

## The Food We Eat

During the millions of years when our bodies evolved, the food we ate was fresh, raw, mostly plant-based and organic. Even cooking is a relatively recent invention.

It's our contention, backed by some very good evidence, that the best diet for a long and healthy life consists of foods that are fresh, organic, mainly vegetarian and mostly raw and unprocessed, with natural sugars and salts.

The typical American and Canadian diet, by contrast, seems almost designed to make us sick. It is heavy on meat, protein and fat; packed with refined sugar and added salt; processed with preservatives, color and artificial flavors; and neither fresh, raw nor organic. It also encourages obesity, which is a risk factor for several kinds of cancer.<sup>1</sup>

In 1982 cancer researchers noted an interesting phenomenon. When immigrants from a country with a low rate of cancer, such as Japan, moved to the United States, they “caught up” to the higher American cancer rates within two or three generations.<sup>2</sup> In the 1940s, when

Health is the birthright of every living organism.

— Sir Albert Howard

breast cancer in Japan was particularly rare, less than 10% of the calories in a typical Japanese diet came from fat. A typical American, by contrast, gets up to 40% of his or her calories from fat.<sup>3</sup>

*The China Study*, the first long-term study of diet, lifestyle and disease, was conducted by a large team under the direction of nutritional biochemist Colin Campbell of Cornell University.<sup>4</sup> Published in 1990, and reinforced with a follow-up study in 2001, it examined the health and diet of people in 24 provinces in rural and urban China and Taiwan who ate locally produced food, including many who were too poor to eat animal-based food. It produced 8,000 links between diet and disease and found that:

- Those who ate the most plant-based food were the healthiest.
- Those who ate the most animal-based food got the most chronic diseases.
- Provided there is variety, quality and quantity, a plant-based diet can be healthy and nutritionally complete without animal-based food.
- The greatest benefits came to those who ate the greatest variety of plant food, with the least heating, salting and processing.

In 1997 the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research published a massive *Expert Report* that summarized the research into cancer and food and came to very similar conclusions.<sup>5</sup>

- *The China Study*: [www.thechinastudy.com](http://www.thechinastudy.com)
- Health and Vegetarians: [www.vegsoc.org/info/health3.html](http://www.vegsoc.org/info/health3.html)
- Meat Consumption and Cancer: [www.cancerproject.org/survival/cancer\\_facts/pdfs/meat\\_and\\_cancer.pdf](http://www.cancerproject.org/survival/cancer_facts/pdfs/meat_and_cancer.pdf)
- The Organic Center: [www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org)
- Phytochemicals: [www.vegetarian-nutrition.info/vn/phytochemicals.htm](http://www.vegetarian-nutrition.info/vn/phytochemicals.htm)

Other studies have shown that:

- Greek women who eat plenty of fruit have a 35% lower risk of breast cancer; those who eat plenty of vegetables have a 47% lower risk.<sup>6</sup>
- German vegetarians have a 56% reduced incidence of colon cancer.<sup>7</sup>
- Japanese women who eat meat daily have an 8.5 times greater risk of breast cancer than those who rarely or never eat meat.<sup>8</sup>
- British women who ate more than 90 grams of saturated fat a day had 2 times the risk of breast cancer than those who ate 37 grams.<sup>9</sup>

As is so often the case, however, there is conflicting evidence. In 2004 a study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that fruit and vegetables gave no protective effect for breast cancer.<sup>10</sup> In 2005 a large European study came to the same conclusion,<sup>11</sup> and in 2006 an eight-year study of 49,000 women showed that a low-fat diet with more vegetables, fruits and grains reduced the incidence of breast cancer by only 9%, while increasing the risk of colorectal cancer by 9%.<sup>12</sup> The studies did not include food eaten during childhood, or by their mothers during pregnancy.

Unless such studies include a control group eating organic food however, the science may be invalid, since non-organic food is deficient in the very anti-oxidants and phytonutrients that are part of the body's defenses against cancer.<sup>13</sup> Many studies have documented the numerous health benefits of organic food compared to conventional food.<sup>14</sup>



CAROLYN HERRIOT

A fresh, locally grown, organic Totem strawberry, moments before being eaten.

Non-organic food is often contaminated with pesticides, even perchlorate from rocket fuel and other contaminants.<sup>15</sup> Meat and fish are generally contaminated with chemicals that accumulate as they move up the food chain, concentrating in the body fat of each species that eats them. When they are eaten by humans, and then by breast-feeding infants, the contaminants are multiplied many thousands of times over.

Researchers in Seattle found that as soon as parents switched to organic produce and grains, the pesticide levels in their children's bodies dropped to zero within just a few days — but went back up again when they returned to a conventional diet.<sup>16</sup>

The overall weight of evidence is clear. If you switch to a diet that is mostly organic, low-fat and vegetarian, you will live a longer, healthier life.