

The McDougall Newsletter

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Readers' Responses to the "Low-fat Diet Failure" News

I want to take this opportunity to share your responses to me about the news story on Wednesday, February 8, 2006 about the "failure of the low-fat diet" and my response to that article (see my letter below).

Reader Responses

I just wanted to say my mother was one of the women studied in the WHI program. I watched her go on the low fat diet. Today she is 30 pounds over weight and now diabetic. She is also dealing with high blood pressure and her husband, who ate with her has had his second heart attack. Some diet!!! I learned what not to eat watching them. I have been vegan now for 4 months and my husband is also vegan. I want to be independent of the drugs that seem to go with "old age" in America when I am older and I want to be healthy and be able to play with my grand children.
Sincerely, EJ

Thank you Dr. McDougall for your comments on this Outrages information put out by the nationwide media. I found their information insulting. JNA

Sorry to say, they interviewed one of the researchers on NPR and he proclaimed that this study was proof that dietary changes had no impact on one's health and the best thing was to 'trust your doctor' for your untreatable conditions. The interviewer was completely ignorant and just helped this clown sow confusion. Thanks for your efforts to clarify the meaning of the research.

Regards, DF

Yeah for Dr. McDougall. When I read this in the newspaper, I could hear your words in my head: A Clear Case Against Moderation!! D

Thank you Dr. McDougall once again. I know it takes time and energy to respond to these foolish reports. Even though 99% of the public who will read the headlines of that report saying a low-fat diet doesn't not make a difference, and use those headlines to keep eating their fat based diet of animal products and say a vegan is unhealthy, I know you are right because it has been working for years and no report saying differently can take that away. RM
ps I have been a vegan [a healthy one] since 1971, I wish you and Mary the best.

This is just what the doctor ordered Thank you. K

This past week, when I heard the ridiculous news reports you cite, I was HORRIFIED because I have BEEN (in the past) one of those people who WANTED to hear such lies so they can, with peace of mind and wild abandon, continue eating all the "delicious"-but-deadly foods they grew up with. Therefore, I KNOW VERY WELL HOW MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WILL RESPOND to this news.....they will DITCH even the minimal efforts they may have been expending to refrain from the DEADLIEST foods, and shout, with glee, "what they heck" and go for the Double Quarter Pounder with Bacon and Cheese! (et al.)

This message from you, two days later, has made me cry, because you are only ONE VOICE of very few which is

**WHI Report: "Low-fat diet may not cut some disease risks;
little change seen in cancer, heart problems"
A Clear Case Against Moderation**

In the early 1990s, the founders of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study were guests on my syndicated radio show. During these interviews, and on many other occasions, I challenged Ernst Wynder, MD (now deceased) and Rowan Chlebowski, MD to teach the women in their study a meaningful diet—specifically, a very low-fat, plant-food-based, McDougall-type diet—so that when the day comes that the results are published the real benefits of healthy eating will be shown. Both insisted that the "moderate diet" they were using would be adequate. Twelve years and \$415 million later, on Wednesday, February 8, 2006, news headlines about their research findings showed them wrong. Please understand that I take no joy in being right; rather I am saddened because now we all must live with the incorrect conclusions that diet cannot prevent cancer or heart disease.

The truth is, this study of nearly 50,000 older women, ages 50 to 79 years, has only reinforced the well-known fact that "skinning your chicken" and "drinking low-fat milk" is inconsequential. The Women's Health Initiative was not the first, nor is it likely to be the last, study to prove that what most people consider to be a "reasonable, moderate or prudent diet" is at best a trivial improvement over the disease-causing, standard American diet.

Proof that the low-fat diet intervention used in this study was ineffective is the report of an average of one pound (0.4 Kg) of weight loss after 8 years of dieting (compared to those not dieting). Furthermore, the women's blood levels of cholesterol and triglycerides, and blood pressures hardly changed after all that effort. Their dietary histories revealed that even though the low-fat diet group received "an intensive behavior modification program that consisted of 18 group sessions in the first year and quarterly maintenance sessions thereafter," they continued to eat nearly the same amount of fiber, protein, red meat, chicken, fish, and grains. The addition of one more serving of fruits and vegetables daily may have accounted for the 9% reduction in breast cancer observed for the low-fat group.

People worldwide have been, and are still being, betrayed by investigators who spend taxpayer's dollars on useless dietary research—and they should not be forgiven because they have always known better. Since the 1950s studies have shown that the more plant-foods, and less processed and animal foods, populations consume, the less breast and colon cancer and heart disease they will develop. Furthermore, there is no "safe threshold"—in other words, the lower the fat intake, the less the cancer and heart disease. In fact, long before the Women's Health Initiative study was conceived, Dr. Ernst Wynder had published extensively on the benefits of the very-low fat (10%), almost vegetarian, Japanese diet for prevention and treatment of breast cancer. So why was a "moderate" diet, instead of the best one, tested?

My nearly 40 years of experience, working with hundreds of influential doctors and scientists, leads me to believe they have a very low opinion of patients and the public in general. They believe we are too stupid and too uninterested in our own welfare to make meaningful changes in our diet—specifically, to follow a plant-food based diet. When I suggest such powerful dietary changes, they respond with, "That's unreasonable; no one will follow a vegetarian diet." Even if they were correct, you and I still deserve to know the truth, so that this option for preventing illnesses and premature death is available to us.

The Women's Health Initiative should be remembered as the study that inspired honesty in the scientific community and put an end to ineffective research using a "sensible diet." No longer should the excuse that people won't follow a truly healthy diet be accepted—we who do so know better. My sentiments about the "the failure of the low-fat diet" are succinctly summed up by this recent e-mail to me: "Please come out against this foolish study. I have become a low-fat vegan, and I have lost 30 lb. or so."

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telling the TRUTH, and it hurts me so deeply to see people (including friends and relatives) suffering and, ultimately, dying, when they CAN change their lives (and their "health destinies"!).....and how do I know the truth?....from PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, thanks to your program. DGL

Thank you Dr. McDougall. We seem to be constantly bombarded by erroneous information from questionable studies within the medical/nutritional community. We appreciate your clarification on the subject. Trust me, this recent WHI study did not sway us from your regimen! RH

. . . an understanding and nicely articulated retort. Thank you. L

"I have just spent some time reading Dr. McDougall's articles and comments. He is quite an admirable person, I do believe. I plan to follow him more closely and I signed up to receive his newsletter. I was relieved to read that we need to do more to change our diets. I had the impression when I read the article about low-fat diets not being effective for preventing cancer and heart disease that we were back to square one, that is, that our diets are not going to help. I should have known better...We have all but forgotten that good nutrition is absolutely the most important ingredient in a healthy lifestyle. We are indeed what we eat. What many of us eat is literally making us sick and leading us to an early grave. I am so glad that you told us about Dr. McDougall. "

Ironically, the WHI study demonstrates that meat, milk, and other animal foods promote serious diseases like cancer, heart disease, and others. I think it is reasonable to conclude from this study that a meat-based diet--even a low fat one--promotes disease. As a second point, fruits and vegetables may not protect a person who eats a diet including killers, like meat and dairy. For my classes and colleagues, I have reversed the title to express the ironic facts: "Meat Diet Low in Fat Fails to Protect Against Cancer, Heart Disease, and Other Diseases." As Dr. Barnard has pointed out, the words "low fat" cannot be applied to meat. I think the focus of the media report should have been on the contradiction of terms: "low-fat meat diet" and not on "low fat diet." Hence, "Study Demonstrates that Reduced-Fat Meat Diet Does not Reduce Risk of Serious Diseases" and "Even Reduced-Fat Meat Diet Promotes Serious Diseases."JY

Thank you!

That issue was very important to confront, debunk and clarify to as many in the general public as have minds able to understand the message. Keep up the seemingly never-ending battle against those with sinister minds, devious motives and defective analytical abilities! With true appreciation. B

Good JOB, John. This may end up being a blessing because the truth will have a bite. A

I am pleased with your immediate response to the "results" of the WHI study. It is a shame that we "have to live with" this media accepted proclamation about diet. I have to admit that I had been one of those Baby Boomers who had succumbed to the confusion of sound byte reports of the news media regarding the latest "news" about nutrition. My final conclusion has been to radically cut back on the "News", a news diet so to speak and look toward more in depth educational sources - and to resist jumping to conclusions. I will turn 60 in October - and for the moment I am getting physically younger as I recover from my regression into the confusing maze of media hype. I had always been moderate. So I have never been sickly, but found myself sliding, becoming heavier - moving with less ease again. It was a subtle and slow change. Luckily I had the perspective of having tried your program, via book and Television some years back and had had stunning results. So, when I awoke from my slump I knew what to do. Thanks Again for Being There - a voice of reason in the crowd. BE

Thank you for your comments on the above report. My parents were raised lacto-ovo vegetarians, I was raised the same and our boys were raised the same. We inherited the practice of replacing the meat part of the meal with another protein dish. My wife grew up eating meat and became lacto-ovo vegetarian when we married. One of the principles of eating that we have learned from you is to make our meals starch-centered instead. This has helped us greatly in our concepts of healthy eating. Another is the facts about fats in our diet. Keep up the good work, D

I was so pleased to receive the e-mail regarding the WHI Report. I knew you would have something to say about it. The feedback from you is extremely valuable, even though most of us are probably strong believers; it is still good to hear from our leader. CT

I was about to write and ask whether you had plans to critique the widespread drivel and incorrect inferences surrounding the low-fat-diets-don't-work "revolutionary" study published this week, so I was delighted to see that you have already gone on the offensive to dispute its obviously flawed assumptions .

Who paid for the New York Times to provide a (falsely definitive) range of conventional opinions parsing some of the study's methods but never really examining its fundamentally wrong-headed premises about a "moderate" diet? We'll never know. Not one "expert" in the NYT piece raised the issue that the concept of a "moderate" diet on which the study was based doomed it to reveal nothing of value. Every medical commentator sidestepped this proverbial elephant in the living room. There were many methodological flaws in this study that no one has so far discussed, either. I hope to see you speaking out publicly against this huge waste of public funds and resources. CM

As a reader (and recommender) of your books, Colin Wilson's *The China Study*, and others, I KNEW immediately that the recent report that "low-fat" diets don't work to reduce chronic disease, were wrong. And I suspected immediately that it was the definition of "low-fat" that was the reason for the incorrect conclusions. TV news was useless in getting to the bottom of this...I am glad you sent out the email to your subscribers. I realize that some of us may need reassurance that they we on the right path. Thanks. JR

I was hoping that somebody would publish the true background of this study. When I first saw the headlines I told my husband "Well, it looks like the meat and dairy industries have done another study to manipulate us." Dr. Campbell, among others, must be steaming! Unfortunately this study will adversely affect millions who don't really search for the truth but pattern their lives after headlines and the latest fads.

JB

I have to say that while I do not follow the "McDougall Plan" I do follow a low-fat plan and have found that I can lose weight no other way. Not sure what kind of "low fat" diet the people in the study was on but if it was truly low fat they would lose much more than 1 pound after 8 years of dieting. They could not possibly be following a low-fat diet.

Just chiming in :) K

Thanks. I am on a vegetarian diet and feel ever so much better and I know I would feel even better if I would make it a mainly raw diet. Weight is no longer a problem, nor is constipation. Keep up the good work of sharing wherever and whenever possible!! By the way, I am almost 84. regards. D

Dr. Campbell wrote about the exact study in his book, *The China Study*. He said the data showed that the control groups dietary consumption of animal based foods actually increased - they just ate leaner sources of animal based foods. Some of the other doctors might be right though. I really do not think most people want the truth. R

Thanks for your response to the WHI study, I was hoping you would put something out. I knew there must have been some problem with it, so now I know why. It wasn't actually a low-fat diet at all. The damage that these blaring headlines will do is the worst part. It's too bad you can't get a rebuttal out there--on Oprah or something. DK

Thank you for fighting this battle, even though you must often feel you are beating your head against the wall. Only people with your outstanding credentials have any chance at all of making inroads against the "politically correct" American diet -- the diet of meat, cheese and ice cream. The rest of us are merely cheerleaders for the knowledgeable leaders like you.

So, do not get discouraged, please. As with all sweeping social change, it will continue to be 1 step forward and 2 steps back. But it WILL happen. Eventually. Thanks for your efforts all these years. You have a lot of cheerleaders on the sidelines. E

Dear Doctor:

Thank you for this response. Too bad it can't have the same international exposure as the article did. When I read the article in the paper I knew it was crap and was going to send it to you but I figured you would get it anyway. How can people be so stupid, Thanks, R

Thank you for sending this email -- I think all of us who follow your diet were inundated by our friends and relatives sending us this study telling us that we are foolish in following a vegan low-fat diet. RD

Dr. McDougall,

After following and benefiting from your advice for the past year, I have come to the conclusion that many of us are too stupid, misinformed or arrogant to understand what is going on here. Actually, my experience is that many people don't want to believe that they must change the way they live drastically to see significant health benefits. And

what we are talking about is seen as drastic change to most. All I get is "Oh I could never eat like that, I love "my whatever," For them, eating vegan is too painful and chronic disease too painless. It is so much easier to take medication especially when doctors push it and someone else subsidizes it.

The WHI Report re-validates your principles. What is sad, the rest of the world thinks it validates theirs. What a tremendous waste of our money and resources. As you know, it goes well beyond the \$400 million because of all the people who can now validate their current dietary habits or will give up making an effort. Thanks for all you do, you have changed my life. FM

Thank you for the comments. For a day I thought that I had it all wrong and I should add fats etc. to my diet. In reality, I've been happily eating very low fat for so long that I don't like the taste of oil Yuck. And to attend a pot-luck and see veggies swimming in fat is very revolting. I've moved to other states three times in the last 5 years and know that doctors do not understand vegetarian or very low fat. It would be helpful to have some directory of doctors who are aware of good nutrition. The nurse practitioner in the clinic I went to in my last state suggested that I eat 4-6 eggs a day to get adequate protein and then take Lipitor to balance the added fat! K

Dear Dr. McDougall,

I am just beginning your low fat vegan way of eating and I was very discouraged to read the results of the Women's Health Initiative (as it applied to women my age) As a result of the information I've read in your books and from your newsletter I questioned this report but didn't know what kind of diet these women were on. Now I know what these women were eating thanks to your email and I'm truly grateful you took the time to write about this report. So, I shall carry on McDougalling my middle-aged morbidly obese and ailing body towards health! Thank you for doing what you do. Sincerely, MP

Hi Dr. John,

Thanks so much for today's e-mail exposing the truth behind these "alarming results" as published around the nation this week. I saw the headlines while waiting for my "veggie sandwich" to be prepared at a local sandwich shop, and knew instinctively that what the headline screamed could not be based on the whole story. I also knew that, in time, you would have some helpful analysis of what really happened. Behold, just a few days later, here's the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey says. A huge "Thank you" for your tireless efforts to keep us informed with the truth. MP

I have read your commentary on this meaningless study. Even had the researchers not required that the study group follow a vegetarian diet, the fact that the fat intake was only 20 to 25% (at most) less than the control group's indicated from the outset that nothing significant would be found.

So of course nothing statistically significant was proved, since there was no difference in types of foods and very little difference between the proportion of fat consumed by the two groups. The fact that healthier foods were not part of the low-fat diet makes me wonder. It is beyond my comprehension to understand why they wasted all that money. NF

An excellent response to this ludicrous study. J

BRAVO !!!!!!!!!!! WELL SAID. Thank you sooooo much. I believe it 100%. Keep up the good work. J

I was so ticked off by the shoddy reporting on this issue I wrote to MSNBC myself. EP

Thanks so much, Dr. McDougall, for your e-mail regarding the WHI Report. As an almost 62 year old female, I am SO SICK of all these stupid reports that only seem to want to encourage & assure the American people that we can forever "eat, drink & be merry," and that those of us who strive for a healthy diet/lifestyle are a bunch of Birkenstock-wearing, weirdo hippies. I may be one, but am proud of it! Regards from a McDougall fan, K

Thank you!

That issue was very important to confront, debunk and clarify to as many in the general public as have minds able to understand the message. Keep up the seemingly never-ending battle against those with sinister minds, devious motives and defective analytical abilities! With true appreciation, B

Thanks to you Dr McDougall I could see right through the study as I read the article. 25% calories from fat, that's not low fat, give me a break. I've learned very much from you and I'm happy to see your response so soon. MC

This was great! I forwarded it to our staff, friends, and even posted it to my class at Loma Linda in response to someone posting WHI anonymously (I know who it was though). My husband sent it to his dad to try and get him to finally enroll in a McDougall program. (I won't hold my breath!!!) Keep up the good work! C

Thank you and God bless you for coming out about the misconceptions with the WHI so-called study. What is wrong with the scientific community? I am hornswoggled. Their results can't be worth anything when the diet they used was not low-low fat, as yours is. No wonder you are sad...Please weigh in whenever there is something erroneous on the news! I so want to hear your views and interpretations on the spot. I so appreciate the emails with these updates. I am so grateful and wish with all my heart I could convince scoffing friends, obese West Virginians, and their heavy, larded children who are too cumbersome of body to play freely, that this is the only way to go. GRP