



Alkaline vs Acidic Foods: Dispelling the Main Myths

by [Ramesh Bjonnes](#)

Are you confused about all the hoopla about whether an alkaline diet is good for you or not? Have you started to think that drinking lots of water and juice to become alkaline is just another diet hype? Then you are not alone.

Just Google the concepts, or go on youtube, and you will hear from various experts claiming to tell the truth. Vegan and raw food proponents will tell you that alkaline food is important, because an acidic body is an unhealthy and toxic body. While experts who adhere to the paleo or the ketogenic diets, which are high in animal protein, will claim that the need for alkaline food is just a myth. So who is telling the truth?

The alkaline vs acidity conundrum

Is it true that the foods and the drinks we consume can make our body, and more specifically, our blood, more acidic? Yes, it is indeed true. But because of the body's complex nature, there is more to the story than "just being alkaline."

Because some parts of the body needs to be acidic, others, such as the blood, needs to be slightly alkaline. And the foods we eat, the stresses of life, the kinds of beverages we drink, will all affect the outcome. Let me try to explain in some more detail.

The body is a complex design of many interactive set of systems: the digestive, lymphatic and endocrine systems, as well as a complex eco-system of nerves, organs, fluids, fats, bones and muscle.

Some of these organs, such as the stomach, needs to be acidic in order to digest the food. In fact, the stomach is very acidic. The blood stream, on the other hand, needs to be slightly alkaline. And because the plasma in the blood is so vital to the optimum functioning of the body's health systems, at the end of the day, those proposing an alkaline diet are right. We need to consume a mostly alkaline producing diet to stay healthy.

When our diet is too acidic, when it contains *too much* meat, eggs, sugar, refined carbs, dairy and grains, then the body's buffering system breaks down and that eventually also makes the blood pH too acidic. This is the missing piece left out by those experts who says that foods and drinks will not affect the body's alkaline and acidic balance. It does. And sometimes with grave consequences.

An alkaline vs acidic body can mean the difference between health and sickness; the difference between living long and in vibrant health or dying early of heart disease, cancer or diabetes. Let us take a closer look at how this all works.

The hidden truths of the body's pH

Acidity and alkaline levels are measured on a pH scale of 1-14. The stomach is between 1-2 on this scale, and thus very acidic. The slightly alkaline blood, on the other hand, has a pH between 7.36 to 7.50.

The pH level of our blood is regulated by a complex system of buffers, which are at work 24/7 to maintain the narrow range of alkalinity in the blood. Because of this fact, the paleo adherents confidently proclaim that you have nothing to worry about. Just eat as much meat as you like.

The body's buffer system, the paleo folks tells us, will take care of the excess acidity. This, they claim, is a scientific fact. But when we take a closer look at our

sophisticated body ecology, we'll realize that this idea is not based on science at all. It is a myth. It is bunk science.

So, the vegans, the raw foodists, and the vegetarians are actually correct: we do need to eat more alkaline food to stay optimally healthy. Still, many of us vegans and vegetarians may not understand the full complexity of what is going on. Because, many vegans and vegetarians are also too acidic and thus not so healthy. I have been there myself.

Even though I have physically experienced amazing health changes by adhering to an alkaline diet, it took me a while to understand the deep, ecological science behind those health improvements. The reason for that lies in the complexity and the subtlety of the organs involved in digestion, absorption of nutrients and elimination of toxins.

The real story behind the advantages of an alkaline diet

According to Dr. Gabriel Cousens, who has studied this issue for over 35 years, the healthiest blood pH is between 7.42 and 7.50. "It is in this range," he says, "that the cells operate most efficiently... Our very life and health depends on the body's physiological power to maintain the stability of blood pH at approximately 7.46 through a process called homeostasis."

It is this issue that those who deny the importance of alkaline foods are missing—the need for maintaining homeostasis. If the blood pH become just slightly less alkaline—below the 7.46 range, due to a breakdown of the body's buffer system, then the body's health mechanisms also starts to break down.

So how can we maintain homeostasis? We need to make sure that the body's buffering system is not overtaxed by eating too many acid causing foods. For when the body is too acidic we can suffer from osteoporosis, kidney stones, gall stones, and a number of other undesirable health challenges.

So let's take a look at the fundamentals of pH and how the body regulates the acid-alkaline balance of its fluids on a moment-to-moment basis.

The body's pH measures how acidic or alkaline a liquid is. With respect to our physiology, the liquids involved are our body fluids, which can be categorized into two main groups—intracellular fluids found in of our cells and extracellular fluids,

such as the plasma of blood and the interstitial fluids, which fills the space around the tissues, such as the lymphatic system, joints, nervous system, cardiovascular system, etc.

As mentioned above, the blood (plasma) needs to maintain an optimum pH of about 7.46 for your cells to function properly. Through a complex system, our cells require the three-dimensional shapes of the proteins to maintain this homeostasis. The tiniest change of the pH of the body fluids will also change the blood pH. This is the missing piece many of the so-called experts are leaving out.

How to read the pH scale?

Each number of the pH scale represents a tenfold difference from the number below or above. Thus a liquid that has a pH of 6 is ten times more acidic than a liquid that has a pH of 7, and a liquid with a pH of 5 is one hundred times more acidic than pure water.

Health writer, Dr. Ben Kim writes that “When you ingest foods and liquids, the end products of digestion and assimilation of nutrients often results in an acid or alkaline-forming effect—the end products are sometimes called acid ash or alkaline ash.”

He also writes that our “cells produce energy on a continual basis, a number of different acids are formed and released into your body fluids. These acids - generated by your everyday metabolic activities - are unavoidable; as long as your body has to generate energy to survive, it will produce a continuous supply of acids.”

Dr. Ben Kim further explains that there are two main forces that can disrupt the pH of our body fluids: the acid or alkaline-forming effects of foods and liquids, and the acids that we generate through regular metabolic activities.

In addition, stress can also effect the acidity level in our body, since we tend not to digest food properly when we are stressed and on the run. But fortunately, the body has three main mechanisms to help us prevent these forces from shifting the pH of our blood outside of the optimum range.

The body's buffer: the secret to health

We have a buffer system of carbonic acids, a protein buffer system, as well as a

phosphate buffer system. In addition, we also buffer ourselves through the exhalation of carbon dioxide and through the elimination of hydrogen ions via the kidneys.

It is due to these facts that some experts deny that certain foods have a negative effect of our health by effecting the alkaline acidity balance. Their argument is that your body's own buffering system will take care no matter what you eat.

But that is not true. When we eat junk foods with too much fat (especially animal fat), sugar and refined carbs, this buffering system is overtaxed and can no longer protect the blood from becoming too acidic, from maintaining homeostasis. And that's when we start getting sick.

In the words of Dr. Ben Kim: "If your body fluids are regularly exposed to large quantities of acid-forming foods and liquids, your body will draw upon its calcium phosphate reserves to supply your phosphate buffer system to neutralize the acid-forming effects of your diet. Over time, this may lead to structural weakness in your bones and teeth."

Similarly, a predominantly acid-forming diet can also increase our risk of developing calcium-rich kidney stones. Another common effect of a diet rich in acidic producing foods and stress is acid-reflux. It's therefore in our best interest to not overtax the body's buffering system by eating a diet that is rich in alkaline producing foods.

Alkaline producing foods

All non-starchy vegetables and fruits have an alkaline-forming effect on your body fluids. That means that potatoes and bananas are slightly more acidic than most other vegetables and fruits. For that reason, non-starchy fruits, berries and vegetables should be the main bulk of our diet. Fortunately, nature has arranged it so that green vegetables, such as kale and broccoli, are not only very alkaline; these super foods are also the most nutrient rich foods we can consume.

Most legumes are semi-alkaline, while whole grains are more acidic and refined grains are actually having an acidic effect on the body. In addition, all meat products, eggs, fish, dairy and sugar are also having an acidic effect when digested. Thus these foods should be eliminated from the diet, or greatly reduced.

Most grains, animal foods, and highly processed foods have an acid-forming effect on our body fluids. The best combination is thus to have a diet of primarily alkaline forming foods and a lesser degree of acid-forming foods.

In other words, a vegan living mainly on protein bars will end up with an acidic and unhealthy blood stream, while an omnivore eating lots of fruits and vegetables and a small amount of meat and dairy can stay alkaline and healthy.

My personal experience

In my late 40s, after being a vegetarian for over 30 years, I discovered that a diet with too many carbohydrates can make the body acidic and sick. I developed a chronic disease which I eventually cured by a long juice fast (the most alkaline diet possible) followed by a balanced diet of primarily fruits and vegetables.

As I detoxed with a juice fast and became more alkaline, my chronic disease healed by itself. My body's buffering system had become overtaxed and my blood pH had lost its homeostatic balance, and I became sick. Once balance was restored, through a more alkaline diet, my body's immune system and healing mechanisms took over, and I recovered from a chronic disease no conventional or herbal medicines could fix. That's the power of an alkaline diet. That's the power of changing our eating habits, of changing our lifestyle.

Summary

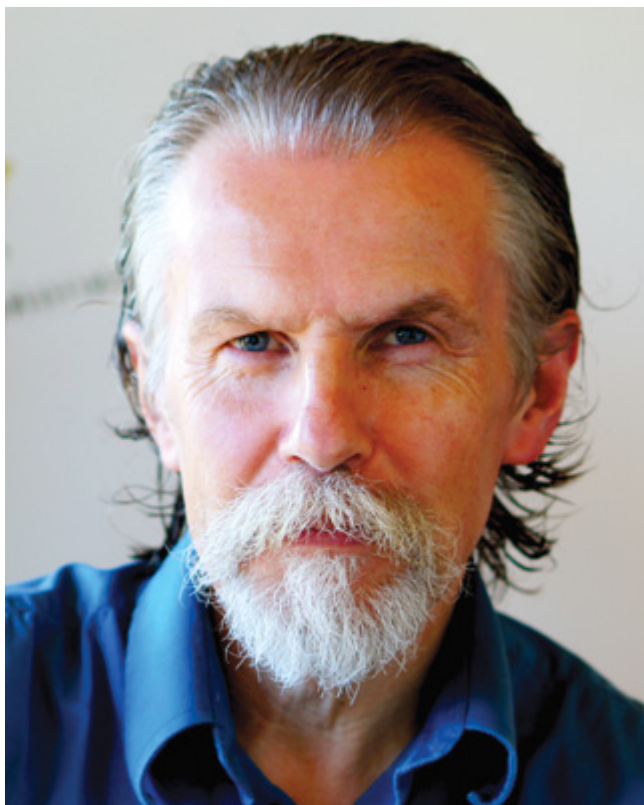
The body needs to maintain homeostasis, a blood pH level of about 7.46, in order to maintain good health. We do that by eating a diet of primarily alkaline producing foods, mainly fruits and vegetables. These foods are also the most nutrient dense foods.

There is no need for paleo folks and vegans to go to war in a battle of words regarding what's right or wrong with an alkaline diet. The facts speak for themselves. In essence, you can become acidic on any diet if you eat too much acid forming foods; too much animal protein and fats, too much sugar and refined carbs, as well as too many deep fried foods. Whether to be a vegan, a vegetarian or an omnivore is, in the end, more a question of ethics, provided you eat an alkaline diet.

But if you don't like to kill animals and you want to be kinder to the planet, then a

vegan diet is certainly best. But if you just want to stay healthy, junk foods and animal foods need to be minimized or eliminated; the main bulk of your foods needs to be alkaline. That is, mainly fruits and vegetables.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Ramesh is the Director of the Prama Wellness Center where lifestyle is considered our best medicine. Ramesh is also a writer, yogi and workshop leader. He studied yoga therapy in Nepal and India, Ayurveda at California College of Ayurveda and is a certified yoga detox therapist from the AM Wellness Center in Cebu, Philippines. He has taught workshops in many countries and is the author of four books, including *Sacred Body*, *Sacred Spirit* (InnerWorld) and *Tantra: The Yoga of Love and Awakening* (Hay House India).