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PRESS ARTICLE

Degenerative Disease in Prehistory

I receive many questions from my readers and audiences. The following one goes to the heart of what I study, write and talk about.

Q. *I was surprised to read in your book, *Deadly Harvest*, that in prehistory humans did not suffer from diseases such as cancer, arthritis and high blood pressure. It must be hard to prove that such diseases did not exist 40,000 years ago.*

A. *Deadly Harvest* is one long argument demonstrating that all the evidence points to this conclusion. Some of the evidence is direct: for example we can inspect ancient human bones; we can analyze the preserved flesh of Egyptian mummies.

But the simple fact is that the diseases you mention (plus many more like diabetes, dementia and osteoporosis) are caused by us throwing a spanner into the works of the body's complex biochemistry. It is not for nothing that health professionals call these conditions "diseases of civilization".

I explain at length that peoples who continue to live in the way nature intended simply do not suffer these diseases. For example, they are unknown among the Kalahari Bushmen and Tarahumara hill-people of Mexico. Quite simply their metabolism is allowed to function in the way it recognizes.

Even in historical times (when we have written records) these diseases were virtually unknown in the ancient civilizations of Greece, Egypt, China and Babylon. Even the Hebrews (who as sheep herders would not have had the greatest diets) do not mention these diseases in the Old Testament.

But we do not even have to go back so far. Famously the Cretans and Okinawans lived extremely long lives and they lived them in good shape to the end. When researchers like Ancel Keys studied them in the 1950's, they had the longest "health expectancy" on record. (Health Expectancy is the lifespan lived in good health). The reason is simple: their lifestyle and notably their nutrition, was (by happy coincidence) largely in harmony with the way the body expects.

Finally, I appeal to recent memory. Just in the lifetime of our grandparents, cancer, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and Alzheimer's have moved from rarities to the leading causes of disability and death. Just in the last 20 years, diabetes has moved from being a rarity to a widespread plague. They are all diseases of deranged metabolism. For this reason we also dub them "degenerative diseases".

In prehistoric times it was impossible for people to mistreat their bodies like we do today. Milk, grains, starches, sugars, bad fats and omega-6 vegetable oils (like corn oil and sunflower oil) simply did not exist; it was impossible to live without plentiful fresh air, sunshine and physical activity. Under these conditions the metabolism functions normally and the body cannot degenerate into "degenerative diseases" like cancers, heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, diabetes etc...

So the message is very simple. These diseases are optional; we can choose not to have them! Or if we already have them we can mobilize our body's remarkable powers of self-repair to give ourselves the best chance of recovery. All we need to do is live our lives in harmony with the way our bodies (and minds) recognize.

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Geoff Bond is a nutritional anthropologist and a recognized authority on what it means to be human in lifestyle terms. He lectures widely and is available for the occasional talk to interested groups. Contact him at GeoffBond@naturaleater.com. Rosie Charalambous interviewed Geoff recently for her "Round and About" program on CYBC radio. You can hear it again on www.cybc.com.cy.

Geoff's latest book, *Deadly Harvest*, is the reference work for lifestyle anthropology and the mastering of degenerative disease. It is stocked by all good bookstores. More information about Geoff's work on his website: www.naturaleater.com.
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