

Life Without Bread

How a Low-Carbohydrate Diet Can Save Your Life

[McGraw Hill] 2000

By Christian Allan and Woofgang Lutz

Review

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The Truths

I accept the fact that humans did not evolve with a high proportion of grains in their diet, and definitely not refined grains. In the modern diet of western civilization, certainly grains are the major sources of carbohydrates – together with sugar in its various forms. The fact that there are no essential carbohydrates that must be part of the human diet is suggestive in itself that carbohydrates are not essential foods! So, it seems reasonable to reduce the degree of carbohydrate consumption – especially in its refined form – to promote the hormonal balance that Allan and Lutz propose and to avoid the diseases that can be associated with the hormonal imbalances that high carbohydrate intake can promote. Indeed, one of the outstanding contributions of Lutz and Allan is to lay out in detail the relationship of excessive simple carbohydrate consumption to insulin resistance [Syndrome X, type 2 diabetes] and the foundation role insulin plays in the hormonal system overall. The book is worth reading for that explication alone.

Stretching the Truth

What is not clear is the need for the degree of the reduction of carbohydrates in the diet that Allan and Lutz propose – to 72 grams of useable carbohydrate. There are many sources of carbohydrate that are not associated with grains or sugars. And more importantly, there are diets among modern cultures [Asian and Central and South American in the main] that center on the consumption of starch [rice, wheat, corn] that do not display the insulin based diseases so prominent in “western” culture. Clearly not all diets high in starch [carbohydrates] are problematic, and clearly diets high in meat products [protein and fat] are not necessary for good health – a central assumption in the Lutz argument. One has to ask, how is it possible to ignore the health consequences of the diets of half the modern [agriculturally based] human population, diets which directly challenge the major contention and assumption of Lutz’s low carb diet.

Allan and Lutz virtually ignore the contribution to ill health in the western population of stress [multiple sources] and lack of exercise. Neither do they take seriously the potential contribution to ill health caused by fertilizers and pesticides, which have been used exponentially in the same time frame as the recognized emergence of “modern” health problems among western populations. And it has to be obvious that in the existing western cultural context there are as many potential negative health consequences of a high fat and protein diet as there are for a high carbohydrate diet [the Lutz diet is a no holds barred high fat diet].

Most importantly, Lutz and Allan do not identify the ill health effects to the fat composition of meat and dairy from animals raised or finished on grain. True, Paleolithic man ate very little grain. But it is also true that the high fat and protein diets of Paleolithic man were from wild animals that consumed what was appropriate for them in their natural ecologies. Most of these animals ate very little grain and more insects, vegetable matter, and the organs and meat of other animals. Modern industrial husbandry is based on grain feeding [mostly corn and soy] and the animals we now eat are themselves ill on these diets and have a very different fat composition – the relation of Omega 3 to 6 fatty acids. The fat of grain fed animals contains four to five times as much Omega 6; so the ratio of Omega 3 to 6 is entirely different in these animals as compared to that found in the wild animals that humans adapted to consume during their evolution. So, while Lutz and Allan’s contention may be accurate that humans can survive and even thrive on eating mostly animal products [including organ meats to obtain much needed nutrients], this contention does not extend to the animal products of industrial, grain based husbandry [where at the very least the organ meats are eschewed]. Indeed, these industrial animal products are thought to be making us as sick as the animals themselves – the difference being that the animals are artificially short lived while we desire to be long lived.

My Conclusions

The answer Allan and Lutz offer is too simple! It is another example of a truth carried too far, a search for a single variable explanation for a problem that is complex and that has several variables that probably are causal – in combination!

The whole point in all of this pursuit of the “best” diet should be to recognize physiologically where we come from in the range of diet that formed the basis for our evolution and to keep the components of diet in balance – respecting that history. At the same time we need to recognize that the human diet has always been extremely variable [depending on circumstances and food

availability], and humans are extremely adaptable with diet as part of that adaptability. Our physiological evolution is not monolithic; it includes great flexibility in what can be the dietary base – from nearly all fat and protein based diets to nearly all vegetarian based diets, with good health achieved at either extreme [when these food sources are from the natural ecology dynamic and all the other issues that affect health are addressed!]

When the information presented in the Allan and Lutz work is put together with the results of research surrounding the emergence of the glycemic index, it becomes clear that the matter of excessive carbohydrate intake in the modern western diet, and especially of the intake of simple carbs from refined grains, is clearly important and significant, but I am not convinced that the case has been made for the more extreme carbohydrate reduction proposals, like that of Allan and Lutz.