

## GETTING STARTED WITH MACROBIOTICS

### *Shedding the Old "You"*

by Michael Rossoff

**W**e all have our own reason for beginning macrobiotics. Often, we are spurred into it by a health crisis, or perhaps the anticipation of serious illness; sometimes, we are motivated for improving our emotional or spiritual health. Regardless of the spark that got us going, we quickly see that turning the promised improvements into a successful outcome takes tremendous attention.

As time goes on, we can lose that early inspiration, becoming less conscientious, especially if we feel that the results are less than hoped for. It seems to me that many people leave macrobiotics within two or three years, asserting that it is: (1) too strict, (2) too consuming, (3) too much cooking, (4) boring, or (5) impossible to do "perfectly." They "leave," but are inevitably changed. The food-sickness/food-health connection was experienced and learned. They continue to select many of the wholesome foods they adopted via macrobiotics.

But abandoning the process begun by following macrobiotics is to misinterpret the dynamics of change. Central forces in our life determine our long-term success with macrobiotics. These core issues are beyond the focus of food selection/preparation, which may be all we thought macrobiotics was about.

The first issue concerns the myriad habits we have created over many years. For instance, eating on the run, or having the midnight snack, or unconsciously pouring salt or a sweetener on our foods. These longtime habits take effort to change. The way to change any habit begins with awareness, followed by the desire to do things differently. It takes time.

Paralleling the matter of habits is the issue of expectations. Breakfast used to be eggs, bacon, toast with butter or sugared jam, and coffee with a sweetener plus milk. Now it is hot cereal with dried fruit or rice syrup and tea. Dinner is even more startlingly different: beef or chicken (sometimes fish)

was the main dish, with potatoes, salad, bread and some fantastic dessert. Now it's grains, cooked vegetables, beans or tofu, perhaps seaweed and, sometimes, fruit. When the husband asked "what's for dinner?" his wife might have said, "roast beef" or "chicken cacciatore"—focusing on the main dish. Essentially, macrobiotics is changing the main dish from meats to grains. But our long-standing expectations of what our plates should look like can be upset by the "unusual" appearance of macrobiotic meals. Learn to anticipate a new look, as well as new tastes.

Even more central is the issue of priorities. In our fast-paced, fast-cooking, fast-foods society, the preparation of foods has been put on the back burner! Other things have become much more important: work, exercise, meditation, recreation, movies, TV, shopping, travel . . . not to mention visits to doctors, therapists and pharmacies. It seems that giving so much new attention to foods prevents our pursuing these other activities. Yet, this is not necessarily so. Creating new eating habits is partly a question of familiarity, efficiency and planning.

Furthermore, as we change, some of what we valued loses its relevance. These necessary shifts in our priorities can either bring out resentments or stimulate a sense of adventure.

The most basic issue focuses on our value system. How much is macrobiotics challenging your long-held beliefs? We need to assess our assumptions of good/bad, educational propaganda (such as "Dairy is one of the four food groups; it's a natural"), family prejudices (such as "I don't like any green vegetables!"). Other beliefs can be extremely subtle and even more influential. Looking with honesty and without attachment can bring a shift in our outlook. This process can help us to embrace new approaches to living in a spirit of openness and play, and the powerful changes we experience on the way with gratitude and joy.

Turning fears into freedom is the goal of macrobiotics. This freedom is coupled with responsibility. We must seek change as a positive, evolving procession and unfolding of our life's energies. Success with macrobiotics is a process, a learning of new ways to love and care for ourselves, our loved ones and our world. ♦

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