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1.3. Функціональні харчові продукти: за та проти

Role of functional foods in a human diet

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The term functional foods was first introduced in Japan in the mid-1980s and refers to processed foods containing ingredients that aid specific bodily functions in addition to being nutritious. It is well known that a poor diet is linked to increased causes of hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, osteoporosis and even death which is why the variety and access of functional foods has become much easier. Many foods are being enhanced and fortified with functional components such as antioxidants, probiotics, vitamins and minerals, to enhance overall health and reduce the risk of disease. Functional foods include conventional foods such as grains, fruits, vegetables and nuts; modified foods such as yogurt, cereals and orange juice; medical foods such as special formulations of foods and beverages for certain health conditions; foods for special dietary use such as infant formula and hypoallergenic foods.

A popular example of a natural functional food is oats. A daily portion of 60 grams of oatmeal has been proven to result in an up to 5% reduction in serum cholesterol. Others include soy with its most well-documented cholesterol-lowering effect, tea (catechins), super fruits such as cranberry, grapes and pomegranate (antioxidants, carotenoids, resveratrol, tannins and flavonoids) are protective against a variety of human cancers, tomatoes (lycopene), and chocolate (flavanols). Garlic is the herb most widely quoted in the literature for medicinal properties. The health benefits of garlic are numerous, including cancer chemopreventive, antibiotic, anti-hypertensive, and cholesterol-lowering properties. There is no doubt that dairy products are functional foods. They are one of the best sources of calcium, an essential nutrient which can prevent osteoporosis and possibly colon cancer.

Functional foods containing physiologically-active components, either from plant or animal sources, may enhance health. It should be stressed that there are no "good" or "bad" foods, but there are good or bad diets. In order to receive their benefits one cannot just consume one serving of a functional component per day. It was stated, functional foods must be consumed on a regular basis, as part of a varied diet. A foods nutrient density is what determines the level of efficiency of a food component.

Finally, those foods whose health benefits are supported by sufficient scientific substantiation have the potential to be an increasingly important component of a healthy lifestyle and to be beneficial to the public and the food industry. Functional foods, whether they are unprocessed or fortified, may be the next big thing to replace medication in the improvement of health.

References

1. Hasler, Claire, M. 1998. Functional foods: their role in disease prevention and health promotion. A publication of the Food Technologists expert panel on Food Safety and Nutrition. <http://www.nutriwatch.org/04Foods/ff.html>, 1998, 1-15