Make the call to eat 'slow' food

By Sally-Anne Creed

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We live in an instant world, where immediate gratification is the norm. Cellphones, processed food, microwave ovens, vending machines contribute to a fast-paced life.

Like many people, you may eat on the go, choosing poor-quality fast food. You might want to take inspiration from the "slow food movement".

In 1986, an Italian, Carlo Petrini, founded the "slow-food" movement. In effect, he created what has morphed into a global movement, incorporating not just good eating habits, but many different aspects of healthy living, environmental responsibility and generally green living.

One of the driving forces is that modern technology and medical advances have made it possible to live longer but quality of life has suffered, along with health. We have exchanged quantity for quality in many areas, none more so than food.

What did people do before microwaves and processed meals? They just cooked from scratch on stoves or fires.

Food is one of the most important aspects of slow living and one you can control almost entirely. But slow food is not so much about food taking forever to make and/or cook, but about using fresh, organic ingredients, making it with love, and taking the time to cook it in a healthy manner.

That's because you literally are what you eat, and so the quality of your food becomes all-important. There's really no excuse not to get it right.

The internet provides endless recipes on how to make your own butter, bake your own bread, slow-roast your organic meat in an oven (wood, gas or electric), and steam your own lovingly grown organic vegetables.

And yes, organically grown vegetables and organically reared livestock are nutritionally superior to those derived from modern farming methods.

A recent study published in the Public Library of Science (PLoS) One showed that organic fruits and vegetables have significantly greater nutrient levels than conventionally grown varieties, mostly because organic farming practices promote higher quality, healthier soil than their orthodox counterparts.

An example of how important it is to eat organic produce is borne out by an interesting strawberry study published online in

PLoS One in 2010, by Dr John Reganold, professor of soil science at Washington State University Regents. Strawberries are one of the most heavily sprayed crops on the planet .

Reganold and colleagues analysed 31 different chemical and biological soil properties, and performed tests on the quality, nutritional value and taste of 26 different strawberries from both conventional and organic fields. Results showed that organically grown strawberries contained more antioxidants, more vitamin C, more valuable polyphenolic compounds and had a longer shelf life than conventionally grown varieties.

An impartial taste test performed during the study for visual appeal, flavour and sweetness showed that on all counts, organic strawberries were superior.

Other research shows that this holds true across the board for all fresh, properly organically grown produce.

Ideally, we should all have our own boreholes, compost heaps, vegetable gardens, livestock, wood stoves and plenty of time to enjoy life. For most people, especially those living in cities, this is almost impossible.

However, there are many "slow" lifestyle and cooking methods you can easily incorporate into your busy life, to improve quality of life, health and wellbeing.

Here are some of them:

- Exercise in the fresh air - walk on the beach, in a forest, or park; ride horses or bicycles instead of exercising in a sunless, air-conditioned gym and chemically laden swimming pool. Pool chemicals send gas into the air that is breathed in during a heavy workout.

- Have early nights - before electricity, people had candles and couldn't work or watch TV till all hours of the night; they couldn't take their cellphone and iPad to bed.

  We now have electric blankets, electric clocks, heaters and dozens of other appliances on standby mode all night while we sleep. This interferes with deep, restorative sleep and affects immunity. So try to be asleep by 9.30pm to 10pm to obtain enough deep sleep to be refreshed. Don't stay out late more than two nights a week, and remember sleep deficit can never be recouped.

- Make or buy a Hot Box or WonderBox (patterns abound on the internet). You'll save electricity, your food will never dry out and will never burn, and if possible, use solar power.

- Reduce stress. The pace of life today is manic; e-mails require instant answers, cellphones keep you constantly alert, and even on holiday, the laptop or cellphone is there to ruin any attempt at relaxation.

- Grow your own. As recently as 50 years ago, many people grew something in the way of vegetables, from herbs on the windowsill to a full-on vegetable patch. They kept chickens and a cow if there was space, providing fresh eggs and milk daily.

You can live the slow life if you are motivated enough to do so. You need to get back to doing your own cooking, baking, pickling, preserves, dried fruit, cosmetics, cleaning products, flea powder. The list is endless of things you can make to avoid toxic chemicals and poor food quality. And there is an enormous saving in making things yourself.

You may have forgotten how easy it is to relax and enjoy making healthy food.

Changing the way you live, and learning to live the slow life again will bring it all back to you.

Source: *Business Day*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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