



Alkaline foods such as salmon, almonds, fruits, and vegetables may help to keep your body's pH in balance.

## acid test Your diet's pH factor // BY RHEA MAZE

Everyone knows that vegetables and fruits are good for you. Here's yet another reason why: A diet high in fruits and vegetables can help your body maintain optimum pH levels, keeping bones and tissues strong.

In case you forgot your high school science lessons, pH measures the acidity or alkalinity of a solution. It is determined by a number ranging from 0 to 14, with pure water having a neutral pH of 7. Solutions that score 0 to 6 on the pH scale are more acidic; those ranging from 8 to 14 are more alkaline.

Meat, dairy, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol are examples of more acidic foods. Too much acidity can stress the body's ability to regulate pH, causing it to draw alkalizing mineral reserves from bones and tissues, which in turn weakens them.

"Blood and cell pH is tightly regulated around 7.4 to sustain life, despite the foods we eat," says Kristin Wood, Clinical Outpatient Dietitian at Kaiser Permanente.

"Foods can influence your body's pH balance by creating a more acidic or alkaline environment. Acid-producing foods lead to metabolic imbalance and illness, while alkaline-producing foods restore pH balance and improve health. Research seems to support that alkaline-forming foods, especially fruits and veggies, have a positive effect on bone and muscle retention," Woods says.

Registered dietitian Jill Nussinow adds, "Often people feel better when they eat a more alkaline diet," which includes vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, and herbal teas. She suggests that to help balance pH, "cut out coffee and switch to rooibos (red African tea), dandelion root tea, or Teecino coffee substitute."

Too much acid-producing food can lead to general feelings of fatigue and irritability as well as a host of health problems.

"An overly acidic diet creates many problems in the body, including inflam-

mation, toxicity, and a breeding ground for microbes. These conditions prevent the body from functioning optimally and contribute to issues such as constipation, diarrhea, and kidney and liver problems. Additionally, acidic states cause our bodies to continually borrow minerals from our bones, which can lead to more serious diseases such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis," says Certified Nutrition Consultant Mia Rosingana.

Rosingana recommends that beginners who want to eat in a more pH-balanced way "start slow, by cutting down on meat and processed foods while adding in plenty of green, leafy vegetables on a daily basis. Adding sea veggies a couple times a week is also very beneficial for promoting alkalinity."

While pH tests are available, the best gauge of whether or not a more alkaline diet works for you is simply to evaluate how you feel after a two-week period.

Certified Nutrition Consultant Diane Tryforos credits a pH-balanced diet with allowing her to stop taking a daily combination of 10 medications. Tryforos adds that since stress can also create acidic conditions in the body due to rising cortisol levels, a pH-balanced diet should also incorporate healthy stress management practices. "It really is a lifestyle change, not just a diet," she says. ■