



Energised Eating

The Rambam teaches that since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of Hashem, one must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthy and helps the body become stronger (Hilchos Daos 4:1). Indeed, the Mishna Brura (231:5) records, "I saw men of great deeds, who before they would eat would say, 'Behold I want to eat and drink in order to be healthy and strong to serve Hashem.'"

Just as a car must be in proper working condition to transport a person from one place to another, so too, the body is the vehicle for the soul to accomplish its Divine mission in this world. Preserving our health is essential for fulfilling our purpose.

Today it is known that many foods have harmful effects such as deep-fried foods, margarine, white flour and sugar. The Sefer Hachinuch (147) writes it is a matter of common knowledge among people that one's body is affected by the food one eats, whether for health or for sickness.

Take sugar, for instance. It depletes essential vitamins like calcium and other essential vitamins from the body. It also contributes to tooth decay, obesity, complications with the arteries, digestive problems, among other things, *lo aleinu*.

At an institute in New York to help children who need special care, it was decided to give them (about 5,000 children) only whole grain bread, fresh fruit etc. — everything natural without artificial additives, white flour and white sugar. Nearly every child improved astonishingly, as the wild ones became quiet, the apathetic ones became normal and the children with normal skills began to excel. After the children were cured of their problems, mentally and physically, their parents were taught how to feed them when they returned home. The parents reported that as long as they were strict about giving them healthful food, everything was fine. But, after indulging a child in a bag of candy and sweets, there would be a drastic decline in their child's health and behaviour. Only after several days of strict diet would their children return to excellent health.

Our Torah sages have long emphasized the importance of proper nutrition:

1. The Sefer Hachinuch (117) instructs us to only eat foods that are beneficial for the body and that preserves one's health.

2. In the Rambam's ethical will, he wrote to his son, "Hate harmful foods as one hates a person who wants to murder him."

3. The Divrei Malkiel writes that it is certainly forbidden to eat anything that brings forth an illness because of *v'nishmartem meod*

l'nafshoisaichem (Devarim 4:15, Shu"t Divrei Malkiel 2, 53:2). Because of this, we must guard ourselves from that which may harm our health. We must bear in mind *bal tashchis d'gufai adif li* (Shabbos 129a), *bal tashchis* with respect to one's body is more important, meaning one's health should always come first.

4. The Mishna Brura (170:45, see Elya Rabba 170:23) writes that one should eat foods that promote healing, and not the temporarily enjoyable sweets.

5. The Shelah warns against excessive eating and drinking. He advises that we only consume that which is healthy for the body, so that we may serve Hashem. When a person follows these guidelines, then each of his meals can be considered a *Seudas Mitzvah*.

6. In the words of R' Samson Rafael Hirsch: "Eat only healthful food and taste nothing of harmful foods. Of non-healthful foods, taste only a little."

7. Here are the astounding words of the Derech Pikudecha: A sub-category of murder, *lo sirtzach*, includes one who eats and drinks... to fill his desire, without considering whether the food is healthful or harmful for his body (Derech Pikudecha, Lo Saaseh, 34, Chelek Hadibur, 4).

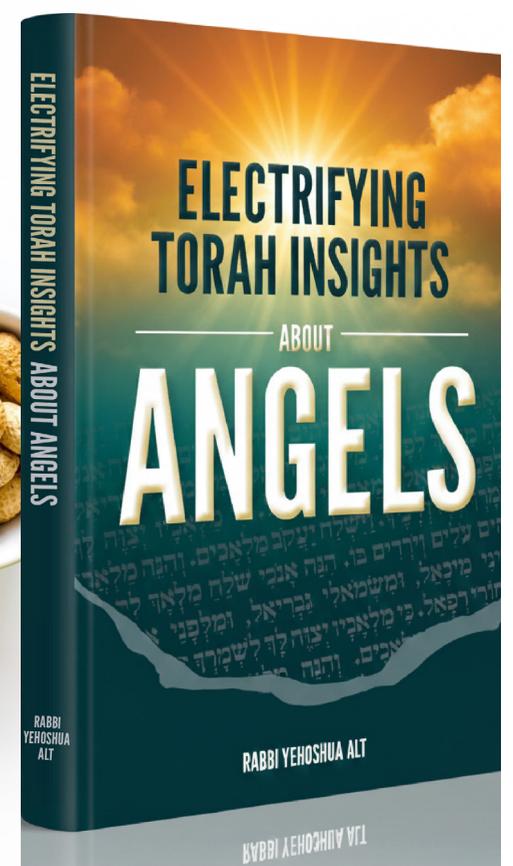
8. The 14th-century R' Yitzchak Abuhav (Menoras Hamaor, Haneir Harishon, Haklall Hasheini, Chelek Sheini, Perek Rishon) remarks that one who pursues food and drink is an *eviyil*, fool, as the first letters of the words of the pasuk *יאמר לך ושתה ואכול*, eat and drink he says to you (Mishlei 23:7), forms the word *אייל*.

What constitutes a healthy lifestyle? The essentials are eating nutritious foods, avoiding harmful foods and engaging in proper exercise.

In addition to causing illness, unhealthy eating negatively impacts one's moods, focus and feelings. We see today that improper eating can cause many disorders, like hyperactivity. Eating well enables one to learn Torah more effectively, with greater focus and stamina.

Even professional athletes avoid junk food during their playing season to optimize performance. Shouldn't we do the same to optimize our performance in Avodas Hashem?

A study at the University of Southampton in England observed 3,781 three-year-olds for one week as the children were fed an exclusively natural diet, containing no artificial colourings or preservatives. During the second week, half of the children continued as before, while the other half ate foods containing artificial food colouring and preservatives. The results showed that those in the second group displayed significantly more hyperactive behaviour than the first group.



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