



John A. McDougall, M.D.

Dr. John A. McDougall's

To Your Health

**Don't let the "sugar police" scare you...
and don't deny your body the sweets it naturally craves!**

Let's face it. Sugar has become an easy target. People interested in making sugar the enemy point to the fact that obesity among children in the United States rose 100 percent between 1980 and 1994. Or to the recent study published in the *Lancet* medical journal claiming that "an extra soft drink a day gives a child a 60 percent greater chance of becoming obese."¹ Yes, these findings are disturbing and very real, but they're certainly not the whole story.

Studies like the one in *Lancet* are often misinterpreted. Not only do they add fuel to the fire for those who promote unhealthy, high-protein diets—they make people who eat healthy, high-carbohydrate diets doubt themselves. "Were the high-protein diet gurus right all along?" "Is sugar the archenemy of your health, to be avoided at all costs?" NO!

While I don't believe that cans of soda and other sugary, processed foods should be consumed as snacks—let alone as meals—sweet-tasting foods *should not* be banned from your diet. And even pure sugar, in limited quantities, has its place. It's only natural (literally) for children and adults alike to crave sweets. And, despite what studies come out or what you might read about in the media, "sweets" *are* an important part of a healthy meal plan. Even part of a weight-loss plan!

Don't trick your body; it's designed to eat sweet-tasting foods

The taste buds that detect sweetness are located right on the tip of your tongue. Your Creator made you that way, and He didn't leave much to chance in the human body. Humans are meant to eat—and enjoy—sweet-tasting foods. Then why the studies showing that people are getting fat from eating sugar? It's just that we've gotten a little sidetracked over the last millennium or so.

There was a time when our sweet-seeking urges were satisfied with natural sources—fruit, rice, potatoes, vegetables, and whole grains. Then humans became aware of the science behind sweetness—and

recognized an opportunity to profit. Once food manufacturers understood how our taste buds worked, they began exploiting our natural urges and adding excess sugar to our foods. They developed more refined, processed sources of sugar, stripping away the natural goodness and substituting those sources for all the good complex carbohydrates.

This "manufacturers' gold mine" has created the scene we have today: a "society of sugar." The USDA reports that we consume an average of 20 teaspoons of sugar a day,² and according to the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, people in the United States eat 139 pounds of the stuff a year.³ Each!

But what really has me bothered is that *all* sugars, including healthy, complex carbohydrates, are getting a bad rap from the high-protein diet gurus.

Ignore those who condemn sugar and carbohydrates all together

The low-carb camps teach (as I do) that sugar raises insulin levels and forces more fat into fat cells. But that's just *simple* sugars. Sugars consumed as whole carbohydrates actually raise insulin levels *less* than beef, fish, and cheese!⁴ And, if you're following a low-fat diet, even if your insulin levels do go up a bit, you won't have the fat for your cells to store. The truth is, even processed sugar in limited quantities is fine. It can enhance the taste of other foods. And carbohydrates? They're what keep you alive and healthy!

How much sugar is your body designed to consume? Plenty!

You can treat yourself to sugar in every meal. Just don't overdo it. For breakfast this morning, I had whole-grain cereal with brown sugar sprinkled on top. For a midday snack, I had dried apricots. I had some fresh corn on the cob with dinner, and a juicy baked apple sprinkled with cinnamon for dessert. These delicious foods, combined with all the vegetables, legumes, and whole grains that I wanted, worked to satisfy my sweet tooth throughout the day, and I did not risk my waistline for a minute. But notice that

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¹ *Lancet*, 357:505, 2001

² USDA Pyramid Servings Data, 1997

³ *Am J Clin Nutr*, 62(8):161S-8S, 1995

⁴ *Am J Clin Nutr*, 66:1264-1276, 1997

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For questions regarding your subscription, please call or write reader services at 819 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21201; tel. (978)514-7851 (9 a.m.-5 p.m. EST, Mon.-Fri.); fax (410)223-2619. International call (978)514-7857; fax (410)230-1273. **Send cancellations to P.O. Box 206, Baltimore, MD 21203.** If, for any reason, customer service is unable to handle your request in a satisfactory manner, you may contact a subscriber advocate. Subscriber advocates can be reached via our telephone hotline (410)223-2690, or via e-mail at subscriberadvocate@agora-inc.com.

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Our mission: For over 27 years, Dr. John McDougall has been fighting to bring nutrition to the forefront of mainstream medicine. Frustrated by the establishment's resistance to logic and to years of evidence from his clinic, he set out to educate health-conscious people about the medicinal qualities of food for the treatment and prevention of many of today's most threatening diseases. He is dedicated to teaching you how to transform your life and to achieve optimum health and appearance by using the life-giving foods that were designed for your body. In addition, each month he will bring you news of his latest healing and weight-loss discoveries.

most of the sweets I consumed were in the form of complex carbohydrates, with just a touch of extra sweetener here and there to boost flavor. Too much *processed* sugars can get you into trouble.

Let me tell you a story about Bob, a business associate and good friend of mine. He was a walking advertisement for my program. Bragged to everyone that he followed it strictly. He told everyone how delicious the food was. Every time we went anywhere, he'd talk it up like it was the best in the world. Sounds great, right? But there was a problem. Bob was 80 pounds overweight. Don't get me wrong; I always appreciate when someone touts a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet. But Bob was hardly the poster boy I was looking for!

One day, I came right out and asked him what he ate on an average day. He told me that he ate a couple of fat-free, McDougall-style danishes for breakfast. He'd snack on fat-free cookies, sometimes scarfing down a half-box in an afternoon! And he never, ever missed dessert! The bottom line? Bob wasn't losing weight because he was eating way too much processed sugar. Although Bob is an extreme example, it's important to realize that the amount of sugar you can eat without negative effects depends on many things: your activity level, your metabolism, and how many total calories you consume in a normal day. If you're overweight and simple/processed sugars are a big part of your meals and snacks, you need to cut down.

Satisfy your body's need for carbohydrates and see your *unhealthy* sugar cravings disappear!

The typical American diet is much too low in healthy carbohydrates to satisfy your hunger drive. Most meals are made up of predominantly protein and fat, with only a few carbohydrates mixed in. At the end of a meal, your body hasn't had its fill of carbohydrates; as a result, you wind up wanting more sugar—usually in the form of ice cream or cake. This is why many people consider themselves “addicted” to desserts. In other words, the typical American diet contains just 30-40 percent carbohydrates a day, and your body is designed for 70-80 percent carbohydrates a day. It's no wonder you're always craving more sugar.

But this problem is easily fixed. If you sit down for dinner and eat as much as you want of fresh vegetables, sweet potatoes, homemade chili with kidney beans and rice, pasta marinara, veggie pizza with homemade Italian sauce, corn on the cob, big crispy garden salads with spicy ginger dressing, the list of McDougall-style delicacies is endless...I tell you what, when it comes time for dessert, I bet you won't want it. After a meal made up primarily of carbohydrates, your body will have had its fill, and your sugar cravings will vanish.

Give your tongue a break from heavy doses of refined sugar...and everything will start tasting sweeter!

Carbohydrates offer all the sweetness you need to satisfy your taste buds, but it may take some work to get used to life without heavy refined sugars and artificial sweeteners. Your tongue has been assaulted with added sugar for years, and it can take time for you to learn to appreciate the more subtle taste from pure sources. You needn't do it all at once. But once you've adapted to this new way of eating, you'll probably find that you don't want as much sweetness in your food as you once did. In fact, many people get used to having no added sweetness at all.

One misconception is that “natural” sugars are better for you than

white sugars. I disagree. Sugar is sugar. So when you eat it, eat your favorite kind! Certain sugars, such as brown sugar and honey, often pack more sweet taste into a smaller amount, so you may want to try using less of them for the same taste. The key with these concentrated sugars is to put them sparingly *on top* of your food—that way, you get sweet taste in each bite. In recipes, you can generally substitute honey for sugar—at half the amount—without noticing a difference in taste.

Start tomorrow morning. In just a few days, you'll taste the sweet difference!

If you adjust your sugar intake gradually, you'll soon taste a delicious difference. As your palate adapts, you'll really taste your food. You may also notice that, almost immediately, your energy levels will go up and you'll feel less tired, lightheaded, or listless throughout the day. Tomorrow, instead of your favorite brand of breakfast cereal (which probably has added sugar), try oatmeal—real oatmeal that you boil and cook. (The kind that comes in a little bag has a lot of added sugar.) If you like, sprinkle a little sugar or honey on top. Eat this for a few days and I bet you won't miss your regular cereal or the extra sweetness.

Every few days, gradually reduce the amount of sweetener you use. In the end, you may find yourself enjoying the pure taste of oatmeal without adding a thing. But if you find you prefer the taste with a touch of your favorite sugar, go ahead. A teaspoon of any type only adds 15 to 20 calories—hardly enough to derail your weight-loss efforts.

Then be sure to treat yourself to the other sweet-tasting carbohydrates in all your meals. Remember, fruits aren't the only naturally sweet foods. Many vegetables also give a satisfying sweet taste. Cold, crunchy carrots and fresh boiled corn on the cob are two that my family and I enjoy regularly. Whole-grain breads often contain a natural sweetness that you can bring out more by toasting lightly. Adding spices to your foods instead of sugar can also be delicious. Try cinnamon or a dash of nutmeg in your cereal or on the fruits you eat.

So don't let the "sugar police" rob your life of sweetness. As with practically all the plant foods that our Creator put on this planet, sugar can be a very healthy and pleasurable food. Give yourself permission to enjoy hundreds of delicious, naturally sweet foods—and even add a little boost of sweetness to others—without compromising your health or your weight.

What's healthier...artificial sweeteners or plain old sugar?

Eating either sugar *or* artificial sweeteners in moderation is OK; but for most people, sticking to sugar is best.

The artificial-sweetener industry makes billions of dollars each year off people's concerns that sugar will make them fat. Although artificial sweeteners *do* have fewer calories, it's difficult to argue that they have helped people lose weight. Saccharin was introduced way back in 1940, with more diet sugars and diet products to follow. But the rates of obesity in the United States have nearly *doubled* in the past 20 years!

Artificial sweeteners do have their place for diabetics and for people with high triglycerides and if used sparingly are probably OK. They are not, however, the solution to weight loss. In fact, there is evidence that these substances actually decrease serotonin levels and stimulate appetite.¹

Furthermore, their safety in general—from saccharin to the latest one, Splenda™—has always been controversial. In manufacturers' rush to market and record-breaking profits, research is often sloppy and inadequate. The most prevalent artificial sweetener, aspartame (known as NutraSweet) has been linked with a number of neurological disorders, including seizures and memory loss. Splenda (the brand name for *sucralose*) doesn't

seem to be off to a much better start.

Splenda is made by *chlorinating* sucrose, chemically changing the structure of the sugar molecule by substituting three chlorine atoms for three hydroxyl groups. The FDA has approved this product for many foods already: baked goods and baking mixes, chewing gum, frostings, fats and oils, jelly, syrups, beverages, and more. But, there have been no long-term studies to find out how this product will affect our health or the environment. We do know that in animal tests it has caused various health problems like enlarged liver and kidneys, a decreased red-blood-cell count, diarrhea, and aborted pregnancies. Since it's too early to know for sure what this product can do to your body, you might want to steer clear, at least until more testing and studies are completed.

Besides, for most of us, sugar is better anyway. Yes, it has calories—but you know that calorie counting isn't the answer to good health or weight loss. At my clinic at St. Helena Hospital, patients eat as much as they want of the flavorful, delicious, and filling foods on our buffet. They can go back for thirds and fourths; in fact, I encourage it! And still they shed pound after pound.

¹ *Physiol Behav*, 47:555, 1990

Reverse osteoporosis and build stronger bones by making just one change in your eating habits

That's right! Make just one change in your eating habits this month, and you could stop osteoporosis in its tracks—even reverse it! The actual research on osteoporosis runs contrary to everything you're being told on TV commercials. Dairy products and other animal proteins *do not* build strong bones. In fact, they can make your bones weaker. And in my eyes, it's a crime that you've been led to believe otherwise.

A recent study reinforces this point. It's not milk and cheese that create strong bones and prevent osteoporosis—it's a low-fat, low-cholesterol, plant-based diet! In an analysis of worldwide trends by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, scientists found that higher consumption of *vegetable* protein can actually help *prevent* hip fractures. In over 30 countries around the world, the researchers compared diet and hip-fracture incidents and found a direct relationship between fractures and protein intake. Where vegetable protein intake was highest, the incidence of hip fractures was lowest. Inversely, the countries that had the highest intake of animal protein also had the highest hip-fracture rates.¹

More research shows that animal protein is *bad* for your bones... including dairy products!

Most people think they need to eat dairy products to build and maintain strong bones. But many studies are now showing that avoiding animal protein is the real key. What's more, the very foods that most people consider the best for osteoporosis protection—milk, cheese, and yogurt—are full of the fats and proteins that are actually doing the damage!

Recently, at the University of California, scientists followed a group of 1,035 postmenopausal women for up to 8 1/2 years. The study found that women who got most of their protein from animal sources had three times the rate of bone loss and nearly four times the risk of a hip fracture that women who consumed minimal animal protein had.²

These findings fly in the face of conventional wisdom about osteoporosis. But actually, the animal-protein link has been known for some time; it just hasn't been promoted. Years of relentless campaigning by the dairy industry has overshadowed these facts, and made generations of Americans believe that calcium is the

key to preventing osteoporosis—and that dairy products are the best source of calcium.

Please understand, I'm not disputing that calcium is important for your bones. That part of the story remains the same. What you may not know is that when animal proteins are broken down in the liver, strong acids (such as sulfuric acid) are produced as byproducts. The acid is then released into the blood, where it is normally excreted in the urine. But as we age, the kidneys become less efficient and more acid remains in the body. You may remember from chemistry class that it takes *base* to neutralize acid. Ideally, in your body, base would come from fruits and vegetables. But if that source isn't available, or if there isn't enough of it to process the acid, the body will take base directly from bone.³

Fat consumption also contributes to weak, unhealthy bones

Animal proteins are bad for your bones not only in their own right but also because of the *fat* content that many of them contain. Scientists at UCLA fed laboratory mice either a high-fat diet or a control chow for seven months. Then the scientists tested both groups for bone-strength markers. Both bone-mineral content and bone density were significantly lower in the high-fat-diet group—43 percent less and 15 percent less, respectively. In addition, the expression of *osteocalcin*, a critical element in healthy bone formation, was noticeably lower in the fat-fed mice after only four months of the diet.⁴

Good proteins come from vegetables and whole grains

Instead of loading up on high- or even low-fat animal proteins, try some of the many delicious sources of vegetable protein. Most people don't realize that legumes and nuts (up to 20 grams of protein per cup), whole grains like oatmeal (approximately 6 grams per cup), and vegetables like broccoli and Brussels sprouts (approximately 6 grams per cup) are packed with it.

If you are still eating animal proteins, do so sparingly—and make sure that the main part of your diet consists of fruits, grains, and vegetables. Remember, plant foods provide the base you need to neutralize animal protein's strong acids.

If you're trying to wean yourself from dairy foods and miss the taste, try some of the soy-based nondairy milks and cheeses or even almond or rice milk. But

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¹ J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med 55(10):M585-592, 2000

² Am J Clin Nutr 73:118-122, 2001

³ "Veggies Good for Women's Bones," www.healthscout.com: Dec. 28, 2000

⁴ J Bone Miner Res 16(1):182-188, 2001

It doesn't have to be dessert to be "oh so sweet!"

In light of the article in this issue re getting the most sweet from what you eat, I thought I'd share some of my sweetest recipes with you. At my house, we try to save desserts for special occasions like holidays, birthdays, and when company comes over. But you'll see that some of the sweetest, most satisfying delicacies aren't desserts at all. They're part of the regular meal. There's no sweeter or more satisfying side dish than my yam casserole. Try it tonight and see for yourself. Hint: Make enough for seconds and thirds!

POACHED PEARS

Preparation Time: 45 minutes

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Chilling Time: 2 hours

Servings: 6

Pears:

6 pears, cored and pared

2 cups white wine

2 cups water

1 cinnamon stick

2 whole cloves

1 1/2 cups honey

zest and juice of 1/2 orange

zest and juice of 1/2 lemon

Sauce:

1 pound fresh strawberries, stemmed and cleaned

6 tablespoons honey

1 tablespoon fresh orange juice

Garnish:

Orange segments

Mint leaves

Place the wine, water, cinnamon, cloves, honey, orange and lemon juice in a large pot. Bring to a boil and add the prepared pears. Reduce heat and simmer for about 30 minutes. Test for tenderness with a fork. (It should pierce easily but still be firm.) Cool in the cooking liquid; then remove from liquid and chill, covered, in refrigerator.

Place the strawberries, honey, and orange juice in a blender jar. Puree until smooth. Add a small amount of water, if necessary, for a smooth consistency.

Place chilled pears on individual serving plates. Pour a small amount of sauce over each pear. Garnish with orange segments and mint leaves.

Mary's Corner

Recipe

OF THE MONTH

By Mary McDougall



FRESH SAUCY YAMS

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 60 minutes

Servings: 8

4 pounds yams or sweet potatoes

2 cups orange juice

1/2 cups chopped dates

2 tablespoons cornstarch

1 1/2 tablespoons orange zest

Pierce the yams or sweet potatoes several times with a fork and microwave about 4 minutes, turning over once halfway through the baking time. Remove from microwave, cool slightly, peel, and thickly slice. Place slices in a large, covered casserole dish.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Place remaining ingredients in a blender jar and process until smooth. Pour into a saucepan and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened. Pour sauce over yams or sweet potatoes, cover and bake for 45 minutes. Remove cover and bake for an additional 15 minutes. Place on individual serving dishes and garnish with orange segments and mint sprigs.

GLAZED BANANAS

Preparation Time: 5 minutes

Cooking Time: 6 minutes

Servings: 6-8

6 ripe bananas, peeled and sliced

1/3 cup fresh orange juice

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

Place the orange juice in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add bananas and cook, stirring frequently, for 2 minutes. Add remaining ingredients and cook, stirring frequently, until moisture is absorbed, about 2-3 minutes. Serve warm.

watch out for the fat content in those products; many of them are still loaded with it.

Note: Use soy products in moderation. Isolated soy proteins found in many vegetarian burgers, hot dogs, lunch “meats,” and wheat gluten are also concentrated proteins and can leach calcium from your bones.⁵⁻⁷

Healthy changes today can actually reverse bone loss

It's never too late to improve your bones through eating the foods that strengthen them. Even if you've been eating animal protein all your life, adjustments in your eating habits today can make a big difference almost immediately. In a study of people already suffering from severe osteoporosis, a low-animal-protein diet started to reverse bone loss and restored a positive calcium balance *within days*.⁸ All that benefit from such a simple step!

No supplements, no pills, no doctors—just good food and lots of it!

Picture your life the way you want it to be in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. Chances are you imagine an active, healthy lifestyle, full of the activities you enjoy. With a few simple steps, you can make that wish come true—by eating low-fat, low-protein foods and avoiding animal proteins. So let's start strengthening your bones TODAY—ignore those misleading milk ads and enjoy plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains instead. Remember, even though the dairy industry doesn't want anyone to know it, all the clever slogans and cute campaigns in the world can't change the truth. The best things you can do for your bones are to stay away from animal protein and to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

⁵⁻⁷ *Am J Clin Nutr* 32:74: 1-9, 1979; *J Nutr* 111:553-562, 1981; *J Nutr* 110:305-315, 1980
⁸ *J Gerontol* 36:14, 1982

Before you dig out your hoe and start planting, check out the new findings on pesticides

Spring is finally here—and if you're anything like I am, you're being lured outside by the warmer sunshine, fresh air, and a new season of gardening. The process of planting, tending, and harvesting nature's creations brings us closer to the way life was meant to be—and brings a bounty of healthful plant foods to the table.

Mary and I have a 10 x 30 foot garden on our property, and we grow all our favorites each summer: tomatoes, onions, green beans, broccoli, lettuce, kale, and spinach. If you're as active in gardening as we are, chances are you've used pesticides. But you may not know that human pesticide exposure has been directly linked to problems with the central nervous system, including cognitive decline and Parkinson's disease, or that using pesticides in your own backyard garden could be enough to put you at risk. So before you spray those pesky bugs this year, consider that you may be hurting yourself and find a way to keep the bugs away safely.

A new Dutch study shows that pesticide-free gardening is literally the smart way to go

A new study from Holland found that people who are frequently exposed to pesticides are *five times more likely* to develop mild cognitive dysfunction (MCD) than people with no exposure. The study followed 830 men and women between the ages of 50 and 80 for three years and measured the frequency of their exposure to pesticides and other substances, such as organic solvents,

metals, and other chemicals. Cognitive function was assessed through five different neuropsychological tests.¹

Only 2.2 percent of the group reported frequent exposure to pesticides either at home or on the job, but of that group a startling 35 percent showed mild cognitive dysfunction at the first evaluation. Among the unexposed participants, only 11 percent showed signs of MCD at baseline.

The job-related-exposure results are even more troubling. The study team devised a separate measurement for this risk, asking 3,127 people to provide self-reported data about their pesticide-exposure risk on the job. Using this data, the scientists reported the probability of pesticide exposure in each job category. For each 10-percentage-point increase on the job-related measure, the risk of MCD rose 47 percent.

Interestingly, pesticides were the only substance tested in this study that showed a link to cognitive decline. And, not surprisingly, arable farmers and gardeners had the highest probability of pesticide exposure among all job categories.

This isn't the first study that points to the harm done by pesticides. Last summer, right in the swing of gardening season, an article was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reporting that individuals who use synthetic pesticides in their gardens have a 50 percent higher risk of developing Parkinson's disease.²

These and other reports of dangerous side effects from pesticides have me worried; most of my friends and neighbors love to garden and I know that many of them use pesticides to keep the bugs away. But there

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¹ *Lancet* 356:912, 2000

² *Journal of the American Medical Association*, June 21, 2000

Keeping up with Dr. McDougall

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Personally selected naturalists will guide us to the national parks, wildlife reserves, nearby towns, and other points of interest. We have five daylong excursions planned for you: horseback riding or a wagon ride through the rain forest; white-water rafting; swing-through the canopy of the forest; a thrilling cable



trip over a canyon; and boating up an estuary, along with snorkeling and scuba-diving. The animal and plant life are exotic. Relax or explore as much as you want.

Evening entertainment will be provided most nights during and after dinner. In addition, my wife Mary and I will be providing education on the McDougall Program. All meals are pure-vegetarian, low-fat, and delicious.

The total cost is \$1,550 per person. (* Trip includes everything except airfare to and from San Jose and airport taxes and gratuities. Ask about our special, low-cost, group-based airfares.) Singles pay \$1,950.

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Are you at **HIGHER** risk for arthritis? A newly confirmed risk factor and what you can do about it

A new study suggests that if you suffered a joint injury when you were younger, you may be at higher risk for arthritis as you grow older.

Sounds like bad news for a lot of people. But even if you *have* been injured, don't give up on your joints! My own research shows there's *plenty* you can do to ward off—or even reverse—arthritis.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University discovered this link between joint injury and arthritis after studying a group of 1,321 men and women for over 35 years. Between 1948 and 1964, scientists recruited medical students to participate in the study. Subjects were asked about prior joint injuries at the beginning of the study and again during each follow-up contact, which occurred at least once every five years. Beginning in 1985, each participant was asked specifically if he or she had ever had arthritis. It was determined that the people who had early knee injuries

were *three times* more likely to develop arthritis of the knee by age 65. The researchers also saw a similar correlation between early hip injuries and the development of arthritis of the hip in later life.¹

Don't be discouraged! There are things you can do to reduce your chances. Keep your weight down so you won't be putting additional strain on your joints. My clinical experience has shown that many cases of arthritis, even those labeled "degenerative," can be prevented by eating foods that are based on starches, vegetables, and fruits and by removing dairy products from your diet. You should also exercise regularly, but choose low-impact activities that minimize wear and tear on your joints (such as walking and swimming). And when you exercise, don't go to extremes. (Running marathons may not be a good idea.)

On another note, the majority of the participants in this study were originally injured during sports or exercise. Keep this in mind when choosing activities for you and your family. If you can avoid the injury in the first place, then that's the best means of prevention. Always use proper protective equipment, and be aware of the risks if you choose to compete at high levels.

¹ *Ann Intern Med* 133:321-328, 2000

New findings about pesticides

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are plenty of ways to protect your plants *without* using chemicals, so don't give up your garden or lose it to bugs.

Ward off pests the natural way and make your gardening easier!

After doing some of my own research, I realized the easiest way to garden is NOT to spend your time and money killing every bug in sight. Instead, focus on making your plants as healthy as possible so they can fight off pesky predators on their own. Bugs are prone to attack the weakest plants in the garden, or the weakest within each row. In order to make sure your garden is healthy, choose vegetables suited to your geographical area.

It's also important that the soil be worked with natural fertilizer. I found out that synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides actually lower organic matter and nutrients in the soil and after a couple of years make it harder to grow healthy plants. On the other hand, mulch in your garden can reduce soil erosion, add organic matter to the soil, reduce weed growth,

reduce water loss, and act as a slow-release fertilizer. The soil in our garden is a natural compost of soils and organic materials and does very well.

Once your garden is taking form, you should thin it of decaying material (leaves and stems of your first crop). This will leave more space for healthy, strong plants to grow and provide fewer areas in which bugs can hide.

Plan to space your plants wider apart this year; it will allow more air to circulate, can prevent disease and fungi, and make the garden much easier to weed. Mary and I put a ring of snail bait around our garden, which seems to work well at keeping these pests away.

If you do have bugs? Many organic gardeners spend time handpicking beetles and caterpillars from their plants, which works if the infestation is mild. But there are also natural insecticides. Or try finely ground sulfur, hot-pepper spray, or insecticidal soaps. Ask for advice at your local nursery; certain products work better on specific types of bugs.

So, stay away from chemical pesticides. Keep yourself, your family, and your environment safe and clean, and pass this information on to your fellow land tenders!

John A. McDougall, M.D., graduated from the Michigan State University Medical School and completed his residency training in internal medicine at the University of Hawaii. He is a board-certified specialist in internal medicine and one of the world's leading experts on health and nutrition. As medical director of a revolutionary program at St. Helena Hospital in Napa Valley, California, he has attracted national acclaim for helping people of virtually all ages to overcome chronic illnesses and reverse life-threatening conditions. He is the author of several nationally best-selling books, including *The McDougall Plan*, *McDougall's Medicine: A Challenging Second Opinion*, *The McDougall Program: 12 Days to Dynamic Health*, *The McDougall Program for Maximum Weight Loss*, *The McDougall Program for Women*, and *The McDougall Program for a Healthy Heart*. His face will be familiar to many from his television appearances on CNN, *The Phil Donahue Show*, and other programs.