

Food Matters

The so-called “diseases of affluence” have been running rampant in the U.S. Obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease have become worldwide health issues and all of these diseases are rooted in poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle.¹ Cardiovascular disease, obesity, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide.² These illnesses are often found concurrently with cancer, dental diseases and osteoporosis. The World Health Organization met in Geneva in 2003 to bring attention to the link between malnutrition and chronic disease. They reported that in 2001, these chronic diseases accounted for 46% of all diseases worldwide.³ These illnesses are all preventable but prevalence is increasing every year. The film documentary *Food Matters* presents case studies of these diseases and how they were treated successfully with nutritional therapy as well as interviews with people from various disciplines to help elucidate the topic from different perspectives.⁴

The growing popularity of holistic medicine is changing how people view disease and what they can do about it. The film discusses the ancient traditional concept of food as the best medicine. The first thing they advocate is eating organic local food. The holistic dentist and nutritionist Dr. Victor Zeines says in the typical American supermarket, produce is on average 5 days old because it travels and that by the time it arrives, it has probably lost about 40% of its nutritional value. The nutritional value of the food we eat is also diminished by chemicals such as herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides. These toxins not only ruin the food, but the soil as well. Widespread use of GMOs are also a problem because it’s unclear as to whether or not they

¹ Jönsson, Olsson, Ahrén, Bøgg-Hansen, Dole & Lindeberg, 2005

² Ezzati M, Vander Hoorn S, Lawes CMM, Leach R, James WPT, et al., 2005

³ Yach, Puska, Nishida & Porter, 2003

⁴ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

contain the same amount of nutrients as natural and organic food. The increasing amount of processing also drains nutrients from food.

Charlotte Gerson, of the Gerson foundation, asserts that pesticides are not necessary and that the reason plants are vulnerable to disease is because of malnutrition. Like humans who get sick from a weakened immune system, plants do as well. As living things, they have natural defenses and the soil is the source of their nutrition so overuse of soil depletes it. She says soil naturally has about 52 minerals but commercial fertilizers that farmers use mostly only contain nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. There are at least 16 essential nutrients that plants need for growth in soil: zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), manganese (Mn), calcium (Ca), molybdenum (Mo), nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), magnesium (Mg), sulfur (S), iron (Fe), boron (B), and chlorine (Cl).⁵

Phillip Day, investigative journalist and author, claims that cooking food decreases the nutritional content. He says that there are enzymes in raw foods which are denatured and rendered useless when food is cooked. These enzymes, he claims, aid in digestion and the absorption of nutrients from the food. He then goes on to say that this causes the body to react to cooked food as though it is a toxin, a sort of allergic reaction.⁶ Since many of these illnesses, such as cancer and diabetes, are instances of the body turning against itself, it would make sense that overstimulation of the immune system would promote such disorders. Processing foods has been proven to affect the nutrient retention and value of the foods. Processing methods include freezing, drying, cooking, reheating, grilling and frying. The amount and kind of processing

⁵ Bierman & Rosen, 2005

⁶ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

affects the amount and kind of nutrients leached from the food.⁷ Studies have been done to investigate the correlation between cancer and raw vs. cooked foods. More studies have found that raw food consumption is inversely related to cancer occurrence than with cooked foods but these diets were all notably high in vegetables.⁸

David Wolfe expounds upon the benefits of raw foods for holistic general health and as a therapeutically useful diet to reverse cardiovascular disease and the related illnesses. He discusses superfoods, which are naturally filled with vitamins, minerals and enzymes reported to help the body function properly. The superfoods mentioned are wheat grass, noni, spirulina, echinacea, goji, raw honey, bee pollen, coconut, raw cacao, ginger, maca powder, turmeric, acai, kelp, kombu, dulse, nori, nettle, chorella, barley grass, propolis, blue green algae, golden seal, and wakame. He says spirulina, a blue-green algae, is the highest protein content food in the world. To preserve the nutrient content of foods, he recommends blending these superfoods into a drink. Spirulina put in water requires very little energy to be absorbed into the system by the intestines but meat requires a lot of energy to break down and digest so spirulina is a more efficient source of protein. Raw cacao has one of the highest mineral contents of all foods in the world including magnesium, chromium, iron, manganese, zinc, copper, and vitamin C. Processed chocolate has no vitamin C because heat destroys vitamin C.⁹

According to the documentary, less than 6% of physicians graduating from a U.S. medical school have training in nutrition and 26% of patients are more malnourished when they leave a hospital than when they get in and 80-90% of patients are in the hospital due to diseases

⁷ "USDA table of," 2007

⁸ Link, Lilli B. & Potter, John D., 2004

⁹ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

related to malnutrition. There is scientific data supporting the idea that vitamin E is useful for reducing seizures in teens with epilepsy, helping with heart disease, and for healing burns.

Vitamin C is a known anti-toxin, anti-histamine, anti-viral, helps blood sugar regulation, and mood elevation. They also say that in 25% of all cases of cardiovascular disease, death is the first symptom. They have also found evidence that even people with advanced cardiovascular disease can arrest or reverse it with a strict diet and intensive stress reducing therapy.¹⁰

Vitamin B3, niacin, has been shown to help alleviate depression in chronic alcoholics because alcoholism causes niacin deficiency. The founder of Alcoholics Anonymous used vitamin therapy with high doses and niacin but after the organization was taken over and converted into a public institution, vitamin therapy was no longer used. There are antidepressant drugs that actually increase the risk of self-harm and suicide but they are still recommended while water-soluble niacin is not. The only known negative side-effect of high doses of niacin is niacin flush, which is a burning or tingling in the skin and a red or flushed appearance. Very high doses can cause liver damage and stomach ulcers but so can most prescription drugs. The only difference is that taking niacin replenishes a substance the body needs instead of just treating and suppressing the symptoms. Niacin can also be used therapeutically to help with diabetes, high cholesterol, atherosclerosis and heart disease, as well as osteoarthritis and other illnesses. If vitamin therapy was used and monitored by physicians, less harmful, less expensive and more effective treatments would be the result.¹¹¹²

¹⁰ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

¹¹ Zieve & Eltz, 2011

¹² Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

These alternative therapies are less expensive and less damaging than relying only upon prescription medication to treat chronic disease. They also seem to yield less negative results because they heal the body holistically so that natural healing processes can be restored. There is the additional problem that healthcare is considered a business that must turn a profit and the pharmaceutical companies are set on collecting as much profit as possible, sometimes to the detriment of patient health. Investigations have shown that in many cases, the pharmaceutical companies are employing, either directly or indirectly, the very people who should be regulating, testing, and evaluating the drugs. Since these people are so closely tied to the success of the product, it stands to reason that one may be suspicious of their work and wish for a more neutral party to oversee their work. This is a serious problem, especially concerning how many TV advertisements are for prescription medications. Why, if these products can only be prescribed by a physician, are there advertisements marketing to potential patients?

Pharmaceutical companies also sponsor private practices and clinics, making a sort of implicit agreement with doctors to use their drugs. If patients, who mostly have no medical knowledge, are asking for a medication they think may help them, this places the doctor in a strange position of receiving pressure from both patient and corporate sponsor to distribute this controlled chemical. This pressure could reasonably make doctors more likely to prescribe medication, even if the problem is not severe enough to warrant it.

There has been a strange trend in American culture with regards to healthcare: everyone wants a fast answer, an easy answer, some magic pill to rid them of chronic disease with no lifestyle changes. Obesity, for example, is related to heart disease, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses. There are many medications and special surgeries that

seem to force you to eat less (lap-band surgery) or block absorption of fat, causing it to be released as oil in the stool. This does not treat the problem, only the symptom. The overweight person will continue to exercise as little as possible and eat sugary, salty and fatty foods with low nutritional value. The person will still suffer from malnutrition even if they appear to be losing weight. This is the result of a cultural emphasis on beauty rather than health because the benefits will be mostly cosmetic.¹³

Also, there is the question of how the FDA approves drugs and if the minimum requirements are too minimal.¹⁴ A review of the FDA's process by another government department has shown that drug reviews may be rushed due to time constraints and an inadequate number of employees. Time restraints may not allow for a sufficiently thorough review of the medication. Also, unnecessary processing of incomplete work may waste valuable time. Another problem cited is with the way the drug is revealed to the public. A more prompt and succinct but accurate description should be given to the public of the results because they have a right to know. Results should be presented clearly in lay terminology so that it may be universally understood.¹⁵

A proposed alternative treatment for many ailments, including cancer, is the detox cleansing diet. Specifically, there were studies done in the 1950s in which cancer patients were treated by vitamins, organic foods, and fresh vegetable juice as prescribed by the specifications in Gerson Plus Nutritional Therapy. It was reported that this therapy actually had a 50% cure rate

¹³ Poli Neto & Caponi, 2007

¹⁴ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

¹⁵ Rehnquist, 2003

for cancer.¹⁶ It is well known that cancer has always been treated with chemotherapy, the injection of toxins meant to kill cancer cells that often kill other normal body cells in the process as well, and by surgically excising the tumors. With these methods, results vary between complete success and relapses where the tumors keep reappearing until the patient dies. Recent government publications, while offering the methods, guidelines and procedures for complementary medicine with regards to cancer treatment, they are sure to make very clear that scientific evidence does not support the use of these therapies and that results of clinical trials for effectiveness have been inconsistent and inconclusive. They also claim that more studies are being done every year to gain more clear results. Considering the source, and how it may be effected by lobbyists from pharmaceutical companies, these disclaimers should be taken cautiously. These treatments are complementary and there should be no harm in physicians using it alongside conventional medicine and monitoring the patient to see which combinations of treatments are most effective.¹⁷

Gerson Plus Nutritional Therapy was developed by Dr. Max Gerson, M.D., based upon his years of clinical research in cell biology from the 1930s to the 1950s. He noticed that cancer patients had damaged organs, especially the liver, and believed that cancer and other degenerative diseases were due to toxins in the body that were causing damage. He proposed that the solution was to help rebuild the immune system with vitamins and minerals in a strict diet along with the use of regular enemas. This diet is supposed to relieve some of the burden of filtering the body from the liver, preventing further damage and increasing the efficiency of the body's natural detoxification processes. This diet rich in organic fruits and vegetables and very

¹⁶ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

¹⁷ Patrick, Ulrich, White, Miller & Sorkin, 2010

low in animal protein will, if anything, supply the body with dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, all of which are recommended for cancer prevention and optimal health. The researchers who compiled the information on the benefits of Gerson Plus Nutritional Therapy clearly noted that they searched the compendium of scientific medical journals for evidence and could find very few clinical studies published using this treatment.¹⁸ *Food Matters* claims that some scientific studies about the benefits of nutrition are not made available to the public or to scientists but are blacklisted and sealed. If this is true, it would certainly impede the development and accreditation of nutritional therapy as a valid and effective treatment in healthcare.¹⁹

Research has also indicated the Japanese diet and lifestyle as a guideline for cancer treatment and prevention because Japan has the lowest incidence of cancer worldwide. The Japanese diet is high in vegetable, particularly green vegetables, and seafood, and although white rice is a part of every meal, it is not the focus. High doses of vitamin C have also been shown to kill cancer cells without harming other cells when given in high doses intravenously.²⁰ Many sources state that high doses of vitamin C do not have any effect on cancer or are not reported to be beneficial. However, new evidence shows that intravenous vitamin C (evaluated in this study at lower than ideal and recommended concentrations) does have recognizable effects of restricting tumor growth and metastasis.^{21 22} So it may be inferred that at the recommended higher levels, it would be even more effective. In fact, one research collaboration of three case studies of patients with advanced cancers, studied histologically, had concluded that at high

¹⁸ "Gerson therapy (pdq@);" 2010

¹⁹ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

²⁰ Colquhoun & ten Bosch, 2008

²¹ Li & Schellhorn, 2007

²² Johns Hopkins, 2007

plasma levels of vitamin C, tumor growth is restricted because it is toxic to the cancer cells and not the normal cells. They recommend further study to be safe but also contend that it would be plausible to use this therapy under physician supervision in a clinic.²³

Conclusively, the case for better nutrition, as opposed to hyper-medication, as a method for preventing and curing chronic illness presented in *Food Matters* is thought-provoking. Considering the old adage “you are what you eat” and how true this is considering human biochemistry, growth and development, and pathology, the body is made up of essentially what you put into it and thusly, healthcare should logically begin with nutrition. While more physicians are emphasizing the need to include nutrition and exercise, as well as other lifestyle changes, into their regimen of care-giving, some physicians and most patients are skeptical of it’s efficacy and see it as less substantiated and valid than taking prescription medication and thus are less likely to implement lifestyle changes for better health. Overall, physicians need to become more aware of holistic healing and alternative therapies, including especially nutrition and exercise, so that they may guide patients instead of leaving them to their own devices, which may prove detrimental and contradictory to the officially prescribed remedy.

Works Cited

1. Jönsson, T., Olsson, S., Ahrén, B., Bøg-Hansen, T. C., Dole, A. & Lindeberg, S. (2005). Agrarian diet and diseases of affluence – do evolutionary novel dietary lectins cause leptin resistance?. *BMC Endocrine Disorders*, DOI: 10.1186/1472-6823-5-10
2. Ezzati M, Vander Hoorn S, Lawes CMM, Leach R, James WPT, et al. (2005) Rethinking the “Diseases of Affluence” Paradigm: Global Patterns of Nutritional Risks in Relation to Economic Development. *PLoS Med* 2(5): e133. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0020133
3. Yach, D., Puska, P., Nishida, C., & Porter, D. (2003, March 03). *Who/fao release independent expert report on diet and chronic disease* . Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2003/pr20/en/index.html>
4. Colquhoun, J., & ten Bosch, L. (2008). *Food matters* [DVD].

5. Bierman, P. M., & Rosen, C. J. (2005). Nutrient cycling & maintaining soil fertility in fruit and vegetable crop systems. Retrieved from <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/m1193.html#essnut>
6. Link, Lilli B. & Potter, John D. (2004). Raw versus cooked vegetables and cancer risk. *Cancer Epidemiology Biomarkers & Prevention*, 13(9), 1422-1435. Retrieved from <http://cebp.aacrjournals.org/content/13/9/1422.abstract>
7. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Nutrient Data Laboratory, Agricultural Research Service. (2007). *Usda table of nutrient retention factors*. Beltsville, Maryland: Retrieved from <http://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/12354500/Data/retn/retn06.pdf>
8. Zieve, D., & Eltz, D. R. (2011). *Vitamin b3 (niacin)*. Informally published manuscript, Medical Center, University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD. Retrieved from <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/vitamin-b3-000335.htm>
9. POLI NETO, Paulo and CAPONI, Sandra N.C.. The medicalization of beauty. Translated by Silvana Polchlopek. *Interface (Botucatu)* [online]. 2007, vol.3 Selected edition [cited 2011-09-26], pp. 0-0 . Available from: http://socialsciences.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1414-32832007000100005&lng=en&nrm=iso. ISSN 1414-3283.
10. Rehnquist, J. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. (2003). *Fda's review process for new drug applications* (OEI-01-01-00590) Retrieved from <http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-01-01-00590.pdf>

11. Patrick, L., Ulrich, C., White, J., Miller, S., & Sorkin, B. National Institutes of Health, NCCAM. (2010). *Cancer and cam: at a glance* (D453). Bethesda, MD: NCCAM Clearinghouse. Retrieved from <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/cancer/camcancer.htm#keypoint>
12. *Gerson therapy (pdq®): complementary and alternative medicine - health professional information [nci]*. (2010, September 24). Retrieved from <http://www.health.com/health/library/mdp/0,,ncicdr0000538268,00.html>
13. Coulter, I. D., Hardy, M. L., Morton, S. C., Hilton, L. G., Tu, W., Valentine, D. and Shekelle, P. G. (2006), Antioxidants Vitamin C and Vitamin E for the Prevention and Treatment of Cancer. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 21: 735–744. doi: 10.1111/j.1525-1497.2006.00483.x
14. Li, Y., & Schellhorn, H. E. (2007). New developments and novel therapeutic perspectives for vitamin c. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 137(10), 2171-2184. Retrieved from <http://jn.nutrition.org/content/137/10/2171.full#cited-by>
15. Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions (2007, September 12). How Vitamin C Stops Cancer. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved September 26, 2011, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/09/070910132848.htm>
16. Padayatty, S. J., Riordan, H. D., Hewitt, S. M., Katz, A., Levine, M. & Hoffer, L. J. (2006). Intravenously administered vitamin c as cancer therapy: three cases. *CMAJ*, 174(7), 937-942. DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.050346