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Health Corner

The Swiss Bircher-Muesli - the Queen of breakfasts

Since I last wrote in this magazine in my function as the Secretary of the Auckland Club, my focus has zoomed in on natural health. I am now in the best possible position to make a contribution by pointing people in the right direction of true health as medical herbalist, and in my employment by Harvest Wholefoods in Grey Lynn as their naturopathic consultant and herbal potion mixer.

During my training in that capacity I have not budged from the notion that food is at the basis of good health, or, when neglected, illness. If I share the occasional recipe in here, it is not to compete with the cooking section, rather to complement it. And believe me, they do not come near any of your yummy gourmet recipes.

I will start this series with our very first meal of the day: breakfast. And the queen of breakfasts must be the famous Bircher-Muesli (although I must confess in my childhood we only ever had Bircher-Muesli for supper!). Here is the recipe as Dr. Bircher-Benner intended it over 100 years ago:

Basic Bircher-Muesli recipe:

- ◊ Take 2 Tbsp rolled oats, 4 Tbsp water, soak the oats, preferably overnight
- ◊ Grate 3-4 apples with skin and core into the mix, squeeze the juice of a lemon over it, mix, add 2 Tbsp sweet condensed milk or cream. When using cream, add sugar or honey
- ◊ Mix all together gently and sprinkle 2 Tbsp grated hazelnut or almond over it.

Note: This meal contains exactly the same proportion of protein, carbohydrates and fat as breast milk.

In the middle of Winter however, a cold Bircher-Muesli is not too appealing for breakfast to most people. For this reason, I also give you the warm, 21st century version of the basic recipe: the fortified porridge (see recipe across the page).

The reason why soaking is so important is that it de-activates a preservative in the grain called phytic acid which makes it difficult to digest, and to release soluble fibre which is so vital for detoxification and gut health. Fibre is a nutrient that has not been well documented in the media and we are led to believe that any cereal that contains fibre is good cereal. But fibre has to be live, meaning it must be derived from a whole food and remain unaltered. There are two kinds of fibre, as discussed below.

Insoluble fibre is the rough stringy stuff that the body can't really digest. This is what advertisers talk about when they hail the quality of their breakfast cereals. It is this fibre that makes fruit so important in the diet, as fruit is made up of a lot of this fibre (insoluble fibre is sometimes added to an otherwise refined cereal, just to adhere to the wishes of consumers and to comply with the latest research findings). As insoluble fibre passes through the colon, it feeds the gut bacteria and helps brush the gut lining and move the stool.

Fortified Porridge

Cover equal amounts of rolled oats or oatmeal and buckwheat with water and soak overnight. In the morning, add raisins or dates and bring to boil briefly while stirring. Pour into serving bowl, add sugar or honey and cinnamon, grate an apple over it and add the following optionals:

- ◊ Previously soaked whole linseeds/flaxseeds or chia seeds, together with the gelatinous water. These are our new superfoods that are higher in protein and Omega 3 fatty acids than fish or nuts. Soaking is necessary to a) release the soluble fibre which is so valuable for the good consistency of the stool and therefore helps when constipated, and also assists the liver in expelling fats and toxins, and b) to make the valuable Omega 3 fatty acids accessible. Cooking of these grains is not advisable
- ◊ Yoghurt, any cow's or other milk, cream or coconut milk
- ◊ Roasted sunflower/pumpkin/sesame seeds.
- ◊ Berries, banana and other fruit.

Soluble fibre on the other hand is released when a grain is soaked for a time and makes the gummy substance in the porridge. This fibre keeps the stool moist and smooth and easy to pass, and binds with bile from the liver. In this way, it is vital for the removal of toxins and fats. It is also very soothing to the gut lining, which is constantly scratched and injured with all the difficult matter that it has to deal with.



Dr Bircher-Benner was aware of these substances and he placed particular importance on eating raw food. He invented the "Birchergrat", the very efficient grater that we, coming from Switzerland, take for granted. This grater provides a means to prepare fresh fruit and vegetable in a way that, irrespective of whether teeth are healthy or not, the body gains access to most components of the food and can benefit from its quality without destroying it with heat. These days, only juicing would surpass this process. During his time of practice between 1897 and 1939, Dr Bircher-Benner engaged in substantial research into the differences between cooked or otherwise processed foods and raw food. He found that the energy yield of a food is not so much gained by its calorie content, as it is by sunlight captured in a raw cell, called solar light photons, in a process comparable to the function of a laser. He developed dietary healing programmes based on raw food diets and achieved remarkable results. His main rule of thumb on healthy living is: start each meal with a raw food, and make 50% of your diet raw. He was offered a professorship by Berlin's Hess hospital, but did not accept this. In his clinic, he treated prominent people such as the Tsar Nicolas II, the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, and writers Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse.

Yours in vitality, Herbal Trudi (Trudi Fill-Weidmann)