

Abstract

Modern America is plagued by preventable chronic diseases including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, and obesity. As a society, we have developed countless medications to battle these problems. However, despite these new drugs, thousands of people continue to die every year. According to the CDC, seven of the top ten causes of death in 2010 were chronic diseases. The research conducted during this project focused on finding an alternative method to treating these diseases beyond prescribing medications. A focus was placed on researching how a whole foods, plant based diet affected the outcomes of chronic disease patients. The website ForksOverKnives.com, which grew out of a documentary featuring prominent researchers in the field, defines a whole foods plant based diet as a diet based on fruits, vegetables, tubers, whole grains, and legumes; and it excludes or minimizes meat (including chicken and fish), dairy products, and eggs, as well as highly refined foods like bleached flour, refined sugar, and oil. The research of scientists such as Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn is included in this project. Both scientists have linked these diseases to the absence of a whole foods, plant based diet in America today. Research shows that proper nutrition may be a better first line treatment for disease such as hypertension, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Extensive literature review concluded that a whole foods diet consisting mostly of organic plants was the best choice for optimal health.

Why do we need better nutrition?¹

- 86% of healthcare dollars are spent on treating chronic diseases
- About half of US adults have at least 1 major risk factor for heart disease or stroke
- 90% of Americans consume too much sodium daily
- In 2012, about half of all US adults (117 million people) have one or more chronic diseases
- In 2011, 36% of teens said they ate fruit less than once per day, 38% said the same for vegetables
- In 2011, 38% of adults said they ate fruit less than once per day, 23% said the same for vegetables

1: All statistics listed are sourced from the CDC



More Information?

- In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan
- Forks Over Knives by T. Colin Campbell and Caldwell Esselstyn Jr.
- China Study by T. Colin Campbell
- Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan

Reasons beyond health to eat more plant foods:

- Reduce Industrial farm pollution
- Animals used for food occupy 30% of our land area³
- Less waste of resources⁴:
 - To make 1 quarter pound hamburger it takes 6.7lb of grain, 52.8 gallons of water, 74.5 square feet of land, 1,036 btus for production (enough to run a microwave for 18 minutes)

3: PETA
4: NPR

Are You Killing Yourself at the Dinner Table?

Molly Czarnecki
Ferris State University
Honors Program



Some people think the plant based, whole foods diet is extreme. Half a million people a year will have their chests opened up and a vein taken from their leg and sewn into their coronary artery. Some people would call that extreme. –Caldwell Esselstyn



*Eat Food. Not too much. Mostly Plants.
– Michael Pollan*

Let food be thy medicine. - Hippocrates

Why should I care?

- 29.1 million Americans have diabetes and it is the 7th leading cause of death²
- Heart disease is the number 1 cause of death¹
- 1 in 3 Americans have hypertension¹
- 1 in 3 have high cholesterol¹

2: Statistic sourced from the ADA

Why can't I just choose the "low fat", "fat free", "sugar free", "heart healthy", "whole grain", "cholesterol lowering" option?

- American has created "healthier" processed food options since the 1980's, but America has only gotten sicker
- Whole foods don't need health claims
- It's not about individual nutrients, it's about nutrients working together
- Traditional diets had it right

Does this even work?

- People have improved, reversed or even cured cancer, diabetes, congestive heart failure, morbid obesity, etc.
- There are many stories published in books, featured on the news, documented on film, and posted online that detail amazing results from a whole foods, plant based diet.

How can we change?

- Focusing on eating a whole foods, plant based diet as defined by ForksOverKnives.com
- Avoiding processed foods
- Eating grass-fed animal products
- Using nutrition as first line treatment for chronic diseases
- Take inspiration from traditional diets around the world that do not include many processed foods in their meals

Future Research

I did not decide on this topic early enough to carry out individual research beyond literature review. My hope is that I can obtain a blood panel while eating a standard American diet. Then I plan to transform my diet to meet the recommendations I have mentioned here. I will obtain a second blood test 1, 3 and 6 months into this change in diet – possibly carrying it out a full year. This will show me that one can improve their health simply by changing their diet.