

Evolution of food not necessarily healthy

By Kathryn Reed

While humans have evolved for the better in so many ways, when it comes to what they eat – especially in the United States – it's more like people have devolved.

“There weren't many overweight or obese ancestors,” Lynn Norton, a registered dietician with Barton Health, told a group of nearly 60 people last week at Lake Tahoe Community College.

She reached back to the days of hunters and gathers to talk about how diets have changed through time. They were eating seeds, nuts, animals and had different protein sources. People ate what the land provided. In addition to this, they were active. Their quest to find food necessitated a certain nomadic lifestyle.

Today people hunt for food in grocery store aisles, gather items that are easy to prepare and have sedentary lives.

This has led to 75 percent of the people in the United States between the ages of 20 and 77 being obese or overweight.

“Today we are screening kids for fatty liver disease,” Norton said.

Farming took hold about 600 generations ago, with nearly all parts of the world having some sort of farming at least 300 generations. This led people to migrate less, but it also meant less diversity in diets.

Eventually, people were becoming deficient in certain vitamins because of the lack of varied foods. Lifestyle changes led to infectious diseases and epidemics becoming more prolific.

The Industrial Revolution of the 1800s began food processing on a massive scale. Additives became the norm – like sugar, fat and salt. Instant food was common. Convenience became more important and little attention was paid to how manufacturers made that happen.

“The meats of our ancestors was wild game and it was much leaner. Today we are fattening up cattle,” Norton said.

It was in 1970 that corn syrup, aka fructose, was introduced. Fructose can come from corn, sugar cane or sugar beets. Norton explained how the latest trend is for food companies to list fructose as beet sugar so it sounds healthier. She called it “a game” and that the consumer is unaware.

She went through a litany of ailments that are prevalent and common today that can be traced back to food choices. These are health issues that people didn’t have to contend with hundreds of years ago. Heart issues, clogged arteries, hypertension, some orthopedic injuries and others are what she calls “diseases of excess.”

“We need to balance the abundance from all the food choices,” Norton said.

She said the way to better health is to be active, minimize added sugars, avoid high calorie meals, eat slowly, ingest more plant foods, lose weight, reduce stress, get enough sleep and drink water.