

“Death by Food Pyramid”: A review



Updated: September 8, 2016

The Food Pyramid, created by the USDA in 1992, has now been conclusively demonstrated to have undermined Americans’ health. While it has held sway, diabetes and obesity rates have soared in America.

Food manufacturers have capitalized on the Food Pyramid’s recommendations to add token amounts of “whole grains” to foods such as bagels and breakfast cereals to confer a false aura of health upon their caloric, processed, high-glycemic index products. I recently had the opportunity to interview Denise Minger ([listen to the podcast here](#)), author of *Death by Food Pyramid: How Shoddy Science, Sketchy Politics and Shady Special Interests Have Ruined Our Health*. The book provides background and historical context for how we took a huge wrong turn in our public policy toward nutrition. ✖

As Minger relates, the public implicitly trusts “health authorities,” particularly from the government, who wrongly assert:

Saturated fat clogs your arteries
Whole grains are heart-healthy
Low-fat dairy makes your bones strong
White meat is better than red
Vegetable oils are healthier than butter
High-cholesterol foods cause heart disease

Death by Food Pyramid chronicles how well-meaning but myopic scientists found their recommendations subverted by agribusiness interest groups. The key problem: The USDA has conflicted missions. On the one hand, we look to the USDA to encourage a healthy diet; on the other hand, its primary purpose is to encourage U.S. agriculture, inextricably intertwined with profit motive and consumption. The two agendas are often irreconcilable.

If you want the dish on how corruption permeates the food policy process in America, this book is for you. Minger capably joins the top-tier of sensible food critics such as Gary Taubes who have challenged the Diet Orthodoxy.

After reading *Death by Food Pyramid*, you’ll be able to muster cogent arguments to push back against militant vegetarians who claim research conclusively supports their lifestyle choice—it’s far from “settled science,” as they might claim. All the crucial studies are mercilessly dissected by Minger, and they are far from conclusive in their indictment of animal protein and saturated fat.

Minger also has written excellent, balanced critiques of the vegan diet and raw foods. As a young idealistic college student, Minger succumbed to the allure of extreme vegetarianism and suffered a bewildering array of health problems before she

switched to a more omnivorous diet.

At RawFoodSOS.com, she offers a detailed and academically scrupulous critique of the “China Study” by Colin Campbell, often invoked as the Bible of the plant-based nutrition movement. Minger uncovers bias and statistical manipulation underlying Campbell’s claim that animal protein is the cause of cancer and heart disease.

In lieu of the USDA Food Pyramid, Minger suggests an “Ancestral Food Pyramid.” That means literally turning the old pyramid on its head: Instead of a broad base of 9-12 servings of grain products per day, grains should be at the apex of the pyramid. Where once animal proteins and nuts were crowded into the top of the pyramid (to be eaten “sparingly”), they should retake their rightful place joining fruits and vegetables as the lions’ share of our diets as they did for our Paleolithic ancestors.

In *Death by Food Pyramid*, Minger asserts that the government has no business telling us what to eat. (Given its poor track record, no wonder people are skeptical of official pronouncements about diet and supplements). She sums it up as follows:

“What does this mean for you? Let’s make it easy. Anyone who’s certain they’re right about everything in nutrition is almost definitely wrong. Our understanding of diet and health is still too young for anyone to have all the answers. Carefulness and caution is the mark of a good scientist . . . ”

I couldn’t have put it better myself!

Minger concludes with this call to action:

“We’re locked in a global food fight that’s as personal as it is political—one we as consumers stand no chance at winning unless we stand up and demand, through the votes of our dollars and ballots and words, the freedom of choice. The burden is on our own shoulders to stay educated, informed, shrewd, critical, proactive, and unyielding in the face of the Goliaths that loom before us.”

So join me in the ongoing *Intelligent Medicine* exploration as we continue to bring great experts such as Denise Minger to your attention.

(Since I first published this newsletter article, Denise Minger has posted some great additional articles on her website RawFoodSOS.com, including an excellent critique of “Proteinoholic: Is It Time To Sober Up From Animal Foods?” an anti-meat book by Houston-based weight loss surgeon Garth Davis, M.D.)