

# Strong body and spirit

**Child singing:** I'm Popeye the sailor man,  
I'm Popeye the sailor man,  
I'm strong to the finish 'cos I eats my spinach,  
I'm Popeye the sailor man.'

More spinach please Mum, I want to be strong like Popeye!

**Tammy:** Welcome to Women of Hope. I'm Tammy and Carol is with me. Let me ask you something. Do you think you're a strong person? Strong in your body and your mind? Or do you often feel that you have no strength to face each day? Today on Women of Hope, Denise and Marli will be here with us and we'll be talking about how to be strong women.

**Carol:** That was Jono singing, and he made me laugh. He's 3 and he wants to be strong and big like his dad! His mother and father told him the story of Popeye. Do you remember the story, Tammy?

**Tammy:** Oh, yes. I used to watch it on television when I was a child. Popeye was a sailor who was very short. He was really bothered by another person in the story, called Bluto - who was very large and very strong. Well, Popeye would be losing the fight. Then he would open a can of spinach, swallow it and suddenly his arms would bulge, and his muscles would grow strong and he would be able to defeat Bluto.

**Carol:** Jono liked that story so much that he asked his mother to cook more spinach and of course she did, because it's very good for him. In fact she grows it in her garden so she never runs out. Jono pulls up his arm, and squeezes those muscles while he sings. He's so funny!

**Tammy:** There is a lot of truth in that old TV show. Certain foods do make a big difference to how you feel and how strong you are physically. Our friend, Denise, is here today. She's a dietician, a professional in good eating, and she's going to talk about the different kinds of food we should eat. Welcome, Denise.

**Denise:** Hi Tammy and Carol. And hello to *you*. How many different kinds of food do *you* eat in one day? Have you ever counted?

**Carol:** I haven't counted, but there would be quite a few. Let's see; I had tea and toast with honey for breakfast...

**Denise:** And toast with honey might give you enough energy for the morning. But what if you ate it three times a day, day after day?

**Carol:** I'd get bored! And fat, if I ate lots of it. I wouldn't get any vitamins if I didn't eat any fruit and vegetables.

**Denise:** And you'd get weak from not eating protein. Soon you would be sick.

I've been looking at government guidelines for what to eat, from different countries. Most of them say we need a *variety* of foods. Often that was the *first* point they mentioned. The reason is that no single food can provide us all the nutrition we need. Different types of foods contain different types and amounts of the nutrients our bodies need. There are more than 40 different nutrients, so the more variety we have in our diet, the more likely we are to get all of them.

Some guidelines have used a pyramid as a picture of the foods we need. The base or foundation contains the starchy foods, like bread and grains.

They supply our bodies with energy. Next comes the fruits and vegetables, which have the vitamins and minerals we need to keep us healthy. They also give some energy. Next, in a smaller layer, are the proteins, the building blocks for our bodies, such as meat, fish, and eggs, beans and nuts, and the dairy foods made from milk. The small peak at the top shows us that we should not eat too many fats and sweets.

These days dieticians sometimes say you should imagine all your daily food on a big plate. One quarter should be full of starchy food like bread, rice or potatoes, half the plate should have vegetables and fruit, and one quarter should have protein foods to build and repair our bodies. Next to the plate is a place for some dairy food such as a glass of milk or some cheese. There's not much room left for sweets and fats but you can squeeze a little onto the edge of the plate.

**Tammy:** That's an easy way to imagine it. So we might have brown rice, vegetables, and an egg for dinner- I'd like that made into a curry, with some yoghurt. (producers- use local foods)

**Denise:** ...and that would be well-balanced...and delicious!

The food pyramid, or the big plate, show us that we can have all types of food in a healthy diet. But some foods definitely give better nutrition than others. Many cultures have their own way of encouraging people to eat a balanced diet. Some say you can go by colour- something white, something red or purple... something yellow or orange... and something green.

**Tammy:** That would give you a good variety- so long as it's not cakes with red, yellow and green icing!

**Denise:** (laugh) No. But usually bright-coloured fruits and vegetables have more nutrients than pale ones. Choose those dark green leafy vegetables!

Some cultures describe foods as 'hot', 'cold' or 'neutral'. They don't mean the temperature, but the effect on the body. If you eat a balance of hot and cold foods, you will have a good variety. No matter which country you come from, remember that the most important point in a healthy diet is - eat a good variety!

If you work hard physically, you'll need more of your diet to be those starchy foods for energy. You'll need more protein foods if you're pregnant and making a baby, or breast feeding...or healing after an illness or accident...or training for an active sport.

**Carol:** Some people go on extreme diets where they eat only a few foods, don't they? Like living on soup, or grapefruit, or meat.

**Denise:** They might lose weight quickly but it's not good for them overall. If you want to lose weight, still eat a balanced, varied diet: just eat less of it, and less of those 'extras' like fats and sugars.

**Tammy:** I know that in some places it's really hard to get a variety. Some people have to live mainly on millet, or rice, or sweet potatoes.

**Carol:** Yes, and often fruit and vegetables and meat are expensive, and bread and sugar are cheap, so people with little money often have a poor diet. I wonder how they could eat better foods?

**Denise:** Well, it's always cheaper to buy fruit and vegetables that are in season and are grown locally, rather than food that has to be stored and transported. Maybe they could grow some vegetables, like spinach or bok choy, or tomatoes. You can grow them from seeds in pots if you don't have space for a garden, and water them with your used washing water. If it's hard to get green vegetables, ask the old people which leaves or grasses can be eaten- often there are traditional foods that have been forgotten.

**Tammy:** I found out that we can eat the green tops of many root vegetables. My mother used to cook the carrot and beetroot tops with some onion when she had no green vegetables. It tastes ok, but most people waste it.

**Denise:** We need to be creative don't we? Maybe you can find a friend or neighbor to share with. You might have more of one type of food at home, and they might have something different. Perhaps you and your friends can grow different vegetables and share your crops. You can help balance each other's food so you are both healthier. So...I would say, do your very best to eat a variety of foods, so you can be strong.

**Carol:** Like Jono- and Popeye!

Of course, if we want to build strong bodies, we need to do more than eat properly. We won't get strong sitting down all day! We need to exercise, to use our muscles and challenge them a bit so they grow stronger. I know I need that, as I get older.

**Denise:** Imagine a ladder going up the side of that pyramid we talked about, reminding us to exercise.

**Tammy:** You might work hard with your muscles all day, if you're a farmer, or a labourer, or you have to carry water or other heavy things. You probably have hard, strong muscles, at least the muscles you use the most. But these days some of us work more with our heads or our hands, and we need to *plan* to do exercises. We need exercises that make us puff and our heart beat harder, like a fast walk. Or we could do exercises that use weights. You could start with whatever you can lift easily for 8 or 10 times, such as a bottle of water, and gradually increase the weight. It's important to warm and stretch our muscles first. We should start with what we *can* do and stop if it hurts. Then each time, work a little harder. Trainers say to do weight exercises 2 or 3 times a week.

**Carol:** Maybe we can talk more about weight training another time. It's amazing how much benefit there is in strength training- it's great for young people and older people...for our bodies and our minds.

**Denise:** It's great if you can do active things together as a family. Maybe mother and father need to go out and play ball with the children, or all go for a walk together, or ride bicycles together. You will get stronger bodies and your family will become stronger too!

**Carol:** Hello again. Here on Women of Hope we've been talking about how to get strong bodies. Now Marli is here to talk about a different way of being strong women.

**Marli:** Hello my friend. I travel a lot and I love seeing beautiful, elegant women dressed in the different styles of their cultures. I've noticed something about women all over the world. We love to dress up, don't we? Have you ever noticed how little girls love to stand in front of a mirror and play dress up?

Today I want us to think about how we clothe ourselves- our inner selves.

I have seen beautiful women, who dress well. They wear beautiful clothes. They look gorgeous on the outside, but when they start to talk, what a disaster! The way they talk shows how shallow they are. Their ugly disrespectful words make them very unattractive. So well dressed and so beautiful on the outside, but all that beauty does not match their inner person.

I will never forget a woman I met years ago. She was poor and wearing a plain faded dress. Her face, hands and feet were distorted by the disease that was destroying her body. She had the disease of leprosy. Then she started talking to me, sharing her heart, and I saw a rare beauty that not many women have. Her inner beauty shone brighter than her physical deformities and her simple cotton dress.

You see, that lady had been in “God’s beauty shop” for years. She had suffered, and the suffering had made her more like her Saviour, Jesus Christ. She knew that God was in control, and she had learned to love Him and other people. This love shone through her life and I could see it in everything she said. That lady with leprosy was dressed with much inner strength. It makes me think about the woman the Bible describes in the book of Proverbs Chapter 31. It’s a long poem, so I’ll just read you a little of it.

It starts: ‘How hard it is to find a good wife! She is worth far more than jewels! Her husband puts his confidence in her’.

It goes on to talk about how hardworking, skillful and wise she is, how she has a business and provides for her family.

We don’t read about what she looks like, but her *character* is described in detail. She’s hardworking, generous, gentle, and wise. She plans for the future. She is truly beautiful. My favourite part is verse 25: “She is dressed in strength and dignity and she smiles at the future.”

Dressed in *strength and dignity*. I wonder...where did she buy *these* clothes? Where can we buy them? Where can we find *strength* to face life’s challenges? Strength to stand against despair, anxiety, and suffering? No, we can’t buy *strength* or *dignity* in a store. And it costs a lot to get them!

You see, I learned from women who were older, wiser and stronger than I was that inner strength does not come from ourselves. It comes from learning to trust God through our suffering. My mother-in-law was a source of strength to our family all her life. She became a widow at the age of 32. She raised 5 children on her own during and after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. She lost her husband and 2 of her children in a short period of time. That woman suffered so much. All through the years, every time we asked her how she was doing, she always said, “Let us thank the Lord. Let us be thankful.” She lived a long and full life of 93 years. The message of her life still speaks loudly in our home town. She was a great woman of God. We miss her still. She was dressed with strength. Strength that came from her faith in God through her suffering.

The Bible tells us that Jesus, the Son of God said, “In the world you have troubles, but be brave, I have overcome the world.” The apostle Paul, one of Jesus’s early followers, said, “And this is the victory that overcomes the world - our faith.”

You see, to be dressed with strength we need faith. Jesus promises us the victory and Paul tells us how to get it. We must have faith in God Almighty and in His Son Jesus Christ. We have to surrender our lives to Him. This is how we can be dressed in strength.

Next, we become stronger when we decide to think about what is good and lovely, not what is bad. When we stop criticizing people around us; our children, mother-in-law, husband... church and neighbours. We become stronger when we learn to accept whatever comes our way and trust in God's power alone. We need to fill our minds with the Word of God and come close to Him as we pray and worship Him. As I said, inner strength is something money *cannot* buy. It cannot be found in a pharmacy, or be won in a lottery game. Only God can give you this strength...nothing and nobody else.

Let me read you some words from God's Word. They were written by a man named David, who went through many troubles. God inspired him to compose beautiful songs and poems that are in our Bible today, in the book of Psalms. He wrote: "The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusts in Him and I am helped." (Psalm 28:7) Here's another one: "The Lord will give strength to His people." (Psalm 29:11) And listen to this: "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble." (Psalm 46:1) Beautiful!

My dear friend, God wants to clothe you with strength and cover you with His dignity. God is waiting to cover women like you and me. Even those who are destitute, unloved, unworthy, and selling their bodies and their souls. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, it's as though we are covered. God sees us as though we are wrapped up in Jesus' purity and goodness. That's our beautiful robe! The Bible calls it our 'robe of righteousness.'

Remember what we read about the good woman in Proverbs chapter 31? "She is clothed with strength and dignity and she smiles at the future." This lady is confident and happy. What is her secret? Another prophet wrote: "The joy of the Lord is my strength." That was my mother-in-law's secret. In the midst of her pain she could smile at the future and say, "Let us thank God."

My friend, the wonderful news is that God loves you and He is just waiting to wrap you with His strength and dignity and give you joy that never ends.

Please pray with me:

*Lord God, I bring my friend to You now. She needs Your grace and Your strength to cover her soul and help her to face the many challenges of her life. Bless and cover her with Your robe of righteousness. I pray in Jesus name.*

**Carol:** Marli, thank you so much for those wise words. My friend, I pray that from today you will be stronger in your body, and stronger in your spirit as you trust God. He knows everything that you need, and he will help you to be strong and brave to face each day.

**Tammy:** Would you like to tell us about your life? Maybe you want to ask questions about the things we talked about. Please send us a message at this station.

**Carol:** Goodbye for now, my friend...

**Marli:** and God bless you.