

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“What Chemicals Are in My Food?”

I can't even pronounce that word, so why would I eat something with that in it?! Food is made of chemicals, but the amount consumed is what matters. All food, like most everything else in the world, is made of chemicals. Foods contain nutrients, which are chemicals and are important for a healthy, balanced diet.

Reading or hearing about chemicals in food, when combined with words like 'toxic,' 'extremely dangerous' and 'cancer-causing' may be scary, especially if you aren't getting all the facts. Here are a few points to help navigate information about chemicals in food.

Complete information from a credible medical or scientific source would likely explain how much of the chemical is in the food, how much of a food someone actually eats or drinks and whether the chemical is present at a level that is harmful to people.

Chemical names may sound complicated, but that does not mean they are unsafe; some ingredients may be familiar. For example, tocopherols are vitamin E, sodium chloride is salt, and dihydrogen monoxide is water.

Some chemicals safely used in food may have other non-food uses. For example, vinegar is used as a household cleaner, but also is used in small amounts in food. If used in food, a chemical must meet the FDA's safety standard.

You have choices to make. Eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods to have a well-balanced diet. You may be asking what nutrient-dense foods are. Nutrient-dense or nutrient-rich foods provide many healthful nutrients and few calories per serving. The phrase nutrient-dense sounds similar to the term energy-dense, but they have opposite meanings. Energy-dense foods are less desirable because each serving of them has more calories, more added fats or added sugars, and typically provides fewer healthful nutrients. Consider the calories in two nutrient-dense foods compared to two energy-dense foods:

Two nutrient-dense foods:		Two energy-dense foods:	
1 small baked potato	127 calories	2 ounces regular potato chips	291 calories
1 cup of raw apple slices	57 calories	1 cup sweetened applesauce	173 calories

Each day, try to eat mostly nutrient-dense foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, seafood, lean meats, turkey and chicken without skin, eggs, nuts, seeds, and cooked dry beans. Try to limit intake of foods that are high in sodium, solid fats, added sugars and refined grains.