

A photograph of a person's bare midsection, with their hands holding a light green ceramic bowl directly over their navel. The person is wearing a white, draped fabric that frames the central area. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of the skin and the fabric.

The acid test

YOU MIGHT HAVE MADE THE CHOICE TO EAT IN A HEALTHIER WAY BUT ARE YOUR FOOD CHOICES MAKING YOUR BODY MORE ACIDIC OR MORE ALKALINE AND WHICH IS THE HEALTHIER OPTION?

BY SANDRA DUBS

Herman Aihara, a leading educator in Western and Eastern health science, writes in his book *Acid & Alkaline*: "The condition and constitution of body fluid, especially blood, is the most important factor in our life: that is to say, for our health. In man, organs such as the kidneys, liver, and especially the large intestine throw out waste and toxins and maintain our internal environment in as ideal a condition as possible. However, there is limitation for this. If we eat too much poison-producing foods, or not enough materials which are needed to clear out the poisons, then our internal environment becomes beyond control, and away from the correct condition in which our cells can live. The cells become sick and die. Many sicknesses are a function of the body's attempt to clean up this internal environment. Cancer is a condition in which body cells become abnormal due to the abnormal condition of body fluids."

What is pH?

All organic matter has a pH level, including humans. Maintaining the correct pH level is vital. A pH under 7 is considered acid, while a pH over 7 is alkaline. The pH of our blood must remain constant between 7.35 and 7.45. The condition of body fluids, including blood, should be alkaline.

The pH level (the acid-alkaline measurement) of your internal fluids affects every cell in your body. Extended acid imbalances of any kind are not well tolerated by the body. Indeed, the entire metabolic process depends on a balanced internal alkaline environment. Every cell burns fuel to create energy. Most of this cellular waste is acid and is released into the blood for elimination from the lungs in the form of carbon dioxide and from the kidneys via the urine. In this way, the body regulates the acid level so that it does not become dangerously concentrated.

The body has an alkaline reserve that can neutralise acids. This excess of alkali is only a backup system with limited supply and the more acid-forming foods eaten, the weaker it becomes, so following a more alkaline-forming wholefood diet is essential to maintaining a healthy pH balance.

It appears that taking small steps to change your body's pH will give you more energy, increase mental clarity, improve digestion and stabilise your weight naturally. The cells in your body function at peak efficiency and achieve peak longevity when bathed in slightly alkaline body fluids.

A diet high in acid-forming protein, sugar, caffeine and processed foods disrupts pH balance. The literature suggests that most degenerative diseases attributed to ageing, such as cancer, osteoporosis and heart disease, and ailments such as allergy, kidney

stones and gallstones, can be linked to mineral deficiencies that result in body fluids becoming more acidic.

There are many factors that create an unhealthy pH level, including stress, certain medications, metabolic and muscular functions in the body and the food we eat and the liquids we drink. Foods are classified as either acidic or alkaline according to their own intrinsic acidity or alkalinity but nutritionists often speak of acid and alkaline *forming* foods, referring to the overall effect of the food after ingestion. In other words, limes with a pH of 1.9 contain strong acid yet after ingestion they contribute to an alkaline environment.

In fruit and most vegetables, the organic acid (such as the acidity of an orange, which you can taste) contains many alkaline elements, such as potassium, sodium, calcium and magnesium. Organic acids, when oxidised, become carbon dioxide and water; the alkaline elements remain and neutralise body acid. In other words, strangely enough, acid foods can reduce acidity in your body. This is the reason fruits and most vegetables are considered alkaline-forming foods. An important distinction to keep in mind is there are two types of acid and alkaline foods: one is acid or alkaline foods; the other is acid- or alkaline-forming foods.

Alkaline-forming foods

Most fruits, vegetables and sea vegetables such as dulse, kelp, arame, nori and wakame are considered alkaline-forming as they are high in buffering minerals (sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and iron). Salt, because of its sodium content, is also considered alkalising.

Acid-forming foods

Bland-tasting foods such as flour, fish and grains are often, though not always, acid-forming. When metabolised, they leave sulfuric, phosphoric and hydrochloric acids behind. Vegetable foods that are acidic include cranberries, plums and prunes. Sugar, concentrated sweeteners, starches, grains, flours, fats and most animal protein foods also create acid when metabolised.

Sugar is a dangerous acid-forming food. It has a significant effect in the body as it passes quickly into the bloodstream, creating an acidic condition, leading to mineral depletion, calcium loss and bone weakening. It also weakens the villi of the small intestine, impairing digestion. Regulated by insulin from the pancreas, excess sugar creates a blood sugar imbalance that can lead to diabetes or hypoglycaemia. Stored in the form of fatty acids, sugar can contribute to obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, certain cancers (especially lung and colon),

osteoporosis and hyperactivity in children.

Pasteurised milk and milk products, such as cheese, are seen to be acid-forming as pasteurisation reduces the available calcium in milk, thereby lowering alkalising qualities (raw milk products are more alkalising because of the calcium).

It is also often suggested that high phosphorus and/or phosphoric acid content (found in meat and soft drinks) pulls calcium out of the bony structures (bones, teeth and nails) in the process of digestion and assimilation. This has a disastrous effect on bone density, leaving them porous and spongy. When calcium is pulled from the bones, it is released through the kidneys, resulting in stone formation (kidney stones) before it is excreted. It has been further suggested that addressing acid and alkali balance may be an important consideration when dealing with people suffering from chronic disease and cancer.

It appears that taking small steps to change your body's pH will give you more energy, increase mental clarity, improve digestion and stabilise your weight naturally.

The balance

The optimal acid/alkaline balance is individual according to metabolism, physical activity, what was eaten earlier and possibly the depth and speed of breathing (deep breathing alkalises the system). According to Dr T. A. Baroody in *Alkalise Or Die*, one part acid-forming (20 per cent) to four parts alkalising (80 per cent) is the ideal. As extreme exercise and highly physical activity create acid, this ratio may be appropriate for athletes if they wish to alkalise. However, less active people might handle more acid-forming food at times. It really does come down to an individual evaluation.

Your alkalising diet

To maintain a better pH balance, incorporate into your diet vegetarian wholefoods including more mineral-rich foods such as sea vegetables, miso, tamari, shoyu, umeboshi plums and pickles. These are alkaline-forming foods. Other alkalising foods include most fruit and vegetables from land and sea, millet, almonds, flaxseeds, apple cider vinegar, green tea, spirulina, chlorella, barley and wheat grass, peas and pea protein powders. →



SANDRA'S WAKAME MISO SOUP

- 1 onion, diced
- 1 carrot, cut into small cubes
- 10cm piece of wakame
- 5 shiitake mushrooms
- 1 tbsp unrefined sesame oil or virgin coconut oil
- 1 cup greens (kale or watercress)
- 100g tofu, cut into 1cm cubes (optional)
- 3-4 tbsp dark miso (hatcho, mugi, genmai, kome), to taste
- 5 cups water
- 1 spring onion, sliced

Soak shiitake mushrooms for minimum 30 minutes in 2 cups of warm water (or soak all day). Remove and discard stems after soaking, and chop.

Soak wakame in water to cover 10 minutes. Strain then chop into small pieces after removing and discarding central stem.

In a soup pot, sauté the onion in a little oil until transparent. Mix in chopped shiitake. Add 5 cups of water (include the 2 cups of shiitake soaking water, strained + 3 cups of plain water) and bring to the boil. Simmer for 10 minutes.

Add the washed and chopped carrots and greens. Simmer for 5-10 minutes more. Add chopped wakame and tofu and simmer for 1-2 minutes.

Remove 1 cup of stock and dissolve miso in it. Add this to the pot, remove from the heat and allow to brew for a minute before serving. Do not boil miso!

Garnish with chopped spring onions.

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Miso

A fully fermented paste made from a mix of soybeans and usually one other cereal grain, miso, like yoghurt, contains live bacteria and enzymes that aid digestion. Miso is highly alkaline and an excellent source of vegetable protein, B vitamins and essential amino acids. There is extensive research into the health benefits of miso in relation to heart disease, cancer, ageing, digestion, detoxification and even treating radiation poisoning.

Sea vegetables (arame, wakame, kombu, nori)

High in minerals, vitamins and complex carbohydrates, sea vegetables aid digestion, benefit the heart and circulatory system and have a stabilising effect on the brain and nervous system. They contain protein and are rich in minerals (especially high in calcium, iron, zinc and iodine) as well as vitamins A, C and B complex. Small amounts aid healthy hair, nails, bones and teeth; assist proper metabolism and are useful for weight loss; reduce blood cholesterol and fat in the blood; stimulate reproductive organs; act as an antiseptic; and detoxify and alkalise the blood.

Umeboshi plums

These were used as food in China at least 4000 years ago. Umeboshi pickled plums have remarkable medicinal qualities. Their powerful acidity has a paradoxical high alkalisating effect on the body, neutralising fatigue, stimulating the digestion and promoting the elimination of toxins. They contain protein and minerals (potassium, calcium and iron). Umeboshi plums enhance the function of the liver and kidneys, purify the blood, expel toxins, are antibacterial and antiseptic and have a high concentration of vitamin C.

The plums are good for an unsettled stomach, indigestion, too much acid or sweet foods and morning sickness and also assist in recovery from illness and fatigue. The citric acid metabolises excess sugar in the blood and converts it to energy. Umeboshi plums are also a Japanese cure-all for sick children.

Twig tea — kukicha, bancha

Kukicha is Japanese for twig tea, made only from the twigs and stems of the tea plant, while bancha tea contains some leaves as well as twigs and so has a slightly higher caffeine content.

Kukicha twig tea is low in stimulants. It is roasted in cast-iron cauldrons to lessen bitterness and to decrease tannin. Favoured among those who follow macrobiotics, it contains almost no caffeine and therefore is also suitable for children and babies. Kukicha twig tea is also a digestive aid, helping to neutralise an overly acidic digestive system because it is high in minerals and low in caffeine. As it contains minimal tannin it effectively works as a germicide and detoxifier. It is said that the tannin works to detoxify nicotine and also to absorb and discharge radioactivity. Twig tea can be consumed many times a day.

Shiitake mushrooms

Known as the "elixir of life" since ancient times, the shiitake mushroom is a parasite on a tree, so it contains many important nutrients such as vitamins B₁₂ and D₂. Modern research has indicated that shiitake mushroom may stimulate the immune system, possess antibacterial properties, reduce platelet aggregation and possess antiviral properties, possibly through antiviral agents. Shiitakes may be effective in combating high blood pressure and reducing cholesterol.

Kale

From the cabbage family, kale is crisp and tightly curled. It is strengthening and warming with a sweet and slightly bitter-pungent flavour. Kale relieves lung congestion and supports the stomach, liver and immune system. Kale juice is medicinal for treating stomach and duodenal ulcers. Kale contains lutein and zeaxanthin, which protect the eyes from macular degeneration. It also contains indole-3-carbinol, which may protect against colon cancer. Kale is also a good source of chlorophyll, calcium, iron and vitamins A and C.

Watercress

This leafy green contains vitamins A and C, calcium and iron. It is one of the oldest edible plants known to man and is related to the mustards. Greek, Roman and Persian soldiers ate it regularly to prevent scurvy. In Chinese medicine it is a cooling food. It is a pungent, stimulating herb that clears toxins and is useful for gallbladder complaints and rheumatism. ☺

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