

## **If You Want to Be Smarter, Become a Fat Head! (And It Doesn't Hurt to Be a Meat Head, Either)**

If someone calls you a “fat head” you’re not likely to take that as a compliment. In fact, you'd probably feel insulted. The same thing goes for being called a “meat head.” Well, by the time you finish this article, you may take these “insults” as a compliment.

Fats and animal proteins are often frowned on in “politically correct” nutrition. Low fat diets are considered healthy and many people interested in nutrition consider it healthier to be a vegetarian than to be a carnivore. But, when we look at historical information, both of these ideas don't really hold water when it comes to feeding the brain to increase intelligence and mental health.

If we look at how people lived before the advent of agriculture, we find that people lived as hunters and gatherers. Their diets consisted primarily of wild game, fish, leaves, nuts, seeds, berries, roots and other plant foods they gathered from the wild.

These people had no concentrated sources of sugars and very few concentrated sources of starch. The plant foods they ate were nutritionally dense, meaning that there were more vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals present for every calorie of energy value they consumed. As anyone who has harvested wild foods knows, wild plant foods aren’t as large or carbohydrate-rich as their cultivated counterparts.

For instance, I’ve gathered wild strawberries. Wild strawberries are much more flavorful than cultivated ones, but they are much smaller, too. When we increase the size of the fruit in modern agriculture we are increasing water and sugar content in the fruit, while losing nutritional density. Thus, we get more sugar and fewer nutrients. This holds true for many other foods as well.

Hunter-gatherers didn’t have a lot of sugars in their diet, but they did have a lot of fat and protein. We know this from the work of Dr. Weston Price, a prominent dentist who traveled the world during the 1930s studying the diets of indigenous people. He took samples of the foods they ate and compared them to the foods available in Western civilization. He also studied the dental and general health of the people from which he was collecting food samples.

Weston Price found that people living on traditional diets had good general health, including mouths free of cavities and bones free of arthritis and osteoporosis. But, our theme this month isn’t about physical health, it’s about the health of the mind, and Dr. Price also noted differences in mental and emotional health.

### **Nutrition and Mental Health**

Dr. Price found that indigenous people living on traditional diets weren't just physically healthy, they also tended to have a low crime rate and smile a lot. In contrast, he observed that people living off of modern processed foods were not only physically weaker and more prone to disease, they also had more problems with crime, depression, anxiety and other “mental” health problems.

Dr. Price's research isn't the only research showing that nutrition affects mental health. One can see a similar pattern in the research of Dr. Francis Pottenger, who conducted experiments feeding different diets to various groups of cats.

In Dr. Pottenger's experiments, cats fed a healthy diet were not only fairly disease free with healthy bones and teeth, they were also emotionally well-adjusted, playful and easy to approach. In contrast, cats fed nutritionally deficient diets developed problems with teeth and bones, were prone to parasites and diseases and exhibited major behavioral changes.

Cats fed only cooked milk or meat scraps often became aggressive and unapproachable, or extremely docile. Cats fed sweetened condensed milk, which contains sugar, developed anxiety and other neurological problems.

Another example of the affect nutrition has on mental health as well as physical health is found in Ann Wigmore's book, *Why Suffer?* She tells of a man who raised mice for pet stores. A restaurant owner convinced him to feed his mice leftovers from the restaurant to save money. Within weeks the mice were not only getting sick, they were killing each other! When he switched back to natural foods, the mice became healthy again. He pointed out that this was food that people are eating every day!

Look around at the high rates of crime, depression, anxiety, obsession and other problems in modern society that obviously involve a lack of mental and emotional well-being. It's pretty obvious that our "junk food" diets are leading to "junk food" brains.

### **The Brain Needs Good Fats**

When it comes to nutrition, you want to be a "fat head," because when you take the water out of brain tissue, 50% of what is left is fat. Most of that fat is composed of omega-3 fatty acids and the most prevalent fatty acid in the brain is an omega-3 fatty acid called DHA, which is very critical for brain development. DHA is found in breast milk and is now added to infant formulas because of its critical role in brain development.

Children naturally crave fats and low fat diets inhibit mental development in children. In fact, the lack of good fats is one of the contributing factors to behavioral problems in children such as ADHD. Some cases of seizures in children have been cured with high fat diets.

Of course, not all fats are created equal. Just as there is a big difference between eating refined sugar and white flour versus eating fruits and vegetables, there is a big difference between processed vegetable oils, margarine and shortening and natural fats.

For one thing, natural sources of fats contain other nutrients, such as fat soluble vitamins. Vitamins like A, D, E and K, help keep fats from oxidizing or turning rancid. These vitamins, as well as minerals and other nutrients are stripped out of processed fats and oils, just like they are stripped from refined carbohydrates. Oxidative stress is an underlying cause of dementia and other mental diseases associated with aging, so stripping oils of these fat soluble vitamins is a bad idea.

Weston Price noted that people eating traditional diets consumed ten times more fat soluble vitamins than people living on processed foods. That was in the 1930s. Think of how much worse the situation is

today. Without enough fat soluble vitamins, fats in the body can oxidize, which causes damage to tissues. And, since nerves are so high in fats, this damage is particularly severe to the brain and nerves.

So, if we want to be mentally alert and well-adjusted, we want to be a "fat head." But we need to make sure that we're a "natural fat-head," not a "processed fat-head." To have a healthy brain we should steer clear of processed fats and vegetable oils, margarine, shortening and deep-fried fast foods. The natural fats, that can help us be smart, come from sources like deep ocean fish (gathered from mercury-free waters), nuts like walnuts (which are shaped like small brains), macadamia nuts, flax, hemp and chia seeds, flax and hemp seed oil, eggs high in omega-3 fatty acids and grass fed meat. We can also use supplements like Super Omega-3 EPA, DHA and Krill Oil.

### **Protein and the Brain**

At the risk of offending my vegetarian readers, I also want to point out the meat and animals foods can be very beneficial for the brain. Neurotransmitters are made from amino acids, the building blocks of protein. If you aren't getting enough amino acids in your diet, you won't have the same degree of mental clarity.

I've seen many people who are strict vegans who develop mental obsession and other signs of poor mental and emotional health. Even if these people are suffering from anxiety, mania or depression they may insist that their diet is healthy. In some cases when I've been able to convince these people to add some kind of animal protein into their diet (such as dairy, eggs or even fish) they are calmer, have a better mood and their mental clarity and flexibility improves.

The bottom line is that it's not necessarily bad to be a "meat head," either. I know many people who have found they could think more clearly when they added red meat to their diet. Of course, everyone is different, so there is no perfect diet for everyone. It's just fine to be vegan or vegetarian if it works for you. It's just that for many people, it doesn't.

Actually, the worst thing you can do for your brain is to be a "sweet" head, because sugar and other refined carbohydrates really mess up your brain.

by Steven Horne, RH(AHG)