



Health Notes from the Lilydale Pharmacy

Food for thought

We should all be well aware that what we eat has a great influence on our health. Ever since the 18th century when Captain Cook and his seafaring colleagues showed that regular intake of citrus fruit prevented scurvy, we have been searching for dietary supplements to cure every disease.

There are no easy answers when it comes to major disease treatment or prevention, but we do know that a diet high in fibre and low in fat can protect against conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

A low-fat diet can reduce cholesterol levels and thus also reduce the risk of cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) disease. Reducing the intake of other substances can also be beneficial. One or two drinks of alcohol per day, particularly red wine, might be helpful; but more than two drinks a day is likely to cause more harm than good.

A low-sodium intake, when combined with a healthy diet and a little regular walking, can significantly reduce blood pressure.

What does seem certain is that there is a link between diet and certain types of cancer. For instance bowel cancer, the second most common cause of cancer death in Australia, appears to be more common in people whose diet is high in fat and low in fibre, fruit and vegetables. Smoking and alcohol consumption may also add to the risk.

Whether extra vitamins and minerals should be taken in addition to your regular meals has been a matter of debate for many years. There is no doubt, however, that healthy eating is the best way to ensure you get all the vitamins your body needs. Nevertheless there are some people who will certainly benefit from extra vitamins and minerals, at least at some time in their lives.

Calcium supplements may be necessary for some of us to prevent the problems associated with osteoporosis. Iron and folic acid are important supplements during pregnancy. A recent study showed that folic acid supplements might prevent heart disease in smokers. On the other hand, a previous study indicated that smokers who took extra beta-carotene (it changes into vitamin A in the body) were more likely to get cancer. Again, we see that non-smoking is the healthiest option.

Obesity is a growing problem which is affecting too many adults as well as children. For men, if your waist measurement is more than 100 cm then you have a weight problem. For women it is 90 cm. Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for many diseases, including heart disease, stroke and diabetes.