

# MORE VEGGIES, PLEASE

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Is butter good or bad? What about chocolate, red wine, nuts and beef?

The skinny on healthy eating: a diet rich in fruits, greens and whole grains will keep you younger longer

By Anne Underwood

NEWSWEEK

Fall & Winter 2001 — Dr. Michael Roizen, dean of SUNY upstate's College of Medicine in Syracuse, N.Y., has seen plenty of lousy eaters. But the worst was a man of 37 who had eaten almost every meal for the previous nine years at a Wendy's, Burger King or some other fast-food restaurant. Shakes and greasy burgers were standard fare for this man — while his vegetable repertoire revolved around iceberg lettuce, french fries and ketchup. It doesn't take a medical-school dean to figure out that this is no prescription for healthy aging, but Roizen was able to tell the man precisely how much damage he was doing.

ROIZEN IS THE DEVELOPER of a popular Web site that helps people calculate their "real age" — that is, the number of years their bodies have actually aged, in contrast to their calendar years. It is based on the premise, backed up by thousands of studies, that such factors as general

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health status, eating habits and exercise patterns influence our risks of developing certain diseases or ailments. This spring he took the concept one step further and published a book called "The RealAge Diet," which shows how certain foods accelerate aging, while others retard it. By Roizen's calculations, food choices alone can tack as many as 13 years onto a person's de facto age -- or strip off as many as 14. Sizing up the fast-food junkie, Roizen says: "Combined with other bad habits, his diet increased his 'real age' from 37 to 64."

Not many of us eat that poorly, but neither do we fully weigh the consequences of our dietary choices. In part, that's because there seem to be no reliable guidelines anymore, just a jumble of conflicting reports. First we were supposed to avoid butter; then it turned out that stick margarine was even worse. Soy is supposed to be great -- if you don't worry about last year's study saying it atrophies the brain. Is caffeine good or bad for us? And what about chocolate? It's had a bad rap for years, but now scientists say it has high levels of health-promoting antioxidants. No wonder confusion reigns. But if you step back from the controversies over individual foods, a clear picture emerges of the way w