



THE DARK SIDE OF THE CHINA STUDY STORY SUPPORTING VEGETARIANISM

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By Dr. Mercola

I have sought to apply science to improve my health, and that of others, for over forty years. The topic so intrigued me that I went to medical school to increase my understanding of the way the body works.

I have learned many things along this health journey. Clearly one of the major lessons is that there is enormous controversy when it comes to understanding what the human body was designed to thrive on.

Fortunately, as a practicing physician I have had the distinct advantage of having the opportunity to treat over 25,000 patients who were willing to implement suggestions I made to improve their health. Over the years, I certainly have made my share of mistakes, and some people did not improve after implementing what I thought was very solid advice.

Interestingly, most of my initial failures were related to encouraging many thousands of patients to eat too many vegetables in relation to fats and animal protein.

This may sound shocking to some, and staunch vegetarians, or vegans, might wholeheartedly disagree with the notion that you could possibly eat too many vegetables. In fact, many have absorbed [Dr. T. Colin Campbell's](#) writing's on this topic, particularly his book *The China Study*, which makes a radical case against the wisdom of eating animal protein at all, by linking protein to all manner of ill health, including cancer.

Is Eating Meat Harmful, Like Popular Pro-Vegan Book Proclaims?

Many who hold strict vegetarian views) still hold up *The China Study* as the authoritative "proof" that eating meat was harmful.

This work flies in the face of many nutritionally oriented physicians, like myself, who have collectively treated tens of thousands of patients and found that forcing an animal-free protein diet on everyone will invariably cause harm and suffering in many whose biochemically and genetically determined [nutritional type](#) requires large amounts of fat and protein.

Since this book is widely trusted and used to defend a no animal protein position I thought it was important to provide my views on why I believe this work has some fundamental flaws.

Another [nutritional physician who has taken a hard look at Dr. Campbell's book](#), and the studies that form the basis of his conclusions, is [Dr. Michael R. Eades, M.D.](#)

Dr. Eades has been in full-time practice of nutritional and metabolic medicine since 1986, and like myself, has treated tens of thousands of patients. Interestingly, Campbell, on the other hand, is not a practicing physician and has no real-world experience to support the veracity of his nutritional recommendations for the population at large.

Major Reason Why the China Study is Fatally Flawed

The very title of the book is inaccurate. It is NOT a study but a comprehensive set of observations. **While this approach can be valuable, it can never prove his assertion that animal protein should be avoided, as he never TESTED that theory on real live patients...** The data from Dr. Campbell's China study was first published in the tome *Diet, Life-Style and Mortality in China*. It contains several thousands of statistical correlations, which Campbell insists show that animal protein intake is convincingly associated with prevalence of cancer.

However, it's important to realize two things:

1. The China study was an observational study. Correlations deduced from an observational study do not – in fact, cannot -- prove causation. As Dr. Eade points out, all you can really do with data from an observational study is to form a hypothesis, which must then be tested in randomized, controlled trials, to ferret out the truth about whether or not x actually causes y.
2. **In many cases, the data (presented in arduous detail in the book *Diet, Life-Style and Mortality in China*) do not show statistically significant correlations between animal protein consumption and disease such as cancer at all. On the contrary. It would seem that sugar and carbohydrates are correlated with cancer – not animal protein.** In addition, the data indicate that fat is negatively correlated with cancer mortality, which again contradicts the claim that meat is harmful.

For more information, I highly recommend [reading through Dr. Eade's critique of The China Study](#).

You can also review another critique of the China Study by Science Based medicine. It is particularly interesting because the reviewer was initially a strong supporter of the "study" until faced with the facts.

<http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/?p=6092>

Two Physicians' Experiences with Using Vegetarian Diets for Everyone

After finishing my family practice residency in 1985 I read the book *Fit for Life*. The book made some very compelling arguments encouraging the consumption of raw fruits and vegetables. So I started its recommendations and had fruit for breakfast. After a few weeks I tested my blood work and was shocked to find my fasting triglycerides were nearly 3,000. That is not a typo. Nearly *three thousand*...This was surprising because they had never been over 100 in the past.

Clearly this diet was killing me and I am convinced I would have died long ago had I remained on it. I now realize that this approach probably helps some, but was a disaster for me personally.

Dr. Eades is another nutritional physician. He and I have never met and do not personally know each other.

However, we both started our medical practices about the same time and were both passionate about helping people with nutritional interventions and helping them with alternatives to drugs and surgery.

We had no predisposition to the outcome and were impartial observers to the results of our nutritional interventions. We were both busy clinicians and never had the luxury to take months out of our lives to publish our observations in the medical literature. Nevertheless the lack of publications does not make the observations any less valid.

Interestingly we both observed the same results, namely that large numbers of sick people failed to improve when they implemented vegetarian or vegan diets.

This shocked us as we were compelled by many of the arguments that Campbell makes and believed that all our patients should have improved on this regimen. Initially I questioned their compliance and believed many of them were "cheating." But after this started happening to more and more people, it became clear my approach was flawed.

Many of these patients significantly worsened and nearly died. Many even left our practices because they lost faith in our ability to use diet as a tool to help them regain their health. What we both realized after these well-intentioned efforts is that . . .

There is No Perfect Diet that Works for Everyone

Most of the confusion in this debate results from this reality. **Vegetarian diets described by Campbell do work for large numbers of people. From my observations, perhaps about one third of the population would benefit from it. These people thrive on these foods and have spectacular health. The problem is that there is an equally large, or even larger, population whose health is devastated by restricting animal protein and fats.**

About ten years ago I was exposed to concepts that helped me understand this shocking observation. I realized that there is an enormous level of biochemical and genetic individuality that essentially guarantees that there is no perfect food plan that will work for everyone.

What I gradually came to appreciate is that we are all uniquely designed and require customized plans.

I eventually adopted a program called [Nutritional Typing](#), which is a central part of my health plan and is available for free on my [site](#).

This plan categorizes people into three different groups:

- **Protein:** High amounts of healthy fats and protein and lower amounts of vegetables

- **Carb:** High amounts of vegetables and lower amounts of protein and fat
- **Mixed:** Somewhere between the above options

The population is divided equally between the groups, with about one third of the population of the US in each group.

If you go to certain countries however, you will find high percentages in one group, but the US is a wide mixture and has a widespread heterogeneity.

Nutritional Typing Produced Dramatic Improvement

Once I began implementing Nutritional Typing in my practice I noticed a remarkable *decrease* in those that did not respond favorably to dietary changes. Nearly everyone seemed to notice improvement, and for many it was quite dramatic.

One of the underlying principles of the program is to "Listen to Your Body" and adjust your foods based on how you feel mentally and physically after consuming them. Many who claim to have tried nutritional typing and report feeling worse, have clearly missed this most essential point.

If, after a meal, you feel sluggish, tired, nauseous, or depressed, your meal was not ideal. If you are indeed following the nutritional typing program, this will be a giant clue that you need to modify your diet.

You make a great mistake if you simply take the test once and strictly follow the food choices recommended for that type – you must continuously check in with yourself and keep modifying your food choices until you find the right balance of fats, healthy carbs and protein for you.

Nutritional typing is a way to determine what YOUR customized diet is, and it is not even a one-size-fits-all within each nutritional grouping. If you take nutritional typing seriously, its guidelines will help you modify your food intake until you find the right balance.

That said, some of the most dramatic improvements I saw were from individuals who were protein types but were eating mostly carbs, in the way of vegetables. It was very common for these people to have strong ethical positions about refusing to eat animal products.

I would *never* ask someone to eat animal foods if they had spiritual convictions against doing so. However, many in this category were just confused about this issue – thinking this is what was healthiest for their body. They couldn't understand why they felt so sick and had so many health problems. Once we were able to clear up that confusion, and experiment with the program, the result was typically quite impressive.

Don't Listen to Me or ANYONE Else About What You Should Eat

It is sad to see that many staunch vegans and vegetarians fail to even acknowledge that anyone is designed to have animal protein. Unfortunately they are able to convince many with seemingly

compelling information like Campbell's China Study and as a result, many people continue to suffer from not including vital nutrients in their diet -- nutrients they were designed to eat.

Ultimately, if you are sincerely honest and seek to understand what diet is best for you, it is my recommendation to abandon any previously held convictions you might have about diet and listen to your body.

Let your body tell you what foods you were designed to eat. Don't listen to me or Dr. Eades or a researcher like Campbell who has never treated patients. Just listen to your own body.

You can experiment for yourself and observe your reactions, but if you would like a systemized way to approach this and record your results so you can reach your own independent conclusions about what you were designed to eat, then I would encourage you to take the [FREE Nutritional Typing Test](#).

Should Meat Be Avoided Because of the Cholesterol Issue?

Many, if not most, conventional physicians still maintain the position that cholesterol is harmful and should be avoided. However, this misconception has been carefully debunked in more recent years. Alas, the conventional system is not known for its speed to embrace corrective action even when a fallacy has been clearly revealed.

I won't repeat all the arguments here but if you are interested in getting a more in-depth review, please read [my most recent cholesterol report](#).

The truth is, many of the health problems attributed to fat and cholesterol are in fact caused by SUGAR, not fat! If you do not understand this vital concept, you will likely continue to sabotage your health – avoiding health promoting foods, and substituting them with some of the most health-harming...

Is Vegetarianism Right for You?

I have long advocated consuming plenty of fresh, organic, locally grown raw vegetables, but it's important to understand that different *ratios are appropriate for depending on your nutritional type*.

This means that some people will thrive on very large amounts of vegetables and very little animal protein. For others, this ratio would spell disaster for their health. Again, it's highly individual. The people who fare the worst on a vegetarian diet are those who are naturally protein types, as they're depriving their bodies of *essential fuel*, determined by their genetic and biochemical makeup.

Some of my views on eating animal protein were directly influenced by the work of Dr. Weston Price but although his contribution was great, since then countless peer-reviewed studies have been published that support these views.

It's also worth mentioning that I have no competing commercial interests that might sway me from providing the most accurate, health-promoting information I possibly can share on this or any other

health related subject. As you may know already, my business model does not allow outside advertisers.

The only commercial items sold on my site are ones that I firmly believe in and most of which I personally use – and that includes grass-fed, organically-and humanely (non-factory farmed) raised meats and wild fish providers whose food products I have tested for purity by an independent lab prior to endorsing them.

But to recap: a largely vegetarian diet may be appropriate for *some*, but to promote it as the only, or even the best, way to improve health is foolhardy at best, because some two-thirds of people simply cannot and will not thrive on a meatless diet.

What About the Other Animal Protein: Milk... Is it Good or Bad?

Another important distinction that must be taken into account when discussing animal protein sources is the difference between raw and pasteurized dairy.

When you heat a protein to the temperature required to achieve pasteurization you denature the tertiary and quaternary structure of the protein making it essentially a new molecule.

Additionally, any time you see studies where casein is given to animals and adverse health effects ensue, there's really little cause for surprise.

Why?

Because any time you process foods you damage them, and you can therefore experience a variety of adverse health effects when you consume them. This should not be misconstrued as being a reflection of the same food in its raw and/or unadulterated state!

My recommendation to everyone is to try cheeses made from raw milk and compare them to cheeses made from pasteurized milk. I'm willing to bet that most of you would agree the taste of raw cheese is far superior. This is so well known, no self-respecting cheesemaker would ever choose pasteurized milk over raw when making cheese, because the properties are entirely different – it's basically damaged goods.

For those who claim there's no significant health benefits of raw over pasteurized, the inherent differences in flavor and consistency between raw and processed cheeses alone will clue you in on the fact that there ARE significant differences between the two types of milk – otherwise the cheeses would also be identical, wouldn't they?

Another common misconception many people have is that you should avoid milk because no other animal in nature consumes it after they're weaned. While this may be logistically true, observation will show you that most animals will eagerly and readily consume raw milk when given the opportunity.

Few would argue with the fact that human breast milk is probably the ideal and most perfect food designed for human infants -- a truly custom-made whole food for a baby -- yet virtually no adult is able to consume this as a source of nutrition for logistical unavailability.

However, **throughout history, ancient people across the world have continued drinking similar raw milk from cows, sheep and goats, well past being weaned from their mother's breast.**

Final Recommendation

This is obviously a very sensitive issue for many. It has been my experience that many make choices to eat certain foods based on philosophical or intellectual reasons. While I believe that should always be an important part of the process, I believe it is equally important to listen to the important feedback that your body provides you when you consume a certain diet.

If your current diet allows you to function at the highest level of energy and fitness and you rarely feel hungry or crave sweets that is a fairly good sign that you are eating food appropriate for your nutritional type.

However if you are struggling with health challenges and have rigidly adhered to a diet that severely limits or avoids animal protein, because you believe you should or you are choosing it for ethical reasons then I would encourage you to consider changing your diet to include some animal proteins.

Just be honest with yourself and objectively evaluate your body's response. Your body is the most awesome instrument to make this assessment. Ultimately it is the best resource and far superior to anything you read on the Internet or in any published study.

Please feel free to use our [free Nutritional Typing Test](#) as tool to help you explore what foods you were designed to eat.

So my final words are to trust the body God gave you to tell you the truth.