“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”, as Hippocrates wrote this probably in the early 300's BC.

This week is one of the biggest eating weeks of the year. The average American will eat and drink more than 7000 calories on Christmas Day, greater than 3x the amount recommend by the USDA and equal to the daily intake of a Tour de France rider. The result: the typical American will be putting on 4lbs from Christmas to New Year’s. Living in Jackson will give us the opportunity to ski it off, but the healthier plan is to avoid puting it on in the first place.

It is important to recognize which foods are our medicine and which foods are poisons.  When I say poison, I really mean what foods are harmful to your body. As I've said over and over again in this column, only eat food and avoid the chemicals that are so prevalent in processed food.

Figuring out which foods are good for you as an individual requires some effort in return for the reward. The gold standard is an elimination diet. This process involves eliminating the foods for which most people have a sensitivity for a two week period, then re-introducing them one by one, monitoring your body’s response to it if you react to something.

Another method that has shown promise is from the book The Plan. Although this book is written for weight loss, it's based on the proven premise that you gain weight because of inflammatory reactions to specific foods. You commit to a very strict diet for three days, weighing yourself every day. Then, you introduce foods one by one to measure weight gain in the form of inflammation.

Another method I have found helpful to my patients in the past 20 years has been a food sensitivity test through a blood draw. This identifies the reaction of an antibody called Immunoglobulin G (IgG) to specific foods and the subsequent inflammation. Sometimes it is difficult to decipher what that reaction is. I had the test done 22 years ago when I was in naturopathic medical school and found I was sensitive to coffee. Coffee made my stomach grumble but from what I heard it made lots of people's stomachs upset. I NEEDED coffee for energy - I was in med school! Four years ago, I finally quit coffee and immediately, my chronic low grade back pain disappeared. Often we get information, but only listen to it when it is the right time.

Now that you know which foods are good for you, how do you find the best foods in Jackson?

Food sourcing has changed considerably for the better in Jackson over the past 15 years. We are lucky to have two natural markets :Lucky's and Whole Grocer and two chain grocery stores that carry organic foods. We have specialty shops like Pearl St Market and The Apsen’s Market that carry locally grown, zero-hormone meats from the Lockhart ranch. After attending the SHIFT lectures, I learned more about the many farmers in our area raising healthy animals. One of my personal favorites is Haderlie Farms in Star Valley, delivering in Jackson at least once a week.

Patients frequently ask me questions about the benefits of organic food, often after reading something that questions the relative nutritional value of organic vs.non-organic. I urge them to remember that a big part of what you’re getting with organic is a considerable decrease in the chemical load of pesticides and herbicides used to grow non-organic food. A great way to do accomplish that goal in the summer is through a local farm share. There are many in the valley, we purchase ours from Cosmic Apple. In the winter they deliver to Jackson once a week. Similarly, when buying good quality meat you are not only trying to avoid antibiotics and hormones, you are gaining the greater omega 3 content contained in grass fed meat.

Fresh, wild seafood has always been tough to source in Jackson. Now, however, we have some great sushi/seafood restaurants and people like the Captain, who I met at the farmers market this summer, bringing in fresh seafood almost daily along with some special orders made by LDS Store for king crab, oysters and halibut. Because of the current pollution levels of our oceans, it is important to eat fish that contains low levels of Mercury and PCBs, like catfish, herring, oysters, pollock, wild salmon, sardines, shrimp, and wild tilapia.

I know there are many other great sources for wonderful food in Jackson and the surrounding area. If I missed any, I’d love to hear from you.

Remember:

1. Eat only food
2. Figure out which food is good for YOU
3. Purchase the best food you can.

This is your health and life is more fun when you are healthy.

*A 15-year Jackson resident, Monique Lai, ND is an alternative health expert with a family practice where she works with patients to restore their health. She obtained her doctorate in naturopathic medicine from Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1996. Monique enjoys working with a variety of health challenges, particularly autoimmune disease, thyroid disease, digestive disorders, menopause and diabetes. For more info visit* [*drmoniquelai.com*](http://drmoniquelai.com/)