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Transforming Health Through the Power of Food

FASS: Introducing the Flavor Carriers

FASS™ stands for Fat, Acid, Salty, Sweet. Together, these are the flavor carriers that get us to YUM! by unlocking the taste of whole foods, herbs and spices. When blended properly, they form a beautiful four-part harmony, with our taste buds serving as the pitch key. If any part of FASS is removed or slightly off in a dish, it's like throwing a sour note into the song. Ironically, FASS isn't even taught in cooking schools. About the only place one finds it in the culinary world is among wine makers, who are used to looking for the different taste "notes" in their product. As for FASS' individual players:

FAT: Good fats are like tiny magic carpets that traverse the mouth and carry succulent flavors across our palates. They lay the foundation—the taste bud superhighway, if you will—that links the otherwise disparate areas of our mouth that sense flavors. Good fats enhance our adrenal system (the fight or flight response, our survival mechanism), protects our cells from damage from oxygen molecules known as free radicals, and leave us feeling satiated and satisfied.

ACID: Sour in taste, acids chemically catalyze food; they're actually nature's vacuum cleaners, powerfully drawing out hidden flavors, the way moisture can be brought out of a seemingly barren cactus. Lemons and limes are the most common culinary acids I use to draw out and brighten flavors. Also if you recall your ninth grade biology, disease tends to make the body's PH too acidic. Interestingly, lemons when broken down by the body increase our alkaline or base PH, bringing us more into balance.

SALT: The taste bud equivalent of TNT, salt—used properly—can help flavor explode on the palette. Salt's crystalline nature, its rough texture, works like a scrubbing bubble that scratches the surface of foods allowing their flavors to be released. The key to salting food is NEVER to do it in one shot, but rather in tiny increments throughout the cooking process. In the yin/yang world of FASS (remember how sour acids actually brighten food), salt increases the sweetness of foods such as onions. All salts are NOT created equal, however. Sea Salt—I call it 'Salt of the Earth'— is preferable for its trace minerals including potassium and magnesium. Such minerals are often removed from commercial table salts. A victim of bad press (many people have unnecessary salt phobias), there's a reason good people are often called "good salts." It's because the right salt can be good for you and your taste buds.

SWEET: The leader of the pack, sweet tastes are the first to hit the palette, and, like the leading edge of a wave that hits the shore, spreads flavors quickly around the mouth while taking the hard edge off many tastes. Just like salts, though, not any sweet will do. Refined sugar falls flat; it doesn't have the virility to carry taste over our culinary 'g' spots. One natural sweetener rises above the rest; I call it the magic elixir, but New Englander sap gatherers know it as Organic Grade B maple syrup. Why not Grade A, you ask? Because that grade is more processed to create a lighter, pancake-friendlier color. Prettier to the eye, perhaps, but not nearly as potent to our taste buds as its Grade B cousin, a few drops of which can take a dish from good to YUM! in seconds, confounding even so-called culinary experts.