

In western culture it is ingrained into the fabric of our society that meat is a staple to our diet as well as a social normalcy, even just the thought of not eating meat is taboo. The common mindset of Americans is that as you get older you “just happen to” get increasingly less healthy and will need medication to solve your health problems. People too easily adopt this mindset, without regarding their personal health choices and without ever asking the question; Why? This attitude that our own health is out of our control as we age is not only completely false, but it can be easily fixed if you identify the root of the problem to begin with.

In the United States over one-third (35.7%) of the entire adult population is obese and every three out of four adult males is obese. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, “In 2012, the average American consumed 71.2 pounds of red meat (beef, veal, pork, and lamb) and 54.1 pounds of poultry (chicken and turkey)”. This is an alarming statistic which only begs the question; is there a link between health problems and meat consumption?

The east seems to indicate this correlation as the truth. As you travel east across the globe and observe different nations’ diet trends and general health, most all eastern nations live a healthier lifestyle than our practices here in the United States and there is a reason for this. Predominately, Asian nations have some of the healthiest diets, but India and some Nordic nations adhere to similar healthy habits.

Since ancient times the east has practiced these healthy habits with the help of their religion/ideologies that have long existed. For example Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Taoism all believe in some form of vegetarian diets not only for health purposes, but for spiritual purposes as well. They all share the common belief that all things are connected as one and most regard nature as sacred. Under the cause and effect doctrine of Karma, our intentions

and actions influence a future effect which illustrates the weight of our decisions in life and the potential consequences they can carry. This doctrine shines more light on the link between health problems and excessive meat consumption if one thinks about it carefully. If an entire lifetime is spent unconsciously choosing to eat animals that are raised inhumanely for the sole purpose of slaughter, while at the same time unknowingly supporting an industry that is more detrimental to our environment than all of our transportation systems combined, then what can one expect the subsequent effect of these actions to entail? Just some food for thought.

Adopting a plant-based diet or even just cutting down meat consumption can not only improve personal health, but can have significant positive impact on our world in many different ways. Consumers have the power to directly influence industry, and the reason why the meat industry continues to thrive and destroy on a massive scale today is because consumers continue to support the corrupt industry. Unfortunately, so many consumers are stuck, stuck in their old habits and stuck in the shadows intentionally cast by the meat industry to keep them forever in the dark. Although it is not easily recognized, a simple consumer choice holds truly incredible power and is the reason why one must question everything. If more consumers were to ask questions about the industries they unknowingly support, then some of the biggest problems currently troubling our society today would cease to exist.

All too often when the debate arises about the plant-based diet there is strong focus on the drawbacks of this particular diet, when the reality of the situation is any deficiency can easily be fixed with an alternative and the positives of this diet are simply too significant to ignore. Vegetables naturally are much more nutrient-rich than any other food; they also have little fat and contain zero cholesterol. A nutrient-rich diet with little fat and no cholesterol is a vastly healthier trend than a typical American meat-rich diet which directly contributes to obesity,

disease, and certain cancers. It is no surprise then that vegetarians have a proven higher life expectancy.

Every single human hopes to live as long and as healthy as possible and the solution to longevity is simple. Years of healthy decisions eventually translate into years added to your life span. In Okinawa, Japan there are the most centenarians in the world and they also happen to have the highest life expectancy of any region as well. This is not just simple coincidence; their diets are almost entirely plant-based which helps fuel their abnormal longevity. Meat consumption over the years clogs your arteries, drains energy, slows the immune system down and causes all sorts of different health issues. It just so happens that the number one killer in the United States each year is cardiovascular disease. This again begs the ultimate question; why is this so?

Cardiovascular disease is caused mainly from a poor diet that consists of the consumption of excessive amounts of fat and cholesterol that eventually clog the arteries and slowly will start to cause heart failure. Meat contains many different fats and cholesterol and even causes cancer cells to produce in the body over time if meat consumption is high. In a Framingham Heart Study conducted by the director Dr. William Castelli, the results proved that a low-fat plant-based diet significantly lowers the risk of heart attack by eighty-five percent. The sad reality is that people only try to change things with their health when it is too late and turn to medication to solve all their problems.

Adopting a healthier diet is the true cure; this prevents, treats, and even reverses health problems much more effectively than prescribed medication. This is also a much less expensive option if done properly. According to the *Vegetarian Times* “An estimated 70 percent of all

diseases, including one-third of all cancers, are related to diet”. Best of all a plant-based diet can also help prevent cancer.

To illustrate this point clearly, research shows that cancer rates are dramatically lower in countries that have mostly plant-based diets. On the contrary, in countries that have adopted western meat-based diets the cancer rates soar and this is once again not a simple matter of coincidence. Vegetarians happen to have a clear advantage when it comes to fighting cancer. When the human body consumes primarily plant-based food it produces higher quantities of certain white blood cells that are coined as “natural cancer killer cells” and these cells actually seek out and destroy cancer cells within the body. To back this up, studies in both England and Germany proved that vegetarians are forty percent less likely to develop cancer compared to meat-eaters. Harvard confirmed these findings when they conducted a study of their own and found that regular meat consumption increases colon cancer risk by roughly three-hundred percent.

If meat consumption can be so harmful, then why is our country mass-producing 93 billion tons of meat and poultry each year? The ugly truth of meat consumption is rarely surfaced for a reason; it is a multi-billion dollar industry. According to the North American Meat Institute the United States meat industry sales in 2014 were 186 billion dollars. Sadly the priority seems to be profit over the health of our own citizens in this country. Human health is not only in jeopardy from the meat industry, but the health of our animals and environment is also sacrificed to the “almighty dollar”.

At first thought, the scope of the meat industry seems simple and insignificant; but in reality it has a very critical impact not just limited to our country’s own borders, but is felt

worldwide. Today in our modern world we are faced with some very important issues that affect each human being on Earth. The list is extensive but some of the top issues include; climate change, global hunger, water scarcity, pollution (carbon, methane, etc.), corruption, poverty, over-industrialization, and rapid depletion of natural resources. The ugly truth is that the meat industry has only fueled each of these issues to become even worse.

If the meat industry is so detrimental to society, then why does it continue to grow exponentially? According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations “global meat production almost doubled between 1980 and 2004, and the upward trend will only continue”. In a world plagued by hunger, around 870 million people suffer from chronic undernourishment and yet our country continues to rely on the meat-industry for food when it is extremely inefficient at producing food and carries a huge environmental toll as well. In a study done by biologist Sir Colin Spedding in 1990 he proved you can feed twenty-two times the amount of people with farmland used for cabbage as opposed to beef. In addition to land wasted, beef production uses roughly seventy-seven times the amount of water compared to vegetables. With all the recent drought problems our country faces, why are we making the problem worse?

The list of environmental issues related to beef production is almost endless but what is even more disturbing is the enormous carbon footprint meat production leaves behind. In 2006 the United Nations stated “meat production (transportation & production) is responsible for more damaging emissions released into our atmosphere than all of our transportation systems combined”. This impact is so extreme that if every American replaced just one meat serving per week with a non-meat product then it would be equivalent to taking eight million cars off the road.

Since the meat industry industrialized the production process and introduced the factory farming style, they have been irresponsibly raising these animals for one purpose only; breed them for slaughter. This is not only inhumane, but is extremely harmful to the animals as well as the humans who consume this contaminated meat. In order to prevent disease these factory farms load up the animals with antibiotics, pesticides, and steroids. Meat being produced in these disease ridden slaughter farms carries extreme health risks for consumers. If a disease in these death fields grows immune to the antibiotics and pesticides, then it has the power to contaminate thousands of tons of meat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention there are over 76 million food-borne illness cases in the United States per year.

Choosing not to eat meat is a conscious decision that: improves personal health, saves inhumanely slaughtered animals, saves money, and saves the environment most importantly. Even just by cutting back slightly on meat-consumption, one can make a significant positive impact on the world and help paint the picture for a brighter future on this precious planet. We all have a choice in this life. What will you choose?

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