

FOUR

Who Decides What You Eat?

*"Yes, sometimes unusual things happen
after a switch to a vegetarian diet.
I've seen a number of cases in which the
poor people broke out in violent attacks of good
health, followed by bouts of physical
exercise and sweet thoughts."*

Anonymous

*"The person who is afraid to alter his living habits,
and especially his eating and drinking habits,
because he is afraid that other persons may
regard him as queer, eccentric, or fanatic
forgets that the ownership of his body,
the responsibility for its well-being,
belongs to him, not them."*

Dr. Paul Brunton

It is now the 1990s. It has been four decades since I sat in my grade school classroom.

In front of me is a coloring book found today in public schools. Purporting to teach children how to eat well, it has been supplied to school systems by the dairy industry. I don't know how many states use

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this particular coloring book, but I know that it is representative of many of the "nutritional education" materials used throughout the United States.

I open the coloring book and see the outline drawing of a man's face. "Color Dad," I am told.

That sounds fair enough. But look what happens next. How we are to color in Dad's face is not left entirely up to our imaginations. There are rules to follow:

1. If Dad drank milk today, we are to draw a "happy face." If he did not, then we are to draw a "sad face."
2. If he had ice cream today, we are to color his hair brown; if he did not, we are to color his hair blue.
3. If he had butter, we are to color his eyes blue. If he didn't have any butter, we are to color his eyes red.
4. If he had cheese, we are to color his face pink. If he didn't have any cheese, we are to color his face green.

It is unlikely that you had this particular coloring book when you were in grammar school, because this one is a recent publication. But it is quite probable that if you went to public school in the United States, you were given similar materials.

When that happened, you probably got out your crayons and began busily coloring away. There is one thing, though, that I am willing to bet you didn't do.

You didn't raise your hand and say, "Excuse me, teacher, but I have some questions. What are the health consequences of eating a lot of milk, butter, ice cream, and cheese? Aren't these all high in butterfat? And isn't butterfat a highly saturated fat? And don't dairy fats carry pesticide residues at very high levels of concentration? Oh, and there is one thing more, teacher: Who is it that profits from our believing that if we don't eat ice cream, butter, milk, and cheese we end up looking terrible, with red eyes, a green face, and blue hair?"

Hucksters in the Classroom

Knowing how malleable and impressionable youngsters are, I have often wondered about the forces that influence our children's thoughts and feelings about different foods. When we are young, we are by nature innocent and impressionable. We look instinctively to our parents and other adults for support, guidance, and example. Trusting, we soak up what we are told.

May All Be Fed

Unfortunately, there are people who see the innocence of children not as a call to be caring and supportive, but as an opportunity to promote the sale of their products.

The National Dairy Council is one of the leading suppliers of the materials used to teach nutritional education in America's school systems.¹ In some of our minds, the National Dairy Council may be a trustworthy organization concerned for human health. Even its name seems to suggest a group of elders whose purpose is wholesome and pure. When they told us to drink three glasses of milk a day, we dutifully obeyed. Little did we realize that this is an organization dedicated to getting the American public to buy as much milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, and ice cream as possible.

Because milk products are priced by federal law according to a structure that provides the dairymen more profit on higher-fat products, the dairy industry pushes those dairy products with the highest percentage of fat. It is not deterred by the fact that these are precisely the products that make the greatest contribution to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and many other deadly diseases.

Kindergarten children have received National Dairy Council materials such as *Little Ideas*, a set of food pictures ostensibly designed to help preschoolers identify foods. The set starts with butter, and then continues with sixteen other milk products, most of which are high in saturated fat. The implicit message is that high-fat dairy products are the primary foods in the human diet.

First graders have gotten a curriculum package ironically called *Food: Your Choice*. This is a large box filled with colorful materials, including bright posters about making milk shakes and pancakes. The recipes happily call for cream and butter.

You may not think that ice cream, a product that derives up to 90 percent of its calories from fat and sugar, is the healthiest sort of food, but the Dairy Council is not hampered by such concerns. Their materials tell children:

Ice cream is a healthful food made from milk and cream along with other good foods.

The "healthful milk group" merrily recommended by the Council features another item that you may not have recognized as the type of food children should be encouraged to eat—chocolate pudding.

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Claiming to be an unbiased source of nutritional information, the Dairy Council next tells children that to be healthy they should:

Drink milk at every meal and have . . . cheese, ice cream, baked custard, [and a] bowl of cream of tomato soup with butter.

Disguised as nutritional education, the advertising of dairy products continues throughout our children's school years. High school students receive such helpful Dairy Council publications as *A Boy and His Physique* and *A Girl and Her Figure*. What do you imagine overweight teenagers receive as their first diet suggestion from the Dairy Council?

[Drink] whole milk most of the time, skim milk part of the time, if you need to lose weight.

With a completely straight face, the "lower calorie" section of these booklets given to teenagers in our schools calls for ice cream.

But wait, that's not the worst. These publications are ostensibly designed to help youngsters lose weight and become healthy, but the "low calorie" sections suggest balls of cream cheese, softened with cream, and rolled in peanuts! This item derives nearly 90 percent of its calories from fat!

Given recommendations like these, it is hard to avoid the perception that the Dairy Council is primarily concerned with getting youngsters hooked on high-fat dairy products, and that providing sound nutritional education to children is merely a pretext.

Could part of the reason so many of us struggle with unhealthy food habits be that when we were young, vulnerable, and impressionable, we were "educated" by materials such as these?

Playing Games with Children's Minds

The National Dairy Council is not the only commercial interest that intentionally seeks to shape our beliefs about food to its own advantage and uses the public schools to accomplish this purpose.

A few years ago McDonald's ran a sixteen-page color insert in the *Chicago Tribune* that extolled the virtues of what it called a "properly balanced diet." It was an interesting version of "balance," in that it amounted to Big Macs, fries, and shakes. If this publication had been produced only as an advertisement, it would have been sad enough. But the insert was then distributed to the schools throughout the Chicago region, with the help of the Chicago Board of Education. The public relations company that developed the concept, the Aaron Cushman Agency, called it "a combination textbook and advertisement."

McDonald's has also presented youngsters with a colorful booklet proclaiming the nutritional benefits of its menu. Called *Good Food, Good Nutrition, and McDonald's*, the booklet concludes that a meal consisting of a cheeseburger, fries, a chocolate milk shake, and McDonaldland cookies is just what the doctor ordered. After all, they point out, such a meal is only 33.5 percent fat. Never mind that people who eat 33.5 percent fat have heart disease and cancer rates ten times higher than people who are considerably more moderate. And never mind that most of the fat in a McDonald's meal is highly saturated beef and dairy fat, which multiplies the danger many times over again.

By the way, there's a little trick that McDonald's uses in order to get the fat level of their meals to appear even that low. The cheeseburger, you see, is 41 percent fat. The fries are 47 percent fat. How do they get the percentage for the whole meal down from there? By adding sugar. The percentage of fat in the cookies and shake is significantly lower for the simple reason that these concoctions get most of their calories from sugar.

The Oscar Mayer company, a large producer of hot dogs, sausages, and cold cuts, also provides schools with nutrition tips. In one attractive booklet that is supplied free of charge to schools, the claim is made that sausage products are not fatty. To prove the point, the company provides an impressive graphic, comparing the fat content of hot dogs to other food products. Lo and behold, hot dogs do indeed come out looking the least fatty of them all.²

The comparison looks quite convincing if you don't happen to know how high in fat are the foods that have been chosen to be compared to hot dogs—margarine, mayonnaise, salad dressing, and cream cheese.

Similarly, the company has found a way to make their meats appear absolutely fabulous to schoolchildren in cholesterol comparisons. They simply compare them to eggs, which happen to be the highest of all foods in the human diet in cholesterol. In another instance, they proudly announce to schoolchildren that their wieners are filled with nutritional

value. To prove it, they make a comparison to another food item, and sure enough, wieners come out clearly on top. Children might not realize that the product against which hot dogs look so good in comparison probably wasn't chosen to provide the stiffest possible competition. Wieners, it turns out, have less sugar and more nutrients than "a 12-ounce can of Coke."³

Life in the Fat Lane

As our understanding of the relationship between diet and human health has been clarified, the meat and dairy industries have found themselves in an increasingly distressing position. Their products, which tend to be very high in saturated fat and cholesterol and provide no fiber, have been found to be responsible for an almost inconceivable amount of human suffering.

Time and time again, medical research has demonstrated the profound health advantages of a low-fat, high-fiber plant-based diet. And time and time again the meat and dairy industries have remained undaunted in their efforts to control our eating habits.

These industries have not always been able to avoid stumbling over the truth, but they have always managed to pick themselves up and carry on their efforts to hook us on their products as if nothing had happened. And it is not only children who are the target of their efforts.

The Beef Council has the dubious distinction of being the only two-time winner of the Harlan Page Hubbard Memorial Award for the year's most deceptive and misleading advertising.⁴ This award is given annually by a coalition of consumer and public interest groups to expose the most dangerous lies and exaggerations of modern advertising. The "*Beef gives strength*" and similar beef campaigns have earned this distinction for their consistent attempts to deceive the public. The servings of steak shown in the ads are only three ounces, when the average beefsteak serving is six ounces. By concealing the fact that the serving shown in the ad is only half the size most people eat, the industry manages to convey the impression that servings of beef are much lower in fat than they actually are. In announcing the award, Bonnie Liebman of the Center for Science in the Public Interest also pointed out that the technicians who did the laboratory analysis for the Beef Council used scalpels to remove every possible bit of fat from the meat samples.⁵ Thus the fat and calorie levels reported were not only for a serving size much smaller than consumers assumed it to be, but also for a serving which had been

trimmed of fat to a degree no homemaker could possibly match.

The Beef Council found itself embarrassed again in the late 1980s when it hired actor James Garner to be the spokesman for a campaign claiming that beef is "real food for real people." Fortunately, Garner lived close to a "real hospital," because soon after the campaign began to air on national television, Garner's poor health required him to undergo quintuple bypass heart surgery.

In 1991, Frank Perdue, the East Coast chicken producer, began running a series of radio, television, and newspaper ads proudly announcing that his chickens would now carry nutrition labels to tell consumers "things like how low in saturated fat a Perdue chicken is." The catch is that while the USDA says a typical serving of chicken is about five ounces, Perdue lists the fat in one ounce of roasted chicken.⁶

Meanwhile, the California Milk Producers got into the act by presenting a series of ads in which hired celebrities proclaimed that "everybody needs milk." The Federal Trade Commission, however, didn't agree. It took legal steps toward prosecuting the milk producers and their advertising agency, calling the advertising "false, misleading, and deceptive."⁷

To this day, the meat and dairy industries continue to seek to convince us that their products are healthy. Steadfast in their purpose, they do not seem to be fazed by trifles like the truth, our health, or the health of our children.

Playing Politics with Our Food

The last few decades of scientific inquiry into the relationship between diet and disease have seen great advances in understanding. We now know, beyond any reasonable doubt, that diets high in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol promote heart disease and cancer. We now know how to prevent many of the diseases that plague our society.

Yet the eating habits of most Americans have not adjusted to reflect this new understanding. Part of the reason is that our attitudes and feelings about various foods have been so heavily influenced by commercial interests. Another part of the reason is that many governmental agencies, under the sway of the "fat lobby," still propagate beliefs that have been disproven.

For more than thirty-five years schoolchildren throughout the United States were taught according to the precepts of the "basic four food groups." Generations of Americans have had the belief drummed into

them that a balanced diet consists of having, every day, at least two servings from the meat group and at least two servings from the dairy group.

As a result, the belief in the necessity of meat and dairy products for our health has grown in our society to occupy the status of given truth.

Today the ideas behind the basic four food groups still provide the foundation of most diet planning in schools, in hospitals, in the military, in prisons, in government institutions, in public service cafeterias, and in households across the country. Unfortunately, these ideas have remarkably little to do with current information on creating good health in human beings.

Marion Nestle, who was managing editor of the Surgeon General's landmark report on Nutrition and Health in 1988, and now chairs New York University's Department of Nutrition, is not overly impressed with the food groups created by the USDA. She says:

The standard four food groups are based on American agricultural lobbies. Why do we have a milk group? Because we have a National Dairy Council. Why do we have a meat group? Because we have an extremely powerful meat lobby.

Had the creation of a plan for a balanced and health supporting diet been placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Human Services, or the Surgeon General, we would have seen very different results. But the food groups were in fact developed by the Department of Agriculture, and remain to this day under its auspices. This is a tragedy, because the Department of Agriculture is not primarily concerned with human health. Its principal mission, for which it was originally created, and for which it continues to be funded, is to promote the sale of agricultural products. This has led to something very different from guiding the eating habits of the country in a healthy direction. It has meant finding and maintaining markets for the meat and dairy industries.

Linda Schwartzstein, Associate Professor of Law at George Mason University, writes:

Congress has specifically given the USDA the mission of increasing demand for beef, pork, eggs, and dairy products. Under Congress' direction, the USDA collects money from all of the producers in these

industries, which it turns over to the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, the National Pork Board, the Egg Board, and the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board. These boards are appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture from members of the industry. The boards operate under the auspices of the USDA as government-sponsored trade associations. Their purpose is to protect the interests of their respective industries and to find effective means, such as advertisements, to increase the market for their products. As an example, in 1990 the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board spent \$20.8 million to promote cheese, \$15.8 million to promote fluid milk, \$13.9 million to promote butter, \$5.8 million to promote dairy calcium to female professionals, and \$4.8 million to promote ice cream. It also arranged a coupon program in conjunction with the American Dairy Association, the International Ice Cream Association, and a cookie manufacturer to promote cookies and ice cream. Overall, \$63.7 million was spent on advertising by this one promotion and research board alone. In contrast, the Food and Nutrition Service spent \$8.7 million on its human nutrition information service. It does not take much skepticism to ask whether the agency that promotes cookies and ice cream can at the same time be given the responsibility for providing nutrition education and research to the American people.

I have struggled against accepting the evidence that the USDA serves the meat and dairy industries more than it does public health. I have not wanted to believe this to be so, because I have wanted to believe that governmental agencies would at least be trying to look after the public interest. But the facts in this case, I am sorry to say, speak otherwise.

Giving Our Children Heart Disease and Calling It Nutrition

Perhaps the most blatant example of the Department of Agriculture's subservience to the meat and dairy industries at the expense of public health is the school lunch program. Each year, the USDA buys three to four billion dollars' worth of surplus foods, which it donates to the nation's schools. These donated items make up 20 to 30 percent of the food served in school lunches. This may sound as if the USDA were helping

our children to eat well, but look again. The school lunch programs are being used by the Department of Agriculture to guarantee a market for the meat and dairy industries. By 1991, the evidence implicating high-fat, high-cholesterol animal products in the creation of heart disease, cancer, adult-onset diabetes, and obesity had become as massive and incontrovertible as the evidence linking smoking to lung cancer. Yet in 1991, 90 percent of the USDA surplus foods consisted of eggs, high-fat cheeses, butter, ground pork, ground beef, and whole milk.⁸ If the USDA had intentionally gone out to obtain foods that would destroy the health of our children, they could hardly have done better. Furthermore, while the USDA donates hundreds of millions of dollars worth of high-fat cheeses, schools must pay for low-fat cheese.⁹

The results are catastrophic for the health of our children. A 1990 study in the *Journal of School Health* found that the average school lunch gets 39 percent of its calories from fat.¹⁰ This, while the Surgeon General was saying that anything over 30 percent is dangerous, and health experts who were not as bound by political considerations were urgently calling for a reduction to 20 percent or less.

As a result of the USDA's programs, the average school lunch contains 1244 milligrams of sodium. Three meals a day at that rate would assault these young human bodies with 3732 milligrams of sodium—while the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences recommends a daily sodium intake of 600 to 1800 milligrams for children aged seven to ten.

No wonder as many as one in eight school-age children in the United States have blood pressure levels that are unhealthfully high.¹¹ No wonder our children have the most clogged arteries of any children in the world, and their rate of atherosclerosis is increasing. No wonder the American Heart Association reports that in a recent seventeen-year period obesity in children aged six to eleven jumped a startling 54 percent, while obesity in children aged twelve to seventeen leaped 39 percent.¹²

School lunches are a nutritional nightmare. Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture is providing three to four billion dollars a year worth of guaranteed business to the meat and dairy industries.

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On April 15, 1991, the USDA announced that the basic four food group charts were at long last going to be modified. The change was not a

major one: The four food groups themselves were not going to be significantly altered, nor were the number of servings recommended from each group.

What *was* going to be changed was the way the four food groups were depicted. The new version was to be a pyramid instead of a wheel, with the meat and dairy groups set at the narrow top of the pyramid. The new presentation would acknowledge both that animal products are higher on the food chain and that these foods ought to occupy a less important place in the human diet than fruits, vegetables, and grains.

While recognizing that this change amounted only to a small step, the nation's health community applauded the change, for it was at least in the right direction.

The meat and dairy industries, however, did not join in the applause. Instead, they pounced on the recently appointed Secretary of Agriculture, Edward Madigan, a former Congressman from the Illinois farm belt. After board members of the National Cattlemen's Association met with Madigan, their executive vice president, J. Burton Eller, Jr., was asked what had transpired. His reply left little doubt as to the purpose of the meeting: "*We complained loudly!*"¹³

Loudly enough, evidently. Almost immediately, Agriculture Secretary Madigan announced he was indefinitely delaying the new chart. He said it needed more study. He said it might be hard for some groups of youngsters to understand. He didn't mention that in fact the pyramid had already undergone extensive consumer tests and had been reviewed for the past two years by some thirty government and university experts.

In fact, the new food group model had already passed three years' worth of focus group tests and had been approved by a joint committee from the Departments of Agriculture and of Health and Human Services.¹⁴

The meat and dairy industries pleaded innocent. Alisa Harrison, director of information for the National Cattlemen's Association, said that the group had simply offered its comments to Madigan, "*as any U.S. citizen is encouraged to do.*"¹⁵

A year later, after spending nearly \$1 million of taxpayers' money to prove what earlier research had already shown, the USDA adopted the Food Guide Pyramid.

The sadness is that this still represents only a small step forward. Our children would still be taught as truth erroneous beliefs, beliefs that have been so relentlessly repeated that they continue to influence even those of us who know them to be awry. They will still be told to eat two

to three servings from the meat group and two to three servings from the milk group every day.

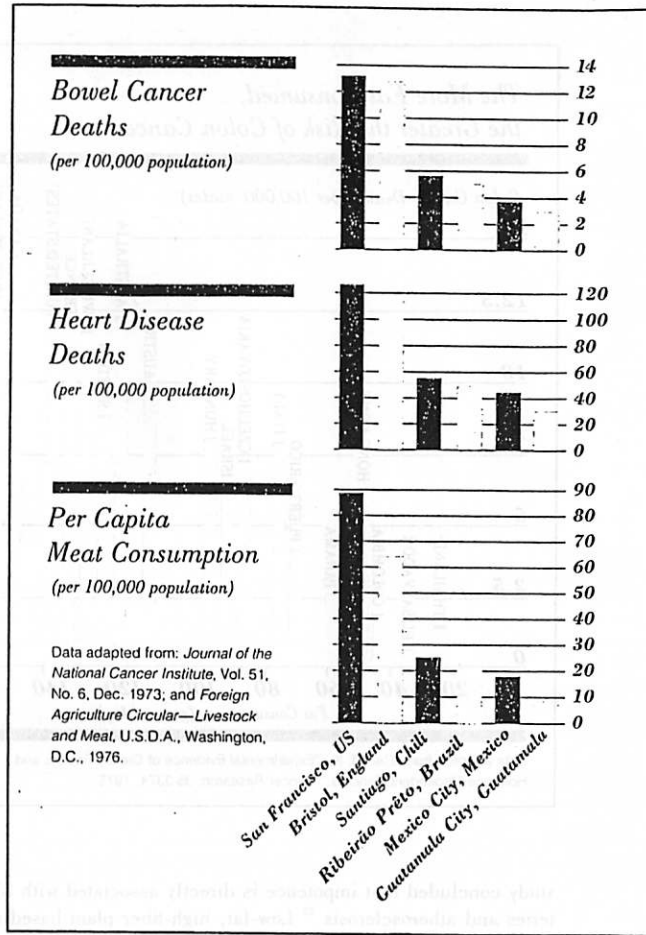
A Different Picture

For the past forty years, nutritionists and cardiologists have increasingly urged Americans to adopt a healthier, more plant-based diet in order to avoid heart attacks, strokes, cancers, diabetes, and many of the other plagues of our time.¹⁶ Literally thousands of articles published in the last few decades in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *British Medical Journal*, *Lancet*, and other publications of similar stature have demonstrated that the less animal fat you take into your body, the healthier you will be. During the last few decades, the list of organizations telling us that cutting back the amount of fat, meat, and other animal products in our diets will make us a healthier people has grown to include almost every organization in the world concerned with human health. The U.S. Surgeon General, the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, the National Research Council, the National Cancer Institute, the American Heart Association, the National Academy of Sciences' Food and Nutrition Board, the World Health Organization, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Program, and hundreds of other similar organizations worldwide are all telling us the same thing: If you want to live a healthy life, eat more vegetables, eat more fruits, and eat more whole grains. Cut down on fat, especially saturated fat, and cut down on cholesterol.

In a nutshell, eat more plant foods and cut down on animal products.

The Evidence Mounts

Every week another report comes out implicating animal fat as a cause of human disease. The December 1990 edition of the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported the results of the largest study of diet and colon cancer ever conducted. After analyzing data from the health and diet histories of over eighty-eight thousand women, the report concluded that the more red meat and animal fat people eat, the more likely they are to develop cancer of the colon. The meat industry had already been put on the defensive, with scores of public health groups in effect telling



Americans to eat less meat. But now Dr. Walter Willet, the researcher at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston who directed the study, concluded:

If you step back and look at the data, the optimum amount of red meat you eat should be zero.¹⁷

Reeling, the meat industry has looked to the conservative American Dietetic Association to support the old-guard philosophy and call for a reinstatement of meat's role as a healthy food. But the ADA was not of much help. Instead, the ADA came out with a position paper saying that people who do not consume meat are at lower risk not only for colon cancer, but also for heart disease, obesity, adult-onset diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, kidney stones, gallstones, diverticulosis, breast cancer, and lung cancer.¹⁸

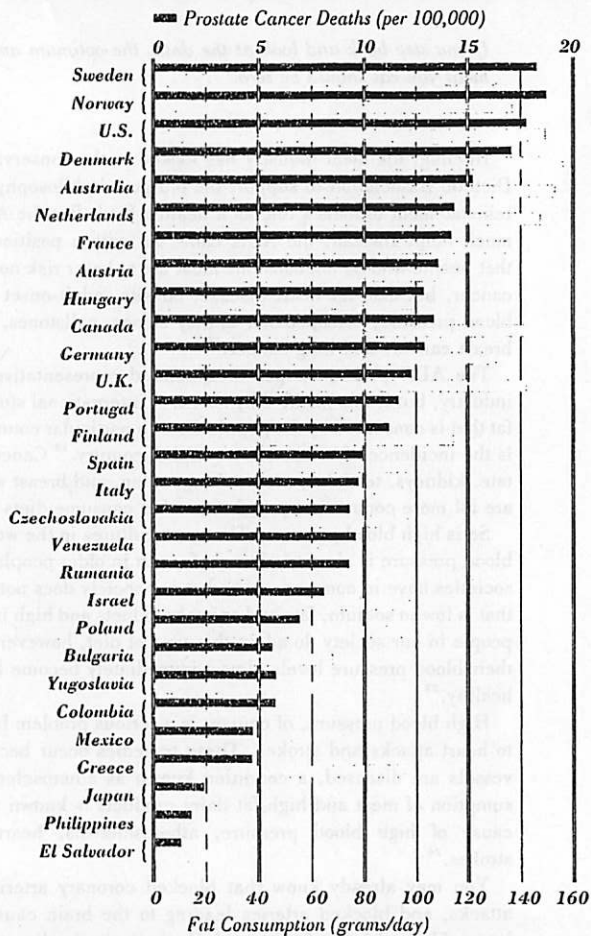
The ADA position paper disappointed representatives of the meat industry, but it was justified by scores of international studies. The more fat that is consumed by the population of a particular country, the greater is the incidence of breast cancer in that country.¹⁹ Cancers of the prostate, kidneys, testicles, uterus, lung, colon, and breast and lymphomas are all more common in populations that consume diets high in fat.²⁰

So is high blood pressure. There are cultures in the world where high blood pressure is almost unheard of, even in older people.²¹ What these societies have in common, and what our society does not have, is a diet that is low in sodium, fats and animal products and high in fiber.²² When people in our society do adopt this type of diet, however, they find that their blood pressure levels almost immediately become lower and more healthy.²³

High blood pressure, of course, is a serious problem because it leads to heart attacks and strokes. These tragedies occur because the blood vessels are diseased, a condition known as atherosclerosis. The consumption of meat and high-fat dairy products is known to be a leading cause of high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, heart attacks, and strokes.²⁴

You may already know that blocked coronary arteries cause heart attacks, and blocked arteries leading to the brain cause strokes. But less publicized is the fact that blocked arteries leading to other parts of the body cause other problems, including lack of sexual response. In July 1985, *Lancet* published a major study of impotence in men. The

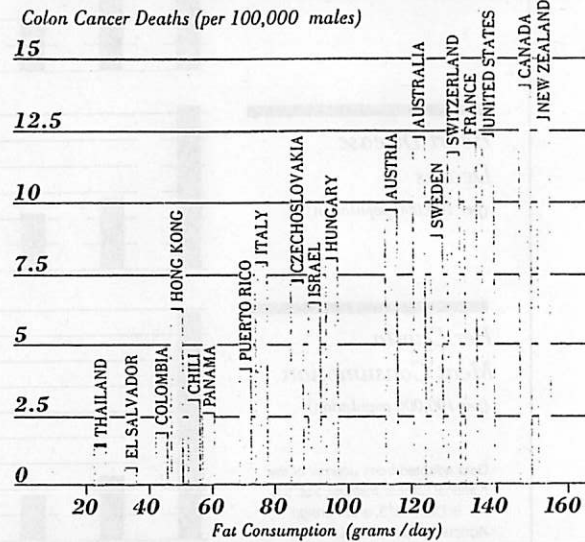
The More Fat Consumed, the Greater the Risk of Prostate Cancer Deaths



Data derived from: Reddy, B.S., et al. "Nutrition and Its Relationship to Cancer," *Advances in Cancer Research*.

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The More Fat Consumed, the Greater the Risk of Colon Cancer

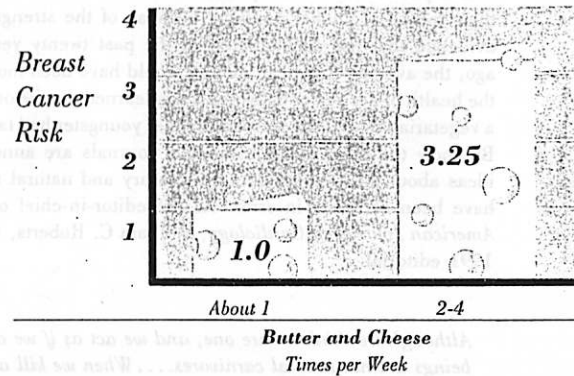


Data adapted from: Carroll, K., "Experimental Evidence of Dietary Factors and Hormone-Dependent Cancers," *Cancer Research*, 35:3374, 1975.

study concluded that impotence is directly associated with blocked arteries and atherosclerosis.²⁵ Low-fat, high-fiber plant-based diets have been shown to dramatically decrease arteriosclerotic deposits, freeing the circulation of blood throughout the cardiovascular system and allowing a full supply of blood to reach all the body's organs.²⁶

Numerous studies have shown that diabetics also benefit, often dramatically, from low-fat, high-fiber plant-based diets.²⁷ So effective are these kinds of diets at bringing the blood sugar levels of most diabetics into balance that as many as 75 percent of adult-onset diabetics who require insulin can stop all medication soon after adopting them.²⁸ Al-

A Woman's Risk of Breast Cancer Rises Dramatically with Her Intake of Cheese and Butter



Data derived from Paper presented by Takeshi Hirayama at the Conference on Breast Cancer and Diet, U.S.-Japan Cooperative Cancer Research Program, Fred Hutchison Cancer Center, Seattle, Wa., March 14-15, 1977.

most 100 percent of those requiring diabetic pills can be freed of all daily medication.²⁹

In the last decade, the evidence that a high-fiber, low-fat plant-based diet is of paramount importance in the prevention and treatment of a broad spectrum of diseases has become incontrovertible. The *British Medical Journal* reported that the fewer animal products people eat, the lower their incidence of gallstones.³⁰ The *British Journal of Urology* reported a direct correlation between the amount of animal protein people consume and their likelihood of forming kidney stones.³¹ The *Journal of Asthma* reported that over 90 percent of asthmatics who followed a

diet without any meats or dairy products could reduce or entirely discontinue their medications.³² *Lancet* reported that animal protein and animal fat aggravated arthritis symptoms, while 100 percent of the patients on a strict vegetarian diet noticed significant improvements.³³

What Every Bite of Meat Costs

The world's longest ongoing investigation into heart disease and diet, the Framingham Heart Study, was begun in 1949. This enormous endeavor has proceeded under the able direction of William Castelli, M.D.

After many years of this work, Dr. Castelli was asked if he could say which food choices are the best. His response was to the point:

*Vegetarians have the best diet. They have the lowest rates of coronary disease of any group in the country. . . . Some people scoff at vegetarians, but they have a fraction of our heart attack rate and they have only 40 percent of our cancer rate. They outlive us. On the average they outlive other men by about six years now.*³⁴

The six-year figure Castelli gives for the longer life expectancy for people who avoid meat is conservative compared to the numbers arrived at by other reputable researchers.³⁵

It is interesting to speculate how much the eating of meat might shorten our life span. If we accept the conservative figure of six years for the length of time that the average vegetarian outlives the average meat eater, it turns out that for every minute people eat meat, they lose more than twelve minutes of their life spans.³⁶ Smokers, by way of comparison, lose approximately eight minutes off their life spans for each minute they smoke.

To me, length of life is actually a minor part of the story—the real issue is quality of life. For a person who is not burdened by clogged and hardened arteries, whose kidneys and skeleton are not under siege from excess protein, and whose cells are not driven to cancerous multiplication by too much fat, the experience of life is thoroughly different from the experience of someone whose diet is based on animal products. The real advantage is not merely a matter of life extension numbers, but can be found in a body that remains strong and supple and a mind that remains clear and flexible as the years go by. A valid test to a good

eating plan is the one that not only lengthens our lives, but allows us the great blessing of good health throughout our years.

The Largest Study in History

In 1990, the global scientific community eagerly awaited the results of the largest and most important diet and health study ever undertaken.³⁷

Conducted by an international team of scientists, the China-Oxford-Cornell Project on Nutrition, Health, and the Environment (also known as the China Health Project) was begun in 1983. When the first reports from the study were finally released, health organizations worldwide applauded the research enthusiastically, and over fifty papers on the study were published in scientific journals.

Representatives of the meat industry, however, did not find many reasons to celebrate. In fact, they were downright appalled.

The reason was that the mammoth study indicated that:

... whether industrialized societies ... can cure themselves of their meat addictions may ultimately be a greater factor in world health than all the doctors, health insurance policies, and drugs put together.³⁸

The dairy industry also had reason to flinch, for the study confirmed not only that consumption of dairy products is completely unnecessary to prevent osteoporosis, but also that because dairy products are high in fat and protein, they contribute to cancer, heart disease, obesity, and many other diseases.³⁹

The meat and dairy industries surely were not going to take a blow like this lying down. The trouble was, the study was being universally heralded. The best they could muster was to complain that the director of the study was a vegetarian, hoping this would cast doubt upon the study's findings.

The director of the study, T. Colin Campbell, actually has preeminent scientific stature. Formerly the senior science advisor to the American Institute for Cancer Research, he is currently Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University. As to the charge that his dietary preferences affect his scientific conclusions, Campbell replied:

I was raised on a dairy farm and ate plenty of meat and eggs until about twenty years ago. I started doing nutritional research, and a decade or so after that my family made some major dietary changes. ... I'm just paying attention to what the data are telling me: The scientific evidence came first.⁴⁰

Campbell is one of many researchers who have dramatically reduced their intake of animal products because of the strength of the dietary evidence that has accumulated in the past twenty years. Not so long ago, the average American mother would have been more concerned for the health of her son or daughter if she learned that he or she had become a vegetarian than if she learned that her youngster had taken up smoking. But now the most credible medical journals are announcing that old ideas about meat eating being necessary and natural to human beings have been seriously in error. As the editor-in-chief of the prestigious *American Journal of Cardiology*, William C. Roberts, M.D., put it in a 1991 editorial:

Although we think we are one, and we act as if we are one, human beings are not natural carnivores. ... When we kill animals to eat them, they end up killing us because their flesh ... was never intended for human beings, who are naturally herbivores.

Reversing Heart Disease

While the China Health Project was a major blow to the meat and dairy industries' claim to be producing healthy products, it is not the only recent study that has given these reeling industries sleepless nights. The July 20, 1990 edition of the British medical journal *Lancet* reported a study that was deemed so important that *U.S. News and World Report* made it a cover story, while both *Time* and *Newsweek* featured it on their covers and called it "revolutionary."

The response of the meat and dairy industries, however, was markedly less enthusiastic. They called it "irrelevant."

Headed by Dr. Dean Ornish of the University of California at San Francisco School of Medicine, the study involved forty-eight people suffering from serious heart disease.⁴¹ Twenty of the patients followed the American Heart Association dietary recommendations, which in-

cluded reducing their fat intake to 30 percent of their calories and reducing their cholesterol intake to 300 milligrams daily. The program included moderate exercise and no smoking. But the twenty-eight other patients adopted a holistic approach and went much further. They reduced fat consumption to 10 percent and their daily cholesterol intake virtually to nil. They adopted a strict vegetarian diet, controlled stress through stretching and relaxation techniques, exercised, cut out all tobacco and caffeine, and met regularly for emotional support.

At the beginning of the study, both groups were tested, using angiography (dye-enhanced X rays of the interior of the arteries) and positron emission tomography (PET) scans. After a year on the program, both groups were tested again, and the results could hardly have been more dramatic. Most of the members of the group following the Heart Association recommendations, considered the standard medical treatment, were worse off than when they started. Their arterial blockages had worsened, and they were at increased risk for heart attacks. This was not surprising to the researchers, as the conventional treatment programs are not expected to cure or even arrest heart disease, only to slow down its progress.

What was astounding were the results for the group on the strict vegetarian diet. For 82 percent of these patients, not only did arterial clogging not get worse—it actually reversed!

For every indicator of health outcome, the contrast between the two groups was revealing. Incidences of chest pain (angina) **increased by 165 percent** in the group following the standard medical program. But in the vegetarian group, angina was **reduced by a phenomenal 91 percent**.

The consequences for the lives of these patients were impressive. When Werner Hebenstreit, seventy-five, began the program he could hardly walk without chest pain. "Now I can hike for six hours in the Grand Tetons at 8000 feet," he announced. Another patient, Don Vaupel, fifty, had been obese. He lost 82 pounds. At age fifty-three, Dwayne Butler drank too much and weighed 280 pounds. He had a history of getting into fistfights and his marriage was falling apart. He was ripe for a heart attack, with coronary artery blockages reaching 90 percent. A year on the program that included a strict vegetarian diet brought his blood cholesterol down from 340 to 149, he lost 85 pounds, his blood pressure dropped from 150/90 to 124/72, and his arterial blockages were significantly reversed; he is now proudly walking six miles a day. To top things off, he and his wife fell in love again.

When I asked Dr. Ornish whether the diet and program that got such

outstanding results for his patients would be of value to people who were not as sick as those he had included in the study, he replied:

It's easier to prevent illness than to reverse it. The real point is that these simple changes increase the joy of living. You don't have to be sick to notice the improvements when you change your diet and lifestyle. People lose weight, they feel lighter, happier, freer, more full of joy. These simple changes can be very powerful. The implications of all this go way beyond treating and preventing heart disease.⁴²

Courage

I appreciate people who are willing to question the eating habits that our culture takes for granted. I respect people who have the courage to learn new ways of cooking and eating that contribute to their health and the health of our world.

Today, the Surgeon General and many established health organizations recommend reducing the fat component of your diet to 30 percent, and reducing your daily cholesterol intake to about 300 milligrams (from an average of about 500 milligrams).

Many scientists have expressed puzzlement that these recommendations are so conservative, when the medical literature clearly indicates that the optimum fat and cholesterol intake levels are much lower than those called for in the official guidelines. These recommendations will lower your risk of a heart attack from 50 percent to 35 percent, which is good. But why stop there when you can lower your risk to virtually nothing? Why settle for a diet that isn't as bad as what passes for "normal" in our society, but that still creates disease and suffering?

The China Health Project and Dr. Ornish's program are only a few in the vast body of studies reporting a consistent finding: Cancer, diabetes, stroke, hypertension, and heart disease risks are much lower with fat levels down closer to 10 or 15 percent, and with cholesterol either eliminated from the diet or drastically reduced.

T. Colin Campbell was involved in the original setting of the official guidelines. He was asked why, in view of the massive evidence indicating they are too conservative, they had not been set lower. He replied that it had been:

... a practical matter. If we had given a figure lower than 30 percent, the public just wouldn't have taken us seriously. ... If you reduce fat to 20 percent, basically you have to drop animal foods altogether. Even if you use low-fat milk or lean meats, you reduce fat to only about 30 percent. ... We would essentially have to tell people they should convert to vegetarianism.

In other words, an essentially vegetarian diet is clearly recognized to be healthier than one following the official guidelines. There is no real dispute about that. The only reason official recommendations fall short of this is the belief that the average American would not be willing to change that much.

But what kind of physician is it who knows what a patient must do to become fully well, yet does not give the patient this information because the doctor makes a judgement that the patient would not follow the advice? Shouldn't the patient be given the information, and the right to decide for himself or herself?

In October 1991, Dr. Campbell had the opportunity to address an esteemed collection of physicians and researchers at the First National Conference on the Elimination of Coronary Artery Disease, jointly sponsored by the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and the Caldwell B. Esselstyn Foundation. The list of attendees read like a who's who in cardiology, internal medicine, pediatrics, epidemiology, preventive medicine, gerontology, and medical education. During the final hours of the conference, Dr. Campbell received a heartfelt ovation when he eloquently stated that the time has come for the profession to begin to recommend the healthiest dietary guidelines, rather than a political compromise:

Why must we be reticent about recommending a diet which we know is safe and healthy? We, as scientists, can no longer take the attitude that the public cannot benefit from information they are not ready for. We must have the integrity to tell them the truth and let them decide what to do with it. We cannot force them to follow the guidelines we recommend, but we can give them these guidelines and let them decide. ... We must tell them that a diet of roots, stems, seeds, flowers, fruits, and leaves is the healthiest diet, and the only diet we can promote, endorse, and recommend.⁴³

I applaud Dr. Campbell for his courage. I don't want the average American's resistance to change to determine the level of health my diet provides me. I want to follow guidelines that lead to optimum health, not ones that reflect what most people are willing to follow. Many people seem to think they are healthy if they can walk to their car and work the remote control for their television. I want to be far healthier and more vital than that. I want to be as full of life and joy and energy as possible.

When we realize how askew are the eating habits of our culture, we are offered an opportunity to take a stand for ourselves and our children. It took courage for Dr. Campbell to call for a new level of integrity in medicine. It takes courage for each of us to make choices that are truly our own, to accept the challenge of being the unique human beings that we are.

I have stopped apologizing to others when my food preferences seem inconvenient to them. What I have realized is that it is vastly more than an inconvenience that millions of people are dying needlessly from diseases caused by meat and dairy consumption, and that millions of other people are going hungry while grain is fed to livestock to produce the very substances causing so much illness and suffering.

A Ray of Hope

There are many hopeful signs that a new and far healthier diet is beginning to emerge. In April 1991, virtually every major newspaper and newsmagazine in the country reported a major press conference held in Washington, D.C., by a remarkable collection of doctors and nutritionists. The purpose of the press conference? To announce the establishment of an entirely new four food groups plan.

Sponsored by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), the new four food group system was designed to incorporate the enormous advances in understanding about diet and health that have been gained in recent years.

The meat industry immediately called its own press conference and tried to dismiss PCRM as being without scientific standing. But as Neal Barnard, M.D., the president of PCRM, officially unveiled the new four food groups, at his side were some of the physicians and scientists who have played leading roles in the advance of medical understanding that has taken place in these last few decades.

One of these men was Denis Burkitt, M.D., a man who has won world

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acclaim for two astonishing feats of medical detection. The first uncovered the causes and pioneered the cure for a form of cancer in children, now known as Burkitt's lymphoma. The second established the link between many of the killer diseases of the Western world, including cancer, and the lack of fiber in our diet.⁴⁴ Burkitt has earned and received as many accolades, honors, and recognition from the scientific community as any other physician alive today. Looking at the role our diets can play in preventing suffering and disease, he has called for sanity:

If people are falling over the edge of a cliff and sustaining injuries, the problem could be dealt with by stationing ambulances at the bottom, or erecting a fence at the top. Unfortunately, we put far too much effort into the positioning of ambulances and far too little into the simple approach of erecting fences.⁴⁵

Also standing with Dr. Barnard were T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D., and Oliver Alabaster, M.D., Director of the Institute for Disease Prevention at The George Washington University.

Barnard spoke not only for the informed scientific community, but also for the hopes and dreams of every mother that her children should be given a healthy body and a healthy life:

Research is now clear and sufficient that the basic dietary guidelines taught to us as schoolchildren are wrong. Based on the knowledge we have today, we cannot go on recommending a diet based on the old four food groups. . . . Evidence has shown that most people who eat according to the old four food groups die earlier and have a greater risk of serious illness than many of those who eat differently.⁴⁶

The new four food groups proposed by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine consist of:

1. Whole grains (5 or more servings a day);
2. Legumes (2 to 3 servings a day);
3. Vegetables (3 or more servings a day); and
4. Fruits (3 or more servings a day).

Who Decides What You Eat?

The most striking thing about the new four food groups is that meats and dairy products, which constituted two of the old basic four, have lost their status. These products are not forbidden by the new guidelines, but they are considered merely optional, because medical studies clearly show they are not needed for human health, and in fact often contribute to disease. The new four groups reflect the massive amount of research telling us that the higher the consumption of meat and dairy products in any nation, the more its people suffer from illness. People whose dietary patterns are based upon grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits inevitably have markedly better health. People basing their diets on these new four food groups are likely to be leaner, fitter, and healthier by every statistical measure than the followers of the old four food groups.

The proponents of the new grouping have made it clear they are not proposing to ban meats and dairy products from the menus and tables of America. Their call is not to eliminate animal products, but to cut back and shift them to a more secondary role. Their proposal is to bring our eating guidelines up to date. As Barnard said:

We're not saying that you can never have another scoop of Häagen-Dazs. But the basis of a healthful diet is not meat, fish, or cheese.

Your Own Department of Nutrition

The new four food groups are not fanatical or rigid. But neither are they a political construct, enslaved by meat and dairy industry pressures. Instead, they are what generations of innocent schoolchildren have all along trusted the basic four to be: a guide to healthy eating.

Michael Klaper, M.D., is a physician who has devoted his life to helping people become well through eating properly. He is one of many medical doctors who has seen in his own practice the staggering price the old basic four food groups have inflicted upon America in human suffering, health care costs, and lost productivity. If the nutrition planners in 1956 (when the old four food groups were just formulated) had had a crystal ball, he says, and could have gazed upon the eating habits that developed from the old basic four food groups—and if they could have peered into modern hospitals and seen the overflowing coronary care units, cancer wards, and surgical suites where diseased colons are

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removed and clogged arteries are bypassed—surely they would have taken us in a different direction.

But they did not have a crystal ball in 1956. And so we have witnessed the unfolding of an extraordinarily sad saga—great numbers of people in the richest nation in the history of the Earth eating themselves into diseases that could easily have been prevented through wiser food choices.

Dr. Klaper's remarks are typical of many in the health sciences who grasp the magnitude of what is at stake:

I am convinced that a proper diet is essential for maintaining or regaining one's physical well-being. . . . Every person is in charge of their own "Department of Nutrition," and, given the right guidelines, can make the best choices for themselves. One can benefit from the experience of the "Great American Dietary Catastrophe," and avoid the mistakes made by others. Even if you have been following a "junk food diet" for many years, it is never too late to begin to halt, or actually reverse, body damage that has been inflicted through unbalanced nutrition.⁴⁷

When asked what food choices he felt would be most healthful, he answered simply:

There is strong medical evidence that complete freedom from eating animal flesh or cow's milk products is a gateway to optimal nutritional health.⁴⁸

Living Health

There is a sadness that is only rarely spoken of in our culture. Programmed to eat improperly, and to live at a distance from the real needs of our physical selves, many of us have become gradually more distant from our natural state of health. We don't talk much about how it feels to be alienated from our bodies. We become resigned, and take it for granted that we will deteriorate physically as the years go by. Our bodies become something we are ashamed of, something we don't want to have

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attention drawn to, something we have to cart around. Our bodies cease to be a source of feeling, power, and pleasure.

The wonder is that in front of us now there lies the possibility of a new way of eating and a new way of living. We have the chance to free ourselves from the programming that has directed us toward disaster and to discover instead the pleasure of genuine natural health. We have the opportunity to learn how deeply satisfying it can be to live and function in a body that responds cleanly and clearly to life's challenges. We have the chance to see through the forces that have controlled our food choices for commercial gain and to discover how delightful it can be to have a body that is lean, fit, and responsive.

The joy is that we can take back our bodies, reclaim our health, and restore ourselves to balance. We can take power over what and how we eat. We can rejuvenate and recharge ourselves, bringing healing to the wounds we carry inside us, and bringing to fuller life the wonderful person that each of us can be.

I congratulate you for every move you make to take responsibility for your own health and well-being. I applaud you for being one of the special people who is willing to take a stand for yourself.