FOOD COMBINING / THE HAY SYSTEM

This is a brief overview of the Hay System of Food Combining. I have used this principle personally for many years (although not 100% of the time) and with patients who have been willing (or have been suffering enough!) to give it a go. I can totally vouch for its efficacy and benefits if followed correctly.

By following the system you can expect to increase vitality, improve digestion and sleep, balance your weight (lose or gain as necessary), boost your immunity, reduce inflammation and reduce symptoms of many illnesses.

These are my own rough notes to help get you started but I recommend that you purchase and read 'Food Combining for Health by Doris Grant & Jean Joice'. It is one of many books available on the subject and probably one of the oldest. Having followed the system myself and read extensively on the subject, I still believe it to be the best.

Food Combining is a simple system once you get the hang of following a few well-defined rules:

1. Do not mix protein foods and starch foods at the same meal. This is probably the easiest 'rule' to grasp and follow and I have included 3 tables to help you – Table 1 Protein Foods; Table 2, foods that can be combined with either starches or proteins; and Table 3 Starch Foods.
2. Allow a gap of 4 hours between different meal types
3. Eat as many alkaline-forming foods as possible. The recommendation is 80% alkaline foods to 20% acid-forming foods. This appears to be one of the hardest 'rules' to follow. Give yourself time to increase your alkaline intake. 80:20 is actually quite hard to achieve so just work towards it and be happy with your progress. Some foods are neither acid nor alkaline-forming and are designated neutral.

The following 'additional rules' are the basic guidelines of a healthy diet:

1. Eat three proper meals a day with fresh vegetables, fruits and salads forming the mainstay of your diet as these are generally alkaline-forming. High quality proteins and carbohydrates are necessary but should be consumed in moderation as they are generally acid-forming.
2. Only snack between meals if absolutely necessary.
3. Avoid all processed foods (occasional lapses are inevitable but try to minimize frequency).
4. Keep sugar intake to a minimum (beware breakfast cereals, breakfast bars and so-called healthy cereal bars, they are all massively high in sugar or sugar substitutes).
5. **Never** consume artificial sweeteners in any form e.g. diet sodas, squashes, flavoured yoghurts, desserts etc.
6. Natural fat is vital in a healthy diet – avoid all low-fat foods. Cold-pressed olive oil is the best culinary oil for regular consumption. Avoid rapeseed oil.
7. Consume only wholegrains i.e. wholemeal bread, brown rice & brown pasta. Fibre is vital to a well-functioning digestive system.
8. Avoid regular table salt, it is a poison to the body and dehydrates the system. Replace with Celtic sea salt.
9. Do not eat late in the evening. A minimum 12 hour gap between the last meal of the day and the first meal of the next day allows the digestive system to rest and repair overnight.

A little more advice: if items don't appear on the lists then they are probably best avoided or used very sparingly. Soya products (except fermented soya such as organic tofu) don't appear as they are very hard to digest. Biscuits, cakes, chocolate, sweets, crisps etc don't appear either but when you choose to eat them then they generally fit into the starch meals category. As you will only be having them occasionally then assume that this is where they belong. Marmite, all quorn products and gluten-proteins such as Seitan do not appear in the lists either. These are highly processed foods which do not fit readily into any of the tables and should be avoided wherever possible.

It is a good idea to print out the 3 tables and stick them to your fridge until you remember which categories different foods fall into (you will in time). On the tables, you will see that categories or foods are highlighted as alkali-forming foods, neutral foods & acid-forming foods. This is a simple 'traffic light system' to guide you in your food choices. Always go for green if you can, followed by yellow then red. Eat as many green foods as possible.

One of the great things about Food Combining is that you can follow it for as much of the time as you like. When you begin to notice the benefits you will find that you instinctively want to follow it for more and more of the time as a matter of course. Occasional lapses then are of no consequence. If you go out for a meal with friends for instance you can choose to follow it or not. If you are eating at a friend's house you will probably find you can't follow it but you can get back on track at your next mealtime.

Here is the science bit just to give you a basic understanding of why and how the system works:

Our digestive tract is vital to a fully functioning and strong immune system, so the healthier it is the better we are. When foods are combined properly they allow nutrients and minerals to be extracted and used in the body efficiently for maintenance and repair.

Proteins require an acid medium for digestion. Digestion of proteins begins in the stomach and can only take place properly if the environment is fully acidic. Starch and sugary foods with their accompanying alkalis interfere with this acid medium so if they are eaten at the same meal as proteins, the proteins cannot be fully digested.

Carbohydrates (starches & sugars) require an alkaline medium for digestion and this process begins with saliva in the mouth. It continues in the small intestine which is the part of the digestive tract that comes after the stomach. When these foods enter the stomach they should be partially digested (if properly chewed) and the acid environment will not interfere with the alkaline medium required to prepare the food for further digestion. If foods from the protein chart are eaten at the same time however then the alkaline preparation is interrupted and fermentation occurs with its accompanying bloating, pain and wind.

Many chronic diseases including cancers, heart disease, arthritis, autoimmune diseases and dementia can be reduced by following a basic, sensible diet. Processed and packaged foods and meals from restaurant chains contain processing agents which no longer need to be listed in the ingredients. These agents increase the shelf life of the foods at the expense of nutrition. Supplements to close this 'nutrition gap' can only do so much, and avoiding deficiencies in the first place with a balanced diet rich in antioxidants from fresh fruit and vegetables, and high in fibre which naturally detoxifies the body, is the cheapest and safest option.

Table 1 - Protein Meals

Foods in this table **CAN** be combined with foods in **Table 2** (combining foods)
but NOT combined with foods in Table 3 (starch foods)

ANIMAL PROTEINS

Unprocessed meat of all kinds – beef, lamb, pork, venison etc (not sausages or meats containing or coated with breadcrumbs).

Poultry – chicken, turkey, duck, rabbit.

Unprocessed fish inc. shellfish (i.e. not fish fingers, breaded or battered fish).

Eggs – yolks & whites.

Cheese.

Fresh milk – cows, goats or sheeps (not soya milk or extra filtered like Cravendale). Do not consume milk with meat dishes.

Natural Yoghurt full fat.
Natural Greek Yoghurt (not Greek Style).

FRUITS

Apples
Apricots fresh & dried
Blackberries
Blueberries
Cherries
Cranberries
Currants (black, white & red – must be fully ripe)
Gooseberries
Grapefruit
Grapes
Kiwis
Lemons
Limes
Lychees
Mangoes
Melons (best eaten alone, too sweet & watery to digest with any other food)
Nectarines
Oranges
Passion fruit
Pears
Pineapples
Plums
Raspberries
Rhubarb
Satsumas
Strawberries
Tangerines

DRINKS

Weak regular tea with milk.

Weak coffee (not instant) with milk.

Herb teas (unflavoured).

Green, white or yellow tea (unflavoured).

Freshly squeezed fruit juices (from list on this page) diluted in water or sparkling spring water.

Bottled / cartoned fruit juices (from list on this page) diluted in water or sparkling spring water.

ALCOHOL
Dry red, dry white wine and dry sparkling wine.

Dry, unflavoured cider.

VEGETABLE PROTEINS

Tofu

Quorn – avoid

Seitan

TVP

SALAD DRESSINGS

French dressing made with olive oil.

Cream dressing e.g. crème fraiche mixed with herbs.

Mayonnaise (homemade).

COOKED TOMATOES

Raw tomatoes are alkaline and combine with both protein and starch foods.
Cooked tomatoes are strongly acidic and should only be eaten with proteins.
Tinned tomatoes.
Tomato puree.

Acid-forming foods. Neutral foods. Alkaline-forming foods.

Table 2 - Combining Foods

Foods in this table **CAN** be combined with foods that appear in either **Table 1** (protein foods) or **Table 3** (starch foods)

NUTS & SEEDS

Can be acidic or alkaline see below

Eat all types of fresh and dried unprocessed nuts & seeds except peanuts (inc peanut butter) which should be avoided. Peanuts are actually legumes not nuts and are highly acidic.

Almonds
Brazil nuts
Cashews
Chestnuts
Hazelnuts
Macadamia nuts
Pecans
Pine nuts
Pistachios
Walnuts

Nut butters are processed to various degrees which makes them more acidic than unprocessed nuts.

All seeds (pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, chia etc) & seed butters inc. tahini.

Coconut – fresh & dried, coconut milk & cream, coconut water.

VEGETABLES

All green and root vegetables except those in starch column (butternut squash, Jerusalem artichokes, potatoes, pumpkin, sweet corn, sweet potatoes)
Artichokes
Asparagus
Aubergines
Beans (fresh green, yellow & broad)
Beetroot
Broccoli
Brussels sprouts
Cabbage
Calabrese
Carrots
Cauliflower
Celery
Celeriac
Courgettes
Kale
Kohlrabi
Leeks
Mushrooms
Onions
Parsnips
Peas
Spinach
Summer squash (marrow, patty pan etc)
Swedes
Turnips

SALAD VEGETABLES

Avocados
Chicory / endive
Corn salad
Cucumber
Fennel
Garlic
Lettuce
Mustard & cress
Peppers
Radishes
Spring onions
Sprouted seeds & legumes
Tomatoes (uncooked)
Watercress

HERBS & FLAVOURINGS

All fresh & dried herbs.

Grated lemon & orange rind (unwaxed fruit, organic if possible).

NATURAL SWEETENERS

Honey
Maple Syrup
Raisins

ALCOHOL

Gin
Vodka
Whisky

FATS

Butter
Cream
Crème fraiche
Sour cream
Quark
Cream cheese (not soft cheese like Philadelphia)
Egg yolks

Olive oil (extra virgin)
Sunflower oil (cold pressed)
Sesame seed oil (cold pressed)
Coconut oil (cold processed)
Full fat natural yoghurt and Greek yoghurt (not Greek-style).

Acid-forming foods. Neutral foods. Alkaline-forming foods.

Table 3 - Starch Foods

Foods in this table **CAN** be combined with foods in **Table 2** (combining foods)
but NOT combined with foods in Table 1 (protein foods)

CEREALS

Chose wholegrains only i.e. brown, wholemeal.
Avoid quick-cook porridge.
Cereals can be acid or alkaline forming.
Barley
Buckwheat
Couscous (wheat)
Millet (although alkaline, millet is best avoided as it contains toxins not easily processed by the gut)
Oatmeal
Oats
Quinoa
Rice
Rye
Taboulleh (wheat)
Wheat (inc. wholemeal bread)

MILKS FOR CEREALS & TO USE IN COOKING

These products have become more prevalent in recent years and many are highly processed and contain lots of undesirable additives. You need to read the labels and choose those that contain only the main ingredient (eg almonds, rice or oats) plus water, sometimes sunflower oil, and sea salt. Organic products are usually better.
Almond milk (whilst almonds are alkaline in their natural state they become more acidic when made into milks. Homemade almond milk can be classed as neutral).
Oat milk (Organic Oatly is recommended)
Rice milk (Organic Rice Dream is recommended).

VEGETABLES

Butternut squash
Jerusalem artichokes
Potatoes (cooked in their skins)
Pumpkin
Sweet corn
Sweet potatoes
Yacon

LEGUMES

Dried beans and pulses are a special case in that they are naturally high in both starch & protein. On balance they are usually higher in starch but are hard to digest generally and should be eaten in moderation.
Aduki beans
Black eye beans
Butterbeans
Chickpeas (houmous / felafels)
Flagolet beans
Lentils
Mung beans
Split peas

(When sprouted dried beans and pulses become alkaline and combine with both starch & protein meals).

SWEET FRUITS

Ripe fruit only
Bananas
Currants (dried)
Dates – fresh & dried
Figs – fresh & dried
Grapes – very sweet
Papaya (pawpaw)
Pears if very sweet / ripe
Raisins
Sultanas

SALAD DRESSINGS

Crème fraiche with herbs.
Sour cream & herbs.
Cold pressed vegetable oils (not rapeseed).
Extra virgin olive oil.

NATURAL SWEETENERS

Brown sugar

DRINKS

May be acid or alkaline-forming or neutral.

Regular tea (with a little milk if desired).

Coffee (not instant, with a little milk if desired).

Herb teas (not flavoured).

Green, white or yellow tea (not flavoured).

Raw vegetable juices

ALCOHOL
Beer
Sweet wines
Liqueurs

Acid-forming foods. Neutral foods. Alkaline-forming foods.