DISCOVER THE 4 FACETS OF FOOD—
AND THEIR POWER TO HEAL

What do you get when you merge ancient food wisdom with modern nutritional science?
Answer: The discovery that optimal eating is more than a balanced diet; that food heals multidimensionally.

— By Deborah Kesten

In *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, Deepak Chopra writes, “The most significant breakthrough is not contained in isolated findings but in a completely new worldview.” Our current food worldview encourages us to look at food with binoculars. One moment we point them at protein, the next at carbohydrates, and then at fat—both in food and on our body. Viewed through such a singular field of vision, we see food solely from a biological perspective of “isolated findings.”

But toss away the binoculars and instead view food through a kaleidoscope of ancient food wisdom, and in place of the interesting but limited binocular focus on food, stunning new nutrition insights are revealed; suddenly, subtleties that reflect physical, emotional, spiritual, and social nourishment are manifested. These are the Four Facets of Food that lie at the core of our Whole Person Integrative Eating™ research on overeating, overweight, and obesity. Viewed from the interactive, ever-changing, four-facet vantage point, food and nutrition become integrated, interconnected, and whole.

A New Nutrition View: The 4 Facets of Food

Sometimes you have to go backward before you can move forward. In my quest to discover optimal eating insights—which ultimately led to unraveling the four facets of food—I began by unearthing ancient food wisdom from world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.), cultural traditions (such as yogic nutrition, the Mediterranean diet, etc.), and Eastern healing systems that include nutrition (traditional Chinese medicine, India’s Ayurveda, etc.). Then I researched what modern nutritional science had to tell us about ancient food wisdom.

A distillation of nutritional truths that emerged from the marriage of ancient food wisdom and state-of-the-art science revealed that food is more than an amalgam of nutrients. Rather, it has been used by people for millennia to heal their bodies (biological nutrition), calm their minds (psychological nutrition), connect to the mystery of life inherent in food (spiritual nutrition), and create connection to others (social nutrition). In other words, the four facets of food have the power to heal the “whole person”; to heal multi-dimensionally.

Here’s a closer look at the four facets of food:

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SOCIAL NUTRITION
Think of a favorite food experience. Was it sharing food with some friends, family members, and coworkers, or were you dining at a table for one? This facet of social well-being is about the health and healing benefits that food can bring when you’re dining in a socially supportive environment.

PSYCHOLOGICAL NUTRITION
Do you ever wonder why you crave carrot cake instead of a carrot when you’re, say, anxious? The facet of emotional well-being is an emerging field of mind-body nutrition research, which explores how food affects feelings via hormones (chemical messengers) that are released in the brain when we eat certain foods; and conversely, how thoughts and feelings often affect food choices.

SPIRITUAL NUTRITION
The spiritual food facet explores the consciousness (degree of mindfulness, appreciation, and loving regard) that we bring to the mystery of life inherent in food. The spiritual nutrition philosophy is at the core of the food-related wisdom espoused by world religions and cultural traditions for thousands of years.

BIOLOGICAL NUTRITION
If you’ve ever chosen a particular food after calculating its calorie content—perhaps with the intention of maintaining or losing weight; or selected a particular food for its health-enhancing antioxidants—you’ve experienced the biological/physical well-being facet of food. This facet explores the power of macro- and micro-nutrients (vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals, etc.) to heal—or harm—health.

Research: Healing with the 4 Facets of Food
In essence, the four facets of food reveal that food has the power to nourish physically, but also emotionally, spiritually, and socially. In this way, the four facets provide a "whole person" way of eating, which our research has linked with less overeating and increased odds of weight loss. Still other studies have found that each of the four facets heal in yet other ways. Indeed, more and more scientific studies are verifying that each of the four facets of food impact health and healing—often in unexpected ways. A sampling…

Social nutrition and the rabbit study
Every wisdom and cultural tradition is rich with food-related social feasts, festivals, and rituals—which is quite a contrast to the isolated eating that is typical for Americans today. Indeed, one groundbreaking study by R. M. Nerem suggests that rabbits that ate potentially artery-clogging food while being held with care did not develop plaque-clogged arteries.

Psychological nutrition and ancient yogic insights
Perhaps food-mood research began with ancient yogis (rishis) who, 5,000 years ago, used their own minds/bodies as laboratories to discover which foods kept them calm so they could meditate and practice yoga. The Bhagavad Gita, Hindu scripture, calls these foods sattvic, while in the West, we describe them as vegetarian, plant-based foods. Flash-forward to the 1970s, when scientists verified ancient yogic wisdom: carbohydrate-dense foods (such as potatoes) release a naturally occurring hormone called serotonin, which is calming and relaxing.

Spiritual nutrition and mindfulness
The three components of the spiritual nutrition facet of Whole Person Integrative Eating are eating with mindfulness, gratitude, and loving regard for food. Indeed, eating with a consciousness of meditative mindfulness—one path to enlightenment based on Buddhist
Foundations of Whole Person Integrative Eating Certification Course

philosophy—and being present in the moment while eating actually affects the way food is metabolized, and ultimately, digestion and wellness.7

**Biological nutrition and enhanced nutrient production**

We’ve known for decades that nutrient-dense food can lead to health and healing. Now more and more research is revealing that the quality of the food we eat influences gut microbiota and in turn, is a new unifying factor in the study of obesity.8,9

**The 4 Facets of Food: A Multifaceted Nutrition Model**

For millennia, humankind and theologies turned to food to nourish physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being. Today Western science is verifying what our ancestors discovered about food and nutrition by instinctively and intuitively using their own bodies and minds as “laboratories.” The four facets of food reconnect us with this timeless food wisdom; at the same time, they help us to demystify and make sense of emerging Western nutritional science concepts. The result: a balanced relationship to food and eating that holds the power to heal and nourish multi-dimensionally.

Rather than thinking about the four facets of food as a new diet or as more dietary dogma, consider that they integrate our current nutrient-oriented view of food while also acknowledging the harder-to-measure healing dimensions of food, such as its link to emotions, spiritual well-being, and community. Once you begin to view food from this multifaceted framework, your entire relationship to food and eating—and your perception about its power to heal holistically—will change at its core.

References:

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Whole Person Integrative Eating is not a diet you will go on and then off. It is a scientifically sound dietary lifestyle designed to be practiced for a lifetime. WPIE will inspire you to transform your relationship to food, eating, and weight by empowering you to discover true nourishment—physical, emotional, spiritual, and social—each time you eat for life. What people are saying about Whole Person Integrative Eating: “Whole Person Integrative Eating is a fascinating guide to choosing foods for health. It is a step-by-step plan to revolutionize your health.” — Neal D. Barnard, M.D., Physicians Committee. I describe my Whole Person Integrative Eating program as holistic because it is a dietary lifestyle—not a rigid, restricted diet; rather, it is a lifetime practice—that addresses physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being each time we eat. An award-winning author, my books include Feeding the Body, Nourishing the Soul; The Healing Secrets of Food; and more recently, Make Weight Loss Last. I have written more than 300 articles about the link between optimal eating, health, and healing for magazines, the web, and health publications. I am married to Larry Scherwitz, PhD., a medical researcher whose career includes Director of Research for 18 years on Dean Ornish, M.D.’s heart disease reversal program. Larry and I enjoy collaborating on many research and writing projects. Whole Person Integrative Eating (WPIE) is a holistic, whole person dietary lifestyle—a way of eating that leads naturally to weight loss and well-being. Here are the 7 science-backed principles of WPIE that up your odds of eating less and weighing less. #4. HEARTFELT GRATITUDE. Be grateful for food and its origins from the heart. Although dieting, judging food as “good” or “bad,” and thinking a lot about the “best” way to eat may not seem to have much in common, they are all characteristics of the Food Fretting overeating style. If you see yourself in the food-fretting scenario, you’re at increased odds of overeating and weight gain.