

The Nutrition Reporter™

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EXTRA

The independent newsletter that reports vitamin, mineral, and food therapies

A Review of Recent Health Books

This August supplement to *The Nutrition Reporter*™ focuses on recent nutrition books and videos that have impressed us. To order the books, go to www.amazon.com, www.barnes&noble.com, or your local bookstore. Ordering information for the videos is at the end of their reviews.

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal, by Eric Schlosser (Houghton Mifflin, 2001, \$25). Each day, one-fourth of the American population eats fast food, spending more than \$110 billion annually. Children often recognize the McDonald's logo before their own names, and the golden arches are now more widely recognized than the Christian cross. Heard enough? You probably know that fast foods are in large part the cause of the rapid increase in obesity and diabetes, but Schlosser's thick book (365 pages) will convince you that things are much worse than you imagined. McDonald's perfected the ability of serving a consistent meal, whether in Los Angeles or London, and became the model for other retail food and nonfood chains to emulate. This has stimulated a homogenization of American society and the appearance of commercial eyesores along nearly every major street. In addition to weighing the cultural impact of fast food, Schlosser describes the gritty details of how fast food is mass produced, how much it lacks in nutritional value, and how the fast-food industry has built itself on low wages and strong-arming government regulators. This is a book well worth digesting.

Health Food Junkies: Overcoming the Obsession with Healthful Eating, by Steven Bratman, MD (Broadway Books, 2000, \$23.95). In a publishing niche with hundreds of redundant books on nutrition and health, Bratman's book is a reset button, a way of maintaining a sense of balance in life while eating natural foods and taking supplements. Although we do not agree with everything Bratman writes, we do believe this is one of the most original and thoughtful health books to be published in years. He coins the term orthorexia nervosa to describe a disorder in which people become unnaturally obsessed with the pursuit of good nutrition and health. How do you

know if you have this condition? One clue is if you spend more than three hours a day thinking about healthy food and meal planning. Another is if you're irritated when friends eat junk foods, or if you're willing to end a friendship because your companion likes sausage pizzas instead of tofu and brown rice. Of course, it is smart to eat healthy foods as a way of getting the most out of life, and this book doesn't try to talk you out of health foods and supplements. However, *Health Food Junkies* is a good reminder that an obsession with food – like any obsession – can end up controlling your life.

Ask Your Pharmacist: A Leading Pharmacist Answers Your Most Frequently Asked Questions, by Lisa M. Chavis, RPh (St. Martin's Press, 2001, \$29.95). Pharmacists often appear to do little more than dispense prescription drugs, which kill more than 100,000 people and cause serious side effects in millions of others each year. However, many pharmacists are increasingly interested in the health benefits of vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements. Chavis appears to be in the vanguard of such people, and she has written an exceptionally balanced book that describes dozens of common conditions and diseases, drug treatments and how they work, and nondrug treatments, including vitamins and herbs – all in easily understandable terms. This book should be a handy reference for consumers, much like *Dr. Atkins' Vita-Nutrient Solution* and the *Merck Manual of Medical Information: Home Edition*.

CFIDS, Fibromyalgia, and the Virus-Allergy Link, by Bruce Duncan, FRCS (Haworth Medical Press, 2001, \$39.95). The treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia often frustrate conventional physicians. These diseases have complex and highly individualistic origins, often a combination of viral infection and food and chemical sensitivities. Understanding food and chemical sensitivities (often referred to as allergies) is crucial to recovery. Duncan's book is suited to either a clinician or a well-read consumer who desires an in-depth understanding of the interplay of viruses and allergies in chronic

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fatigue, fibromyalgia, and many other diseases.

Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs, by Mark Blumenthal, Alicia Goldberg, and Josef Brinckman (American Botanical Council, 2000, 800.373.7105, \$49.95). The Commission E, The German government's equivalent of the Food and Drug Administration, has published extensive monographs on dozens of herbal remedies. Several years ago, the American Botanical Council published a translation of the Commission E herb monographs. This revision is far better organized and more user friendly than the original monographs. It describes several dozen herbal remedies, their side effects and contraindications. This is an excellent and understandable reference for both consumers and clinicians. The book is also available on CD.

Prozac Backlash: Overcoming the Dangers of Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, and Other Antidepressants with Safe, Effective Alternatives, by Joseph Glenmullen, MD (Simon and Schuster, 2000, \$25). There are more than 30 prescription antidepressant drugs on the market, all of which try to manipulate brain chemistry instead of correcting the underlying causes of depression, which may be psychological or nutritional. (For example, vitamin B6 and the amino acid tryptophan are needed to produce the neurotransmitter serotonin.) Antidepressants frequently trigger the opposite effect, such as increasing the risk of suicide. Glenmullen, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard University, details how Eli Lilly and other drug companies altered research data to obtain Food and Drug Administration approval for their drugs. Glenmullen's "alternative" therapies are primarily different types of traditional psychological therapy, which may help some people suffering from chronic depression. The book does an excellent job of documenting the dark side of pharmaceutical marketing, and it also describes some of the benefits of St. John's wort. However, its major weakness is a failure to describe the many vitamin therapies for depression.

Masks of Madness: Science of Healing, video hosted by Margot Kidder (Order from the Canadian Schizophrenia Association, 416.733.2117, \$39.95). Several years ago Margot Kidder, the actress who portrayed Lois Lane in the first Superman movie, was diagnosed with manic depression. After drug treatment made her worse, she discovered the benefits of dietary supplements and has become an advocate of nutritional therapies. This 50-minute video features a round-table discussion of Kidder and several other former patients who were ultimately helped by supplements. Several physicians, including Abram Hoffer, Hugh Riordan, and Hyla Cass, explain how they use nutritional therapies in their practices.

Weight Management, video lecture by Hugh Riordan, MD (Order from the Center for the Improvement of Human Functioning Int'l, 800.447.7276, \$22.45). Riordan, one of the leading nutritionally oriented physicians in the United States, was obese for most of his life. By the time he reached his 60s, he decided to shed his extra weight – and has been successful in doing so. This recent lecture by Riordan describes a variety of tips to help lose weight. One tip: doing nothing more than walking 30 minutes a day will help you lose 6-8 pounds over a year. Another: it's important to avoid low-fat foods because most are high in sugar, calories, and refined carbohydrates.

Nutraceuticals in Health and Disease Prevention, edited by Klaus Kramer, PhD, Peter-Paul Hoppe, DVM, and Lester Packer, PhD (Marcel Dekker, 2001, \$150). This is a scientific book intended for the most serious readers of nutrition books. Its 15 chapters describe recent research on vitamin E, SAME, lycopene, lutein, alpha-lipoic acid, creatine, and other nutrients. Like other books in the series, it contains a wealth of technical information on some of the health-promoting nutrients found in foods.

Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs in Health Promotion, edited by Ronald R. Watson, PhD (CRC Press, 2000, \$115). Vegetables, fruits, and herbs are rich in health-promoting substances, some of which researchers have long known about and others scientists have only recently begun to fathom. This is a scientific book, though perhaps just a little less technical than *Nutraceuticals in Health and Disease Prevention*. It is divided into four major sections: vegetables, vegetable extracts and supplements, fruits, and herbs in health. Like other limited-edition scientific books, the content (and the cost) make it more suitable for the most serious students or practitioners of nutrition. Some chapters describe nutrients (e.g. carotenoids) involved in protecting the skin, eyes, and other diseases. Other chapters explain the health benefits of soy, garlic, and cranberries.

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Post Office Box 30246 • Tucson AZ 85751-0246 USA

Editor and Publisher: **Jack Challem**
Copy Editor: **Melissa Diane Smith**

Medical and Scientific Advisors:

Lendon H. Smith, MD Portland, Oregon • **Richard P. Huemer, MD** Lancaster, California
Ralph K. Campbell, MD Polson, Montana • **Peter Langsjoen, MD** Tyler, Texas
Marcus Laux, ND Pacific Palisades, California
James A. Duke, PhD Fulton, Maryland