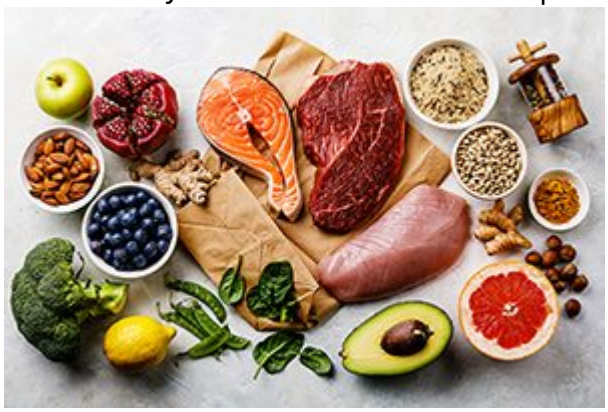
Nutrition community to Lancet: EAT this!

written by Dr. Ronald Hoffman | February 7, 2019



Last month, 37 eminent scientists from around the world released a consensus paper for *The Lancet*—the EAT-Lancet report—that recommends draconian restriction of animal protein with a dual agenda of promoting human health and saving the planet from environmental catastrophe.

I can't recall a more vociferous reaction from my nutritional colleagues during my entire professional career of over three decades!

Is it, as some insist, a rational plan for curbing our modern epidemics of diet-related degenerative diseases while at the same time averting a planetary calamity? Or a wrongheaded blueprint for a command-and-control global food economy with incalculable effects on human health and oversold benefits for climate change?

A great summary and analysis of what EAT-Lancet proposes can be found in an article by the Alliance for Natural Health International.

Features of the diet include:

- Drastic restriction of the daily allotment of animal protein. Red meat is restricted to just seven grams per day (think a strip of bacon, or a beef serving weighing the equivalent of seven EPA capsules—for reference, a "Quarter Pounder" weighs 113 grams!).
- Despite a laudable effort by EAT-Lancet authors to curtail sugar intake, there's a greater energy allowance for sugar (120 kcal) than for beef, lamb, pork, chicken, other poultry, and eggs combined (111 kcal energy).
- Protein from dairy sources is earmarked to exceed the total protein derived from the meat of livestock—this despite widespread variations in people's tolerance for milk and dairy products.
- A very hefty proportion of protein is to be obtained via more "environmentally-sound" plant sources, like legumes and especially soy.
- It recommends a 32% contribution of daily energy from whole grains (34% of that from starchy carbohydrates).
- The recommendation to supplant saturated fats with predominantly

> vegetable oils would result in a net preponderance of Omega 6 fatty acids over Omega 3 fatty acids, skewing toward a pro-inflammatory Omega 6:3 ratio.

Many excellent critiques of the EAT-Lancet report have been published by prominent and responsible voices within the nutrition community. Here are some of their concerns.

Conflict of interest: The majority of EAT-Lancet scientists are pro-vegetarian or pro-vegan. Nina Teicholz writes “An examination of the EAT-Lancet authors reveals that more than 80% of them (31 out of 37) espoused vegetarian views before joining the EAT-Lancet project.” The author of the study, Walter Willett, a distinguished Harvard professor of nutrition, is a big fan of “plant-based diets”; his numerous conflicts of interest, including support from vegetarian groups are enumerated here.

Conflation of objectives: It’s one thing to claim that it’s healthier for humans to eschew most animal protein. But to hitch that proposition—which remains highly contested—to a completely separate and distinct controversial environmental agenda is rhetorically powerful, but inherently unscientific. It’s almost like saying: “Even if we’re jumping the gun about the universal health benefits of minimizing animal protein consumption, there’s a planetary emergency that dictates immediate rationing of meat.” But even if the far-reaching environmental benefits were to pan out—which is debatable—does this justify inflicting an academic’s version of a healthy diet on every man, woman and child on Earth?

Dubious nutritional science: The EAT-Lancet report basically doubles down on challenged orthodoxy: That saturated fat and animal protein are inherently bad, and drivers of our dual epidemics of cancer and cardiovascular disease. These contentions are belied by the latest studies that exonerate meat and dairy. The EAT-Lancet diet recommendations are completely at odds with findings that a low-carb Paleo-style diet can be the best way reverse metabolic syndrome and obesity. Emerging evidence implicates starchy grains as contributors to cognitive decline and autoimmunity. Legumes are problematic for many, and their elimination and substitution with animal protein alleviates symptoms. Not to mention the success of the Keto diet for everything from diabetes to seizures, Alzheimer’s, and even cancer.

Nutritionally incomplete: Zoe Harcombe PhD has argued that the EAT-Lancet diet is nutritionally incomplete. Her calculations show that nutrients traditionally derived from animal sources—B12, the retinol form of vitamin A, iron, calcium and omega 3—might be marginal. Drastic restriction of sodium under EAT-Lancet would suit some subgroups like certain salt-sensitive hypertensives or those with heart failure, but won’t benefit most healthy adults and children.

Fuzzy “climate preservation” logic: Predictions of the imminent demise of mankind have been made since the time of Malthus (1766 to 1834). Even if we acknowledge that climate change is man-made, the estimate of the contribution

made by greenhouse gases produced by meat consumption is around 8%—far outweighed by the carbon footprints of the transportation and energy industries. It could even be argued that sustainable agricultural practices actually preserve grazing ecosystems, maintaining soil balance and recycling carbon dioxide.

Command and control: There's a world-wide trend towards regulation, curbing of individual freedoms, and outright totalitarianism, ostensibly to achieve lofty goals. A diet *diktat* that punishes meat consumers is yet another step toward more government control. I'm envisioning the world-famous steak houses that populate my East Side Manhattan neighborhood reduced to covert speakeasies where unrepentant carnivores get their illicit animal protein fixes!

Anticipate a flood of ersatz products: The profit margin on unadulterated, non-processed animal products is razor-thin. That's why the food industry is continually hunting for ways to tart up cheap commodities like corn, soy, and wheat—mostly GMO—into highly-processed, tasty faux foods. The "Greenwashing" effect gives these unscrupulous marketers a halo of social responsibility. They're banking on harnessing your eco-anxiety and environmental guilt to goose their sales of profitable low-fat and vegan products your grandparents would instinctively reject.

You might not feel well: Read what this *Guardian* reporter writes after sampling the latest meat substitute:

"I started to question the healthiness of some of the new generation of vegan burgers after I ate a Beyond Burger, as served at the Honest Burger chain. While eating the burger – which came with guacamole and "pulled" barbecued jackfruit – I was stunned by how close it felt to meat in my mouth, with its rosy pink hue and fragile flesh-like texture. But it felt nothing like meat to my digestive system. Half an hour after lunch, I started to have griping stomach pains and a horrible junk-food aftertaste. When I looked up the ingredients, it occurred to me that had they not been marketed as quasi-meat I would never have chosen to lunch on "pea protein isolate, expeller-pressed canola oil, refined coconut oil, water, yeast extract, maltodextrin, natural flavours, gum Arabic …"

Additionally, there's a fair amount of research that suggests that at least some vegetarians experience mood problems while consuming a diet deficient in neurotransmitter precursors and key vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids.

In the coming months and years, you'll be seeing a big media push to promote the EAT-Lancet agenda. Many powerful industry, academic and government forces are aligning to implement it. *Caveat emptor!*