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Evolutionary Biology

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FORCES OF NATURE

Human Evolution Speeds Up



Henry Harpending is distinguished professor of anthropology at the University of Utah. He makes a speciality of studying the genetics behind the differences in the various human races. In his latest study he reports on how, genetically speaking, human differences have been accelerating since the first humans left Africa some 60,000 years ago [[Ref 1](#)].

The explanation is straightforward. The population has multiplied from a few thousand to 6 thousand million during that time. With that massive increase in population comes a massive increase in the numbers of people carrying a genetic mutation. Harmless mutations then spread quickly throughout a population. An example is the arise of blue eyes and blond hair in just such peoples as the Vikings

(see "Blondes got the Blokes", [March 2006](#))

"Human races are evolving away from each other," Harpending says. "Genes are evolving fast in Europe, Asia and Africa, but almost all of these are unique to their continent of origin. We are getting less alike, not merging into a single, mixed humanity." (see also [September 2000](#), [August 2002](#))

Hence (for example) the distinctive traits found in different ethnic populations. For example: athletic prowess, intelligence ([October 2004](#)), disease susceptibility, temperament ([August 2004](#)) and parental investment ([September 2004](#)).

So what happened to the Vikings? (Picture above) Only 1,000 years ago they were a terrible scourge -- raping, pillaging and creating mayhem for thousands of miles around their homeland in Scandinavia. Today, Swedes, Danes and even Norwegians are the pussycats of the world's nations.

Harpending ventures the idea that a peace-loving gene arose and then spread to make Scandinavia the most feminized society in the world.

However, we venture an alternative idea. The Vikings were not only marauders, they were *migrants*. Their population multiplied fast and quickly outgrew the capacity of the harsh Scandinavian climate to support them. In the 9th and 10th Centuries, Vikings migrated en masse in their longboats (picture), using the amount of force necessary to establish themselves, their families and their cattle in land that didn't belong to them.

In that way they colonized, in bloody battle, the whole of the east coast of England (Canute was one of their kings), Normandy in France (Normans), vast swathes of Russia and Ukraine, Sicily (where they refined protection rackets and laid the foundations of the Mafia) and parts of Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium and Scotland.

Now here we have an interesting mechanism at work. Which Viking families stayed at home? -- and which ones risked their lives fighting for a new life in foreign parts? On average, the risk-averse would stay put. So there we have it. Present day Scandinavians are descended, on average, from the unadventurous peaceniks who stayed home.

But curiously, Swedes still give more respect to people who demonstrate manly social behavior. Alexandra Snellman, doctoral candidate at Uppsala University (Sweden) found that the greater the identification with manliness, the higher the social dominance [[Ref 3](#)].

HUMAN FRAILTIES

Medical Myths Even Doctors Believe

Indiana University School of Medicine researchers explored seven commonly held medical myths including:

- People only use 10 percent of their brains
- Hair and fingernails continue to grow after we die
- Eating turkey makes you sleepy
- People should drink at least eight glasses of water a day
- Shaving hair causes it to grow back faster or coarser
- Reading in dim light ruins your eyesight

These beliefs are commonly accepted, not only by the general population, but also by many physicians. The authors' surprising findings -- all the beliefs are untrue [[Ref 8](#)].

The first belief they explored (and dear to our own heart) -- people should drink at least eight glasses of water (64 fluid oz) a day. This advice has been promoted as healthful as well as a useful dieting or weight control strategy. "When we examined this belief, we found that there is no medical evidence to suggest that you need that much water." In fact they came to the same conclusion as we have espoused on several occasions: that most of this water will be in the food we eat and in the various other drinks (like tea and coffee) that we consume. (See [September 2002](#)).

As for the other myths - well, just don't unnecessarily worry your children about them.

Why Women Worry So Much

Scientists have known that on the whole, females of all ages tend to worry more and more intensely than males. Women also tend to see more risk in situations and grow more anxious than men. Now they think they know why. Women are more likely than men to believe that past experiences accurately forecast the future [[Ref 13](#)]. Men on the whole, treat each new situation on its merits without reference to the past.

We don't know what use this information might be other than to encourage men to be more supportive of, and less irritated by, a woman's "fussing".

RECIPE

Zucchini Curry Quick Fix

Yield: 4 servings (as a side dish)

A curry is often a good way to spice up bland veggies (like zucchini). Here, by the judicious use of other eastern spices and condiments, we conjure up a dish redolent of the exotic orient. Since this is a quick fix, we focus on the use of several ready-prepared ingredients, but nothing stops you from substituting fresh. This dish tastes its best the day after preparation.

Ingredients

olive oil spray
 1 cup frozen chopped onion (about 4 ounces)
 2 teaspoons ready-made chopped garlic
 1 teaspoon ready-made chopped ginger
 2 - 3 teaspoons Thai red curry paste, to taste
 1/2 cup coconut milk
 2 teaspoons light soy sauce
 2 pounds zucchini, unpeeled and cut into bite-size pieces
 2 teaspoons lemon juice
 freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Method

1. Spray a large frying pan (or a wok) with the oil and sauté the onion, until it is soft and translucent.
2. Mix in the garlic, ginger and sauté all together for 2 minutes.
3. Mix in the curry paste, the coconut milk and soy sauce.
4. Add the zucchini and coat the veggies with the sauce.
5. Cover and bring slowly to a boil. Cook for approximately 30 minutes, or until done.
6. Season with the lemon juice and pepper to taste.

QUESTIONS

Gut Recovery from Antibiotics

Q. After a week's course of antibiotics, I have grumbling guts and diarrhea. Is there anything I should be doing?

A. Certainly. There will have been a massive die-off of gut flora. In particular, the critical "bio-film" coating the gut wall will be destroyed. It is this area which must be colonized by "good" bacteria and other organisms, for good health to be restored.

You can't do anything to "seed" the good bacteria. Live bacteria products, such as yogurt, contain only one or two species out of the hundreds you need, and the stomach juices do a good job of killing them off long before they can reach your colon. On top of that, yogurt is the last thing you need to come in contact with that raw and vulnerable gut wall.

No, as you write to me, various bugs appear out of nowhere and fight a battle royal for this prime piece of real estate on your colon wall. You must do everything you can to ensure that the good guys win.

You can do nothing better than to continue to eat like we say. Plenty of plant food (salads, vegetables, low-sugar fruits) to feed and nourish the helpful bacteria. Strictly avoid the foods that irritate the gut such as grains in all their forms, dairy and legumes. Go easy on foods of animal origin (even "conforming" ones like fish): they feed the "sulfur-reducing" bacteria in the colon which produce corrosive quantities of sulfuric acid. For similar reasons avoid processed foods (you would anyway wouldn't you?) containing sulfur such as cold meats, packaged salads, hamburgers and so on.

You need to keep this up for several weeks until the colon flora finally finds its equilibrium.

There is lots more information in "The Underrated Colon", pages 114 to 119 of [Deadly Harvest](#).

Body Mass Index for Growing Children

Q. Does the Body Mass Index (BMI) work for children? My 11-year old son is 4'-11" tall, rather flabby and weighs 124 lb (8 stone 12lb).

A. Yes. But the standards are quite different for growing children -- and age and gender have to be considered too. According to this chart, your boy is pretty overweight: 95% of boys his age will weigh less than him for that height. (You can find this chart (for boys) plus one for girls, and much other useful information at this US government website: [\[Ref 2\]](#).)



Your boy is "flabby" and so his exceptional weight for his height is not due to an incredibly muscular build. He is therefore obese and his health is severely compromised. Worse, he is locking-in a permanent source of ill-health for the rest of his life.

For your son's future well-being you have an iron duty to take him in hand and feed him and exercise him like we say. I know it can be a challenge to do this in practice, but try to pick up on the various hints and tips in these newsletters (see articles later) and see "Children/Adolescents" in [Deadly Harvest](#), page 182.

Fibroids and Lifestyle

Q. I am a 35 year old woman suffering from fibroids (myomas) in my womb. Is there anything I can do from a lifestyle point of view?

A. Possibly. Starting from the presumption that this is not supposed to happen in a normally functioning human being, then something must have provoked the condition. Surprisingly, there have been few studies. The chief one finds that a woman is more likely to develop fibroids if she has a higher than average consumption of red meat (notably beef and ham). She is less likely if she has a higher than average consumption of green vegetation and fruits [\[Ref 9\]](#).

Another study found that women with the highest levels of physical activity had the least likelihood of developing fibroids [\[Ref 10\]](#). Obesity increased likelihood [\[Ref 11\]](#). One study suggests that deficiency of the sunshine vitamin, vitamin D, increases chances of tumorous growths in the womb [\[Ref 12\]](#).

In summary, the evidence points to a lifestyle like we say to avoid getting fibroids. No one seems to know if it helps once you have got them -- but we suspect it does -- on the principle of if you are in a deep hole, it helps to stop digging!

HINTS & TIPS

Letter: How to Encourage Children to Eat Right

A mother of two children writes:

"I have pinned up a color chart on my kitchen wall showing the vitamins the body needs and what they do to help it work properly. Both my children read it. I emphasize that if you eat the right things, your skin and hair glow, nails are healthy, eyes are bright and so on. Moreover they will avoid getting fat. (They are both trim).

"Even their visiting young friends are intrigued. When I serve up something they are not used to, like broccoli, they look up what vitamins it contains and what they are good for. Then they tuck into it and, when they go home, they ask their own mothers to serve healthy food instead of the usual pizza or burger and fries.

"In my experience, it is sufficient to open these young people's eyes to healthy alternatives. After all, they are keen to trim down and have healthy skin, nails and eyes too!

"I feel it is important to be positive about food -- and for both mothers and children to know how they should be eating. I feel a booklet in the making here....just for children (not the science) just the vitamins, what they do, in what foods they find them and lots of color photos! What do you say?"

Congratulations! You have found a wonderful way to influence your children's minds in a healthy direction. Furthermore, you are helping to spread these healthy habits to a wider circle of friends. You might find it tricky explaining what is going on to the other mums, but it is important to have their cooperation. We wish you well!

As for preparing materials for small children, well, there's an idea. We would love to hear from, and collaborate with, anyone who is used to writing for children. - Geoff Bond.

Make Inertia Work for You

We all find it easier to favor the status quo or "default" option. As an example: if fast food restaurants offered mineral water as standard and you had to make a specific request for soda, then most people would just "ride" with the water. You can do the same with your children. Not just water. Do that with everything you feed them. Make the default state one of healthy food: make it difficult for them to nag you into giving them unhealthy snacks. Make it hard for yourself to do so: keep them in a locked cabinet where you have to climb upstairs to get the key. Think of similar dodges that work for you.

Battle "Mindless Eating" - Keep Visual Cues

People only ate half as many Halloween candies if they they left the discarded wrappers in full view [[Ref 7](#)]. We do not of course condone the candies, but think about this stratagem if you are ever feel like abandoning yourself to the temptations of seasonal festivities.

Present Sacrifice for Future Benefit

We find it hard to postpone the pleasure of something now for the sake of greater benefit later. This is why New Year's resolutions don't last long. We want to look good on the beach in August, but it is hard to give up the food in January!

Try to work with the grain. Give yourself innocent rewards NOW for healthier behavior.

EARTH ECOLOGY

Humans consume a quarter of Earth's natural productivity

There's 6.6 billion of us. New research indicates that in vast regions people, by dint of their burgeoning numbers, are consuming almost two-thirds of the biological productivity of the Earth [[Refs 4, 5](#)].

"We were surprised how intensively these regions were being affected" by human presence, says Karl- Heinz Erb, an ecologist at Klagenfurt University in Vienna. "Only one-third of the natural productivity is left for all the other species."

Overall, nearly one-quarter of Earth's biological productivity ends up in people's hands and bellies. A projected 25 percent increase in the world's population by 2030 is bound to strain ecosystems even further. Some scientists now wonder: At what point do the world's ecosystems begin to break down? Or, more frighteningly, has that process already begun?

OPINION

Climate Changes and Humbug

Last month ([November 2007](#)) we saw how the Earth's climate has been on a warming trend for over 12,000 years, that carbon dioxide levels have been much higher in the past, and that King Canute demonstrated human impotence in the face of the forces of nature. Our Opinion column ended: "What about the much publicized Intergovernmental Report produced by a panel of experts [[Ref 6](#)], 'who, you all know, are honorable men'? This is where the humbug comes in."

Part II - Humbug

They say, quite rightly that the earth's climate is warming up. But who are we to question them when they claim that it is due to human activity – for they are honorable men? They say that we should reduce emissions of greenhouse gases – for they are honorable men. Yet they admit that even if we stopped right now, the climate will continue to heat up for centuries – so they are honorable men.

They say that extremes of climate will be more frequent, that crops will suffer, that water will be scarcer, and that coastal plains will be flooded. Or to paraphrase Shakespeare's King Lear: " that winds will blow and crack their cheeks, that cataracts and hurricanoes will spout and drench our steeples, and that all-shaking thunder, will smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world."

They say that this will happen whatever we do -- just a year or two sooner if we do nothing.

On top of it, they are only looking at carbon emissions. They mention, but then remain silent on another greenhouse gas that is 20 times more potent than CO₂: methane. They are silent because the one factor we have control over is taboo: it would mean cutting right back on beef and dairy herds. Cattle belch pints of methane with every mouthful of cud.

They remain silent on a whole range of other possible measures. One that is dear to my own heart is over-population. Already humans have an overwhelming impact on the Earth's ecosystem (See "Humans consume a quarter of Earth's natural productivity", previous article).

Rather than trying to stabilize (just "stabilize" mark you) carbon levels by 2100, how about a program to reduce the world's population to 10% of its current level?

Wouldn't that be wonderful? Suddenly the human footprint on the planet would become sustainable. There would be enough resources for everyone, we could all enjoy a high standard of living – and greenhouse gas emissions would be 10% of what they are now!

It is not so unrealistic. The Chinese have shown one way with their 25 year-long one child per family policy. In spite of some cheating, their female fertility rate is down to 1.7 births per woman which is significantly lower than the 2.1 needed to maintain replacement. As a result, they estimate that the Chinese population is now some 400 million fewer than it would have been. (Yes -- 400 million! - that's more than the entire population of the United States!)

No need for coercive policies in developed countries. Quite naturally fertility levels are below replacement rate: France 1.90, Norway 1.81, Sweden 1.75, UK 1.74, Netherlands 1.73, Germany 1.37, Italy 1.33, Spain 1.32, Russia 1.3, Greece 1.29, Japan 1.29.

So is everything all right then? Not necessarily! In western Europe, the population is actually increasing -- due to immigration from the third world. However, the Russians and Japanese, who protect their societies from immigration can look forward to a pleasing reduction in congestion, social strife and squalor of public services.

There are good reasons for conserving carbon resources. There are good reasons for reducing pollution. But halting global warming is as futile as Canute turning the tide. Rather, we should throw our energies into protecting ourselves from the consequences.

FOOD-DISEASE CONNECTIONS

Flavonoid-Poor Diet Allows Ovarian Cancer to Flourish

Women who had the lowest intake of the flavonoids "kaemferol", (found for example in black tea and broccoli) and of "luteolin" (found for example in carrots, peppers and cabbage) starved their bodies' natural defences thereby allowing ovarian cancer to flourish [[Ref 14](#)].

Poor Bone Health Linked to Obesity

Obese adolescent females have more fragile bones, contrary to common belief [[Ref 15](#)]. The researchers speculate that the fat cells produce hormones which depress the activity of bone building cells.

Increased Glucose Level is a Strong Risk for Colorectal Cancer

Patients with the highest levels of glucose and insulin had much increased risk of cancer of the colon and/or rectum. Moreover, they had a 50% increased chance of cancer recurring after treatment [[Ref 16](#)].

EVENTS

USA Speaking Tour

Geoff and Nicole will be traveling to southern California for a series of lectures to medical staff during March. Geoff will also be doing a book signing at the Natural Products exposition at the Square One booth, Expo West, Anaheim on Saturday, March 15th.

FOOTNOTES

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