

Food-As-Medicine | Healthy diets, better outcomes (Print)

The American diet continues to be a topic of conversation. It seems every day there's a new article about ultra processed foods and unnatural foods and drinks people consume. While trendy recipe videos continue to be super popular on social media.

Enter the food-as-medicine movement. It's the idea that the food we eat can prevent disease and even treat or manage it. A recent panel of experts brought together by [Health News Illinois](#) says the movement could improve health outcomes and even reduce your health care costs down the line.

Erica Dawkins, a registered clinical dietitian with OSF HealthCare, says the food-as-medicine concept is a great way to rethink the way we eat.

"Overall, it's promoting a great base of a healthy diet. Promoting good, fresh produce, as well as eating whole grains, lean meats and dairies. Then you'll incorporate those more often in our diets," Dawkins says. "Aim for different fruits and vegetables with different colors, because they're going to all provide different nutrients. If you ever hear 'make your plate a rainbow,' think about that. So, make sure to use a variety of different colors."

Veggies and fruits: in. Added sugars and added sodium: out. Added sugars can contribute to weight gain and obesity, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. A diet high in [sodium](#) puts people at higher risk for developing high blood pressure, which is a major cause of heart attack and stroke.

The food-as-medicine movement aims to provide education about making healthy choices and improving access to these sorts of foods in local communities. For example, the OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute healing garden offers patients the chance to pick fresh produce to help with their cancer journey. This allows patients and dietitians to create healthy recipes in the CEFCU Teaching Kitchen, working together toward better health outcomes.

Certain foods are believed to have healing qualities, such as [tomatoes](#). The natural, bright red fruit is filled with vitamins and minerals, including Lycopene. Lycopene is a phytochemical which helps fight inflammation and acts as an antioxidant. On the other hand, excessive alcohol use has been [tied](#) to an increased risk of cancer.

Dawkins says there are many local markets in the Peoria area with great options to find fresh produce. And don't let price be an obstacle.

"Illinois has the Illinois link match program. Anyone with a Link card can go, here in Peoria specifically, to the Peoria Riverfront market and Market 309," Dawkins explains. "You can swipe your Link card, and they will double your value with vouchers that can be used to purchase fruits and vegetables."

To find healthy recipes for you and your family, visit the OSF HealthCare [website](#).