

BUILD HEALTH OR PRODUCE DISEASE

Just a few hours into my first clinic for the new year, I came across an amazingly disciplined patient who has diabetes. I asked her if she checked her blood sugar regularly. Truth be told, I was expecting her to say that she checked it once in a (long) while. This is the typical answer I get from patients who have diabetes for twenty years or more. Her answer surprised me. Imagine my surprise when she said, "Yes, just six times a day and before and after every meal." And that, despite her primary care doctor telling her that there is no need to be over exuberant! She also put herself on a strict regime of healthy diabetes-friendly foods - brown rice, wholemeal bread, lots of fish and vegetables, white meat and the like.

Not too unexpectedly, she has no signs of diabetic retinopathy or other diabetes-related complications. Now, I am not suggesting that you check your blood sugar six times a day. In fact, if you avail yourself to be regularly checked by your general practitioner or endocrinologist, you have already done quite well. The main point about this story is not so much how often she checked her blood glucose but about how she developed such strong discipline and determination. It is about how it is possible not to succumb to temptations in food-mad Singapore and especially during this festive season!

Someone sent me a watch list for 2013. Amongst the dos and don'ts is the famous quotation by the American nutritionist Adelle Davis: **'Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper'**. Of course, if you have diabetes and are on insulin or oral medication you need to check with your primary care doctor and make sure you don't end up with hypoglycaemia ('hypos') or wild swings in your blood sugar. A lesser known "food quote" by Davis which I like is this: "As I see it every day, you do one of two things, build health or produce disease in yourself."

So, let's take this quote to heart each time we have our next meal and hopefully for as long as my iron-willed patient.

Have a healthy year ahead!

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