

# Sustainable Health

By Judy Stone



## A New Health Column by Judy Stone

(Ann Arborite Judy Stone has a nutrition practice

devoted to helping people improve and maintain health, with the goal of reducing and avoiding the risks and side effects of pharmaceutical medicine. She is the author of *Take Two Apples and Call Me in the Morning: A Practical Guide to Using the Power of Food to Change Your Life*. Judy's articles have appeared over the years in *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*)

Sustainability-- a word we hear often these days applied to energy, food and agriculture, local economies, communities and more. Achieving sustainability means looking at patterns of resource use and development with an eye towards providing not just for the present but for future generations as well.

Beginning with this issue of the *Community Journal*, **Sustainable Health** will be a regular column exploring how we can sustain our personal health, the health of our families, communities, and of future generations within the complex systems of health care and industrialized food production.

If we each increase our understanding of how the choices we make every day translate into whether we descend into a life of chronic illness and medication, or maintain vitality and health, we have the power to change our lives and our children's lives. However, this is not going to be a dietary advice column. Sustainable health is grounded in our food choices; food is after all the physical stuff of which our bodies are made. But equally important is that we deconstruct our patterns of unsustainable behaviors and knee-jerk reactions around health that are rooted in, and driven by larger more complex systems—drug ads on TV, the typical doctor-patient relationship, insurance driven medicine, industrialized food production. How do we respond to not feeling well? What do we think, what choices do we make, how do we make sense of what's happening to us? Pain and illness are powerful forces that often don't prompt the best decision-making. To move toward more sustainable health, and our potential for longer, healthier lives we need the ability to examine and question the options we're being offered as well as those we're being denied.

In thinking about sustaining health I always start with the core premise that our bodies have the innate intelligence to repair and regenerate and to sustain life. According to present estimates, if we're doing things right, we should be able to live for approximately 120-125 years. Yet current lifespan in most developed countries only averages 75 which begs the question of how we can move more towards our potential? This column will discuss health concerns such as osteoporosis, hormone imbalances, heart health, and gastrointestinal issues but also place them in a

**Most of us have personal habits, and many would confess addictions that keep us eating ourselves into poor health and hasten death. But the forces that most shape these habits that are killing us and keeping the connections foggy have far more to do with corporate lobbying than with weak-willed Americans...**

broader context.

As a nutrition and health professional I often feel challenged by the frustrations of clients who find it difficult to make decisions that would improve their health and quality of life. Some of these are decisions about what to eat but many are rooted in beliefs about health and healing. I want to have better ways to address these frustrations beyond "eat this, don't eat that". For myself, I'm motivated by a desire to maximize my healthy longevity. On an almost daily basis I'm conscious of each real or imagined lapse in cognitive ability—a name forgotten, the word that just doesn't make it from my brain to my mouth—wondering if as my mother, I am destined to go out in a fog of dementia. Both my parents smoked, and though they quit in their forties, both died of lung cancer in their eighties, leaving behind the question as to whether my unwitting second-hand smoking would get me someday. I scrutinize the obituaries daily, a work-related obsession I have with the alarming number of people dying far short of an average lifespan. And I am determined to do what I can to make a difference. I know it doesn't have to be this way.

Just recently I was listening to NPR's *The Splendid Table*. Guests Jane and Michael Stern, columnists for *Gourmet Magazine*, and host Lynne Rossetto Kasper were giddy with excitement about cinnamon rolls the Sterns discovered at a Colorado truck stop. "They were a foot by a foot!" "You're joking!" "Well maybe 9" X 9" and 3-4" tall and covered in what must have been a pint of white, gooey icing" went the exchange. A bargain at only \$2.50, we were told, these are rolls "which you have for breakfast, lunch, dinner and a 3 a.m. snack!" Oh, I hope not. I was taken aback by their unbridled enthusiasm for something I know is silently feeding all the ailments I see in my office, but I confess that at one time I would have been right there with them in their ebullience, (and making a note in my "places to go" file of that Colorado truckstop). This time though my mind went instead to the early 80's when I worked in a residential substance abuse treatment program. The program had a rule that neither residents nor staff could wear any clothing or jewelry that promoted, glorified, even mentioned, the substances, or the act of using the substances that had landed these folks in treatment. After all, why would you keep celebrating the very thing that is stealing your life? The problem is, with regard to food, we're really struggling with acknowledging that fact.

We're at a significant crossroad in health. After a decade of debate over whether the low carbohydrate diet is beneficial or if hydrogenated fats are dangerous there really is no longer any question about the negative effects of sugar, processed carbohydrates, trans fats, or chemical in and on food. There are many who don't like that reality, who attempt to equivocate or ignore facts, but the debate is over. Most of us have personal habits, and many would confess addictions that keep us eating ourselves into poor health and hasten death. But the forces that most shape these habits that are killing us and keeping the connections foggy have far more to do with corporate lobbying than with weak-willed Americans, though every "disease association", and unfortunately far too many health care providers, would have us think otherwise.

Headlining this menu of hypocrisy is none other than the dieticians' professional organization, the American Dietetics Association, which sees it consistent with its mission to take money from such nutritional giants as Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Mars, Kelloggs, and General Mills. Archway Cookies (once again General Mills), Breyer's Ice Cream, Kraft Foods, and at least 18 pharmaceutical companies have been corporate

**As you read this, the state of New Jersey is contemplating legislation (Senate Bill 1941) that will make it illegal for anyone other than a registered dietitian to talk to you about nutrition. You can be sure that other states won't be far behind.**

sponsors of the American Diabetes Association. Licensing fees paid by food manufacturers who use an AHA logo to promote their food as "heart-healthy" fund the American Heart Association, which uses drug company money to run "education" programs. But they are far from the only ones. Disease associations, college and university departments of nutrition and medical schools, and medical specialty organizations all feed themselves with funding from drug money and manufactured food money (see <http://www.cspinet.org/integrity/nonprofits/index.html>). How likely is it that the American Heart Association is going to tell you that your AHA approved breakfast cereal with a glass of orange juice is quickly turning into sugar and raising your triglycerides along with your risk of heart disease? Instead, you hear that it's low in fat and high in fiber, true facts but very misleading since there is ample evidence that dietary fat is not the cause of heart disease (see <http://westonaprice.org/knowyourfats/index.html>, or *Take Two Apples And Call Me In The Morning* by Judy Stone) and vegetables would be a far healthier source of fiber (yes, even for breakfast). Similarly, I have never had a client with diabetes who was taught how to eat to reverse their disease, only how to maintain balance between their diabetes drugs and their blood sugar.

As we head toward November elections each presidential candidate has a platform on healthcare reform, which, disappointingly but not surprisingly, simply reshuffles the deck. Extending insurance coverage, supporting disease management efforts, making drugs cheaper and more available, lowering costs with better information technology-- you won't find anything significant in either candidate's platform that addresses how we keep people healthier, only how we can manage their poor health better and presumably with less money. But since more people are becoming sicker, at an earlier age, and each put on an increasing number of medications, costs are never going to go down. The only thing different on this menu is the call for more transparency in reporting the escalating medical errors, disparities in care, and incidences of hospital acquired infections, and that will have an impact only if those reports stir action, a big if.

We make it cheap, convenient, and all-American for people to eat in a way that erodes health and subsidizes the industries and organizations whose existence depends on us becoming sicker. And then we tell people that if they only ate less and moved more we wouldn't be such an obese nation dying of heart disease, strokes and diabetes. As you read this, the state of NJ is contemplating legislation (Senate Bill 1941) that will make it illegal for anyone other than a registered dietitian to talk to you about nutrition. You can be sure that other states won't be far behind. Yes, those folks who think Coca Cola, Wendy's, McDonald's, and Mars should have a place at your dinner table are aiming to be the only ones allowed to talk to you about nutrition and health. What do you think?

*(Judy Stone was the subject of a full-length interview in the Community Journal in Issue #4, in the fall of 1996; back copies of that interview remain available at Crazy Wisdom.)*