

Go on, have a TASTE!

If you think eating healthily is boring, think again. Dietitian **Vanessa Jones** says it is important to open your mind – and your mouth – to new foods you might not have tried before

Same old boring food?

Have you fallen into a food rut? Do your meals seem dreary and dull? Does your shopping list consist of the same old boring three vegies, a standard kilo of skinless chicken, a tedious loaf of wholemeal bread, skim milk and a packet of bland low-fat cheese slices? If this sounds like your shopping trolley, it's time to get off the monotonous food treadmill.

Where has your motivation gone to try new and exciting foods and add variety to your diet? A hectic lifestyle could be the culprit. Many of us have less time to spare, because we're working longer hours (or, in some cases, because of a hectic social schedule!). Food variety in the home is often the first thing to suffer... well, that

nutrients. For example, oranges provide vitamin C, but no vitamin B12 whereas cheese provides B12, but no vitamin C. Therefore, including a large variety of foods in the diet helps ensure the body receives the complete package of goodies needed for health and vitality.

Research has revealed a relationship between food variety and health, with chronic diseases being lowest in countries where the greatest variety of food is eaten. The Japanese diet is often cited as a good example of high food variety. The Japanese are well-known for eating an extensive range of foods and for suffering significantly lower rates of heart disease, diabetes and many cancers compared to most Westernised nations. The Japanese

“The Japanese Dietary Guidelines recommend eating 30 different foods a day. How many do you eat?”

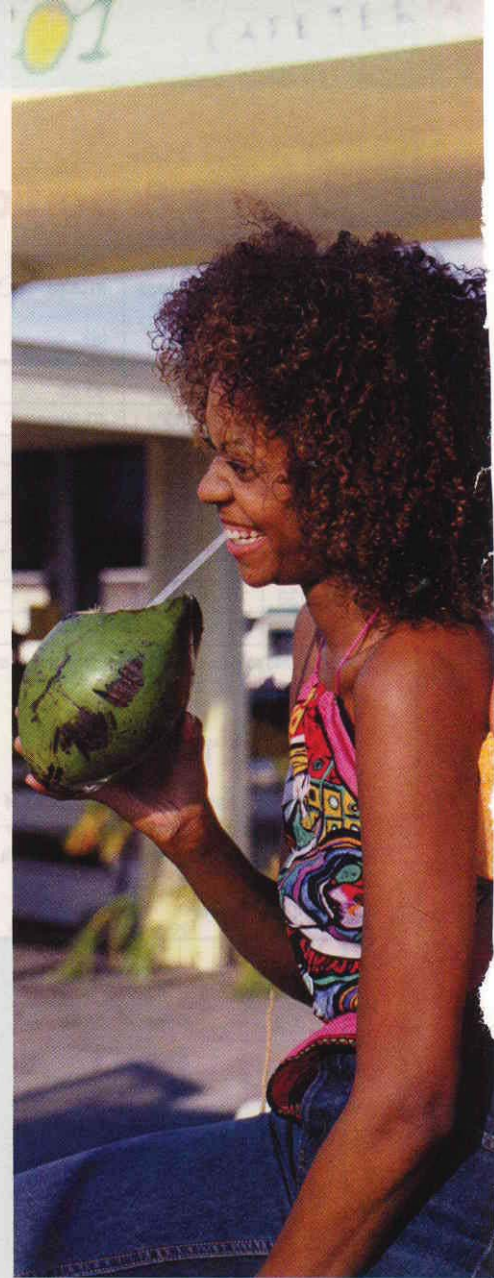
and the teetering pile of ironing!

Enjoying a wide variety of foods from the different food groups is the key to healthy eating. In fact, an eating pattern that is based on a broad spectrum of foods is the cornerstone to a more palatable eating experience and it can make weight control more enjoyable and achievable. Healthy eating can be fun!

No single food provides all the nutrients we need for good health. Each food we eat contains and contributes different

Dietary Guidelines actually recommend eating a staggering 30 different foods every day. But how many different foods did you have yesterday? Many of us would struggle to reach double figures.

If you're one of the thousands of Aussies guilty of religiously sticking to the same old foods for breakfast and lunch, and rehashing a handful of dinner recipes week after week, now is the time to break the cycle and make a change. Think of it as an exciting new food adventure...



Mission impossible?

Increasing the variety of foods you eat can be an exciting and stimulating experience. Your tastebuds will be tantalised and your body will get a buzz from the introduction of new foods. Increasing the variety of foods eaten just requires a bit of forward thinking and dedication to the mission.

THE MISSION:

1 Each week, set yourself a goal to try at least two new foods that you have never eaten before or haven't tried in a while. The goal may be a personal goal or a household goal. If it is a household goal, be sure to discuss the plan with everyone involved, such as your partner, children or flatmates. The more comfortable everyone is with the plan, the easier it will be to achieve your goal. Reinforce to everyone



that this is going to be an enjoyable experience and not a death sentence!

2 Write down your goal and stick it on the fridge door. This will remind you of your mission every time you reach for one of your usual boring old foods!

3 Write a list of all the new foods that you try each week. The aim is to incorporate as many of these new additions as possible to your normal culinary repertoire. Of course, some of the new foods you try will be seasonal. Your list of newly sampled foods will be a reminder to purchase those foods again when they come into season.

Getting motivated to try new foods

● **VEG OUT:** Each week choose one fruit and one vegetable that you've never

eaten before. Most supermarkets nowadays have recipe cards or provide helpful tips for some of the more unusual types of fruit and vegetables. Alternatively, ask your greengrocer how to eat or prepare the new fruit or vegetable you've chosen. The shopkeepers are there to sell their produce so they should be more than willing to help you out.

● **EXPLORE BEYOND YOUR COMFORT**

ZONE: One of the best ways to increase variety in the diet is to pay a visit to an Asian supermarket, European deli or multi-cultural food market. This does not require taking an overseas holiday – most cities and large towns now have supermarkets, delicatessens or food markets dedicated to specific international cuisines. Look out for information on upcoming food festivals and international food markets in your local newspapers.

● **GO EXOTIC GROCERY SHOPPING:** If you have a friend who regularly shops in Asian or European food stores, go shopping with them. Their knowledge of different foods, eating tips and cooking advice will be invaluable. Alternatively, if you go alone, do some research before you head out. For instance, if you wish to visit an Asian supermarket, look through several Chinese, Thai or Vietnamese cookbooks to give you some ideas of what foods to look for and buy. Take your cookbook or a list of must-try ingredients along with you as a reference.

● **TREAT YOURSELF TO A COOKING**

COURSE: Doing a cooking course, especially one that incorporates a cooking style you're unfamiliar with, is a fantastic way of broadening your knowledge of new foods. And doing a cooking course needn't be a fattening experience. Many cuisines are low in fat and kilojoules. Look out for Asian-style cooking classes, such as Japanese sushi and Thai wok cooking classes, or those with a health food focus. It's a great investment in your health – and your tastebuds! 🍴

THE EXOTIC SHOPPING LIST

GUAVA: A round green tropical fruit, which turns yellowish when ripe. The flesh is white to pink, juicy and fragrant. Cut lengthways and scoop the flesh out. It's a good snack and ideal for fruit and cheese platters. It is an excellent source of vitamin C, fibre and vitamin A.

BOK CHOY: Also known as Chinese white cabbage, bok choy is a member of the cabbage family. The leaf and stem can be used in stir-fries and soups or steamed and served with oyster sauce. It is an excellent source of vitamin C, vitamin A, calcium, iron and potassium.

TARO: A tuber veggie and a staple in Asia, the Pacific Islands and West Indies. The skin is light brown and rough and the flesh ranges from white and pink to purple. Taro can't be eaten raw, but it can be peeled and boiled, steamed or used in soups and stews. It is high in carbs and vitamin C, moderate in iron and low-fat.

TOFU (BEAN CURD): A white curd made from soya beans. Tofu takes on the flavour of the ingredients it is cooked with. Firm tofu can be cut into cubes, dusted with rice flour and added to stir-fries. Silken tofu is softer and can be steamed or scrambled and piled on top of noodles. It can also be puréed for dips and dressings. Tofu is an excellent source of magnesium, calcium and it's also a source of protein, folate and potassium.

QUINOA: Pronounced 'keen-wa', this grain is exported from Peru and the US. It is cooked like rice. The pellets swell and can be served like rice or added to soups and stews. Quinoa has a delicate flavour and is full of protein.

LYCHEE: A small fruit about the size of a small plum, with a rough, leathery, scaly skin, which is usually rusty red. The flesh is white, sweet and fragrant with a hard black stone in the centre. Just peel them and eat fresh or add them to fruit salad and ice cream. They're rich in carbohydrates and vitamin C, and are a moderate source of iron.

BOOKS TO SINK YOUR TEETH INTO if you want to find out more about the great healthy foods that are out there, try one of these books.

- **FOOD – THE ESSENTIAL A-Z GUIDE** (AN ILLUSTRATED KITCHEN COMPANION FOR COOKS AND FOOD LOVERS), BY JOHN NEWTON, MURDOCH BOOKS, \$59.95.
- **AUSTRALASIAN INGREDIENTS** BY LOUKIE WERLE, LIBERTY ONE, \$29.95.