The Protein Nemesis
Category : April/May/June 2008
Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 2008

HEALTH

The Protein Nemesis

A modern-day emphasis on animal protein has steered the human diet in a dangerous direction

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Some years ago, Dr. Campbell received a telephone call from a distraught woman who told him, "I have a strong history of breast cancer in my family." She said her mother and grandmother had both died from the disease, and her sister had been diagnosed with it."I can't help but be afraid for my nine-year-old daughter," she confided. Dr. Campbell, a nutrition scientist at Cornell University, told her that his research concluded that a change in diet was her best option to dramatically reduce the risk of the nation's three greatest health-related killers: heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

You can read about his findings in The China Study: Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-Term Health (2005). The book, which reads like a novel, was co-authored by his son, Thomas M. Campbell, to whom he credits the book's readability.

The China Study

In the most comprehensive study of health and nutrition ever conducted, the China

Study project was arranged through Cornell University, Oxford University and the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine in the early 1980s to examine the eating habits of 6,500 people in China and Taiwan.

Central to the inquiry detailed in The China Study is an in-depth discussion of protein especially animal protein . Dr. Campbell observed that people who eat a plant-based diet are generally healthier. While the average man in China consumes only one tenth the animal protein, half the fat, but 20% more calories than an American, Americans are on average 25% fatter. At the same time, Chinese who consume excess animal food have the highest rates of Western diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

During his early-1960s nutrition study in the Philippines, Dr. Campbell was still operating under the conventional medical assumption that a lack of protein Â---especially animal protein--causes malnutrition. He writes, "In this project, however, I uncovered a dark secret. The children of the wealthiest families, who ate the highest-protein diets, were the ones most likely to get liver cancer!"

This correlated with lab research in which Dr. Campbell and his team discovered that, in mice and other rodents predisposed to liver cancer, "nutrients from animal-based foods increased tumor development, while nutrients from plant-based foods decreased tumor development." Dr. Campbell, who was raised on a dairy farm, says, "The safe proteins were from plants, including wheat and soy. With these, we could turn off tumor growth. This information countered everything I had been taught. It was heretical to say that protein wasn't healthy, let alone say it promoted cancer. It was a defining moment in my career."

Diseases of Affluence

Dr. Campbell and his team expanded their research beyond the China Study and the protein/cancer link to include other nutrients (e.g., carbohydrates, cellulose and dietary fiber). Part Two of The China Study surveys a wide range of human diseases and conditions--heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes, autoimmune, kidney, eye diseases and osteoporosis--and the medical profession's failure to effectively address them. Dr. Campbell puts it bluntly: "Here in America, we are affluent, and we die certain deaths because of it." Americans and people in affluent European

nations are becoming sick at unprecedented rates. Men in the US have a 47% chance of getting cancer, while the rate among women is 38%. Nearly a third of US adults are obese, and one in three Americans will die from the biggest killer: heart disease. But rather than concentrate on low-cost prevention through prescribing diet changes, doctors prefer--and hospitals encourage--expensive surgeries that help their financial bottom line.

Osteoporosis, considered a major health concern in the US, is much lower in China, where most people get their calcium from vegetables. The US has one of the highest per-capita dairy consumption rates in the world, due in no small part to agribusiness' claims that the calcium in cow's milk and cheese strengthens bones and helps prevent osteoporosis. A study conducted in 2000 showed that the rate of hip fractures for women age 50 in the US is among the highest in the world. Animal protein suppresses the body's production of an active form of vitamin D. By consuming high levels of dairy products, studies conclude, you are actually inviting osteoporosis, not combating it.

[From the Editor: We do not advocate that lacto-vegetarians stop consuming dairy products as a source of protein. The levels of casein (milk protein) used in these tests were far higher than those normally consumed. It will be important to see whether modern-day laboratories corroborate Dr. Campbell's findings with casein and other animal proteins in future studies.]

Eating Right

The authors give simple advice: By basing your diet on whole, plant-based foods, you can live longer, lose weight, lower your risk of cancer, prevent diabetes, keep your bones strong, avoid stroke, lower your blood pressure, reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and enjoy many other health benefits. Preventing and even curing some diseases may be as simple as proper nutrition.

Here are the book's Eight Principles of Food and Health: 1) Nutrition represents the combined activities of countless food substances. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. 2) Vitamin supplements are not a panacea for good health. 3) There are no nutrients in animal-based foods that are not better provided by plants. 4) Genes do not determine diseases on their own. Genes function only by being activated, or

expressed; and nutrition plays a critical role in determining which genes, good and bad, are expressed. 5) Nutrition can substantially control the adverse effects of noxious chemicals. 6) The same nutrition that prevents disease in its early stages (before diagnosis) can also halt or reverse disease in its later stages (after diagnosis). 7) Nutrition that is truly beneficial for one chronic disease will support health across the board. 8) Good nutrition creates health in all areas of our existence. For those challenged with making a transition, the authors suggest, "Give it one month. You've been eating cheeseburgers your whole life; a month without them won't kill you.".

By Mark Hawthorne, author of Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism, http:/www.strikingattheroots.com

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Summary: Whole Plant Food Is the Key to Good Health

Edited excerpts from an interview with Dr. Campbell

In our animal experiments, we determined that casein [a protein found in milk and cheese], but not soy or wheat protein, promoted cancer development. However, in these experiments, casein promoted cancer development only when in excess of the amount that is needed, i.e., above about 8-10%. From 10% to 20%, for example, we observed a linear relationship.

"Please keep in mind a couple of ideas: First, protein is an essential nutrient and, from these experiments, casein can serve this purpose; about 10% is needed for growth of the young and about 5% is needed for adult maintenance. Second, these experiments investigated casein as an isolated nutrient (generally unlike what it is when consumed as part of a whole food). Third, although we did not test other animal proteins, I am confident, using other indirect evidence, that other animal proteins, when tested in isolation, will show the same effect.

"As a corollary observation, a meal of varied plant based foods will provide about 8-10% protein, plenty enough to meet the requirement for protein. But 95% of human diets contain 11-22% protein. If the experimental data are relevant for humans (a large body of evidence suggests that this is true), then most humans

have diets that could be enhancing cancer development by consuming protein in excess of the amount needed.

"The excess protein being consumed is clearly coming from animal-based foods. That is, about 70-80% of the total dietary protein is provided by animal-based foods.

"There is no nutritional need for this excess protein. Consuming animal-based foods not only sustains higher levels of dietary protein, which may have its own protein-specific adverse effects, but in doing so, an almost endless variety of other adverse effects occur because of parallel changes in the intakes of a variety of other nutrients.

"If one exceeds the need for protein by using protein-enriched products from plants (e.g., soy and vegetable protein isolates), this, too, could cause similar problems, although perhaps not to the same degree. This may seem somewhat tortuous logic, but it is not. It's really quite simple.

"It is necessary, however, to fully comprehend each of the above statements to get its full meaning. Together, they question why we have so long believed that protein is so important. Indeed, our virtual reverence for protein, especially of the animal kind, is one of the most serious dietary misadventures of all time."

Listen to the full audio interview with dr. campbell in the Hinduism Today digital edition at: http:/www.hinduismtoday.com/digital

Read more at the following websites:
http:/www.chinastudy.org

http:/www.cancerproject.org