, discreetly, that we are

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