The Manipulated Food Chain: You Are What You Eat, Eats

Every living thing requires energy to live. A food chain shows how each living thing gets food, and how nutrients and energy are passed from creature to creature. Food chains begin with plant-life, as plants use sunlight, water, and nutrients to get energy in a process called photosynthesis. Herbivores eat these plants for energy and we human beings, as omnivores, get our energy from eating a combination of these plants as well as eating the animals that eat these plants and their byproducts including milk, cheese, and eggs. But what if human beings get in the way of Mother Nature and manipulate the food chain? How does this change the makeup of the animals that we eat and affect our health and performance in the gym?

We all learn about food chains in biology class. For example, man eats cow and cow eats grass. But in 2010, that is not the way food chains work anymore in the commercial food industry. Nowadays, a typical commercial food chain looks more like: man eats cow, cow eats corn and soy, antibiotics, hormones, other drugs, and up until recently, cow eats other cow’s parts. The same problem applies for commercial chickens and farm-raised fish.

In nature, chickens aren’t vegetarians, they are omnivores. The ideal chicken is free-range, eating numerous bugs and wild plants and consuming 30% of their calories from grass. Moreover, like commercial chicken, farmed fish are fed corn, which is for the first time in history introducing Omega-6 fatty acids into the ocean’s food chains. The entire ocean food chain is based on single-celled, green plankton, which is the “grass” of the sea. Plankton has no seeds, so all wild seafood has only Omega-3 fats.

There are two main kinds of fatty acids: Omega-3 and Omega-6. Omega-3s come from the green parts of plants, while Omega-6s come from the seeds of plants. We need approximately equal amounts of Omega-3s and Omega-6s in our bodies. But because of feeding our livestock corn and soy rather than grass, we are consuming huge proportions of Omega-6 and very little Omega-3. Meat and dairy products from animals fed a high-grain diet have up to ten times more Omega-6 than products from grass-fed animals. Consuming high levels of Omega-6 raises our “bad cholesterol,” and keeps our “good cholesterol” low. Consuming equal amounts of Omega-3s and Omega-6s raises good cholesterol and lowers bad cholesterol.

Why is it so important to eat animals that eat what nature intended them to eat? For example, grass-fed beef is better for human health than grain-fed beef in ten different ways, according to the most comprehensive analysis to date. A joint effort study in 2009 between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and researchers at Clemson University compared grain-fed beef, and grass-fed beef and found that grass-fed beef was: lower in total fat, higher in beta-carotene, higher in vitamin E (alpha-tocopherol), higher in the B-vitamins thiamin and riboflavin, higher in the minerals calcium, magnesium, and potassium, higher in total Omega-3s, a healthier ratio of Omega-6 to Omega-3 fatty acids (1.65 vs. 4.84), higher in CLA (cis-9 trans-11), a potential cancer fighter, higher in vaccenic acid (which can be transformed into CLA), and lower in the saturated fats linked with heart disease.

How does the makeup of food affect us? Most people think protein is protein, carbs are carbs, fat is fat, and calories are calories; and all that matters is the calorie count and the grams of protein, carbs, and fat in a particular food. The truth is that nutritional fact panels will only tell part of the story and explain nothing about the quality of the food you are eating. For example, according to French researcher Gerard Aihaud, “Omega-6 is like a fat producing bomb...” commenting on the results of a new study showing that mice fed the amount of Omega-6 fatty acids present in the modern western diet grow fatter and fatter with each succeeding generation and have the warning signs of diabetes versus mice who eat a healthy balance of Omega-6 and Omega-3 with equal amounts of exercise. This study suggests that if we switch to food with a healthy balance of Omega-6 and Omega-3 fatty acids, we will be leaner and healthier.
References


However, fast food companies make clients eat more. They offer over-sized burgers, extra-large French fries, and big portions of Coke. What’s more, these are usually cheaper. The chain has healthy dishes on the menu, such as fruit and vegetables. Why not order them? But you don’t go to McDonald’s for a green salad or a yoghurt! You can occasionally allow yourself a fast food meal. However, if you are eating it more than once a week, think of giving up. Fast food should play a small role in your life. If you have a way out, have a fast food meal in one of McDonald’s restaurants but choose the healthier dishes.

You should be aware of what you eat and try to develop healthy eating habits. McDonald’s is the main fast food chain in the world. While I mostly eat food from every food group. There are a few that I avoid at all costs. I am a meat eater; you name it, fish, chicken, beef, lamb I’ll eat it. But there are certain delicacies that I avoid, you can’t even pay me to eat them. Mainly, chicken liver and beef/lamb “spare parts” (that’s what I call them), specifically tripe, brain, heart, lungs. YUCK! So much sugar, and other chemicals and additives intended to manipulate and improve the taste of what would otherwise be much less tasty. Artificial sweeteners intended to feed and compensate for a sugar addiction, rather than overcome and resolve it. Chemicals and additives that were never actually intended to be for human consumption, are not part of the natural food-chain, and simply added to prolong the life of the food.

Eating properly is an important aspect of health. If you are interested in your wellbeing and that of your children, you must ensure that the food you eat is fresh. The average American eats processed food that has been prepared three or six months ago. In the yogic culture, we always consume cooked food within 1.5 hours after it comes off the stove. If it’s any later, inertia will set in. If you eat food that creates inertia in the system, you will lose all your dynamism. There is also a correlation between the kind of food you eat and the amount of sleep you need. Generally, doctors advise that it’s not what you eat, but the way that you eat it on this week’s The Food Chain. As people are exposed to cuisines from all over the world, we ask if there has been a global shrugging off of table manners. From how we sit, to the tools we use, is there a best way to consume food? And what do your eating implements of choice - hands, cutlery, or chopsticks - say about your cultural identity? We start at Lalibela, an Ethiopian restaurant in North London where experts in dining etiquette and history join us to eat a feast with their hands. Food historian Bee Wilson tells us cutlery is