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Press Article

Make Of Your Gut a Herb Garden (Part I)

Our evolutionary history designed us for life on the savannas of east Africa...

Back in Victorian times, it was the common wisdom that one should empty the bowels once a day. Instinctively those practical Victorians felt that it is not good to have toxic waste hanging around in the body. But as time wore on into the 1920's those ideas fell out of favor: constipation seemed to be the natural condition!

But anyone who has spent time with tribal societies will be aware that they defecate frequently and copiously. As early as 1939 the explorer-doctor Weston Price, MD, observed how such societies enjoyed many health benefits as a result. In the 1970's Dr Denis Burkitt reinforced Price's work with his own observations on African villagers. For the first time the colon's contents were thought of as a living thing: "biomass".

Even so, ten years ago, when I first wrote about gut health in my book *Natural Eating*, conventional medicine still thought of the colon as a nuisance. If they thought of the colon's contents at all, they called it "excrement" and thought of it as proto-sewage. Our knowledge has come a long way since then, and it reinforces my insistence on how the right biomass is a key element in good health. I made a feature of it in my latest book *Deadly Harvest*. Now the evidence is pouring in.

Until now, scientists had only identified some 500 species of bacteria in our guts. I had always thought that this is a gross underestimate: researchers had only been able to count the few species that they knew how to grow under laboratory conditions. Now Les Dethlefsen PhD at Stanford University, using ground-breaking DNA techniques, finds that there are at least 5,000 species of bacteria in the colon – that's TEN times as many as previously thought!

The Battle of the Bugs

These intestinal microbes live, for better or for worse, on the food residues we send down. Send down the wrong residues and the bad bugs take over; send down the right residues and the friendly ones thrive. Why does that matter? Over the millions of years, our bodies have come to depend on the benefits that the friendly bugs bring us. For example, without them our immune systems don't develop properly and we will be deficient in essential nutrients such as vitamin K and propionic acid. Furthermore, good bacteria fiercely defend their citadel (our colons) from the bad bugs that are forever battering at the gates.

Over 100 TRILLION bacteria inhabit a healthy gut. We now know that the balance of power between the species is critical. But what have got today? Bad bugs have invaded and infested the colons of people on the classic western diet. Right in the heart of our bodies we are harboring a vicious, evil-doing enemy. What does it take to drive out the hostile forces and welcome in the good guys? I'll come on to that later, but first let us look at some of the latest discoveries about the benefits that a properly functioning biomass brings us.

Infection Fighting

Dr. Gerard Eberl, at the Institut Pasteur, shows that good bacteria communicate with the immune system to generate lymphoid tissue. This tissue produces antibodies which are vital agents in fighting bad bacteria and infection. Without them the bad bacteria and infections get a foothold.

Next month: I will explain about how the mischief created by bad gut bacteria contributes to inflammatory bowel diseases, autoimmune diseases (like Diabetes type I, asthma and allergies), osteoporosis, cancers and heart disease.

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Geoff Bond is a nutritional anthropologist and a recognized authority on what it means to be human in lifestyle terms. American hospitals employ him to give in-service training to their doctors about mastering the lifestyle diseases like cancer, heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. The Walter T Stec Foundation supports Geoff in bringing his message into American schools. He is on the health panel of the UK think-tank Reform. Geoff's latest book, *Deadly Harvest*, is the reference work for lifestyle anthropology and the connection with degenerative disease. All good bookstores stock it.

Geoff is available for private consultations and the occasional talk to interested groups.

More information about Geoff's work on his website: www.naturaleater.com.

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