



Update on "Death by Veganism" by Nina Planck:

The Public Editor of the NY Times was asked to comment; here is his response on this matter:

I asked David Shipley, the editor of the Op-Ed page, for his thoughts. He said, "I think Nina Planck is on firm ground in her Op-Ed. Her reading of the science is that it is indeed the case that children (and all of us) need animal-derived nutrients, and she's able to summon studies backing up her assertion -- just as the vegans are able to summon up studies showing that you can indeed survive on plants alone."

My own view, which I expressed to Shipley, is that, given how important and fraught with emotion the subject of children's nutrition is, the Times owed its readers an Op-Ed by another contributor debating Planck. Because there is science to support another view, it should have been aired at the same time, or very close to the same time.

David Shipley's view is that, "Op-Ed readers understand that they are reading an argument and that there is almost always another side to the argument." I'd feel better if the Times had actually presented that other side in this particular instance.

Sincerely,
Clark Hoyt
Public Editor
The New York Times

The Public Editor says he (or an associate) reads all letters. You can write to Clark Hoyt at: public@nytimes.com

You can send your thoughts to the Op-Ed editor of the New York Times, David Shipley, at: oped@nytimes.com

Further background on Nina Planck:

Ms. Planck is a food writer and has no formal education in dietetics, nutrition, health, or medicine. One of her claims to fame was her position as the director of Greenmarket, New York's system of farmers markets. She was dismissed after 5 1/2 months on the job. She is solidly supported by the anti-vegetarian organization, the Weston A. Price Foundation.

Sally Fallon, the president of the Weston A. Price Foundation writes about Planck's book, *Real Food: What to Eat and Why*:

Much of her book is devoted to debunking the lowfat, vegetarian message. She tackles the notion that meat causes cancer or that farm animals are bad for the environment in her chapter on meat--"Why Even Vegetable Farms Need Animals." Planck endorses what even the grass-fed movement has denigrated--animal fat in the form of marbled beef, bacon and schmaltz. There's more on the virtues of saturated fat in a chapter called "Real Fats," and paeons to butter and cream in a chapter on "Real Dairy." Planck extols the health and economic benefits of raw milk as well.

Planck's love of food and robust optimism shine through every page of this delightful book--of course she enjoys life, she eats plenty of good fat. Egg-white omelets and skinless chicken breasts, those darlings of the dietitians, those icons of food puritanism, get the whacking they deserve--Planck calls them culinary abominations--as do soy, vegetable oils, trans fats, farmed fish and corn syrup. Let's all help her get on the best-seller list by buying a copy. (<http://www.westonaprice.org/bookreviews/real-food-review.html>)

Sally Fallon credits herself as: an author, journalist, chef, nutrition researcher, homemaker, and community activist. She lists no formal training in any health or nutrition field. The punctuation and spelling errors in the above two paragraphs are hers.

Letter sent to newsletter subscribers and the NY Times by John McDougall, May 21, 2007

The New York Times today (May 21, 2007) carried an Op-Ed piece about the dangers of a vegan diet, titled "Death by Veganism," that deserves an immediate response:

For the original article see:

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/21/opinion/21planck.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

This article, written by Nina Planck, who is identified as a food writer and expert on farmers markets and local food, stems from the case of a recent murder conviction of parents who starved their 6 week old child to death by feeding him a diet of apple juice and soy milk. She writes on her web site, "Among many sources for this piece, I interviewed a family practitioner who treats many vegetarian and vegan families."

For the story of the child's death see: <http://www.news4jax.com/news/13286030/detail.html>

Here is the 150 word letter to the editor that I sent to the New York Times (chances of publication by the newspaper are obviously small):

Nina Planck's article condemning vegan diet contains serious errors concerning the adequacy of plant foods. Plants do contain all the essential amino acids in adequate quantities to meet human needs, and even those of children (Millward). Vitamin D is not found in milk or meat, unless it is added during manufacturing. Sunlight is the proper source of this vitamin. Plants manufacture beta-carotene, the precursor of vitamin A. The original source of all minerals (including calcium and zinc) is the ground. Plants are abundant in minerals; and they act as the conduit of minerals to animals. The scientific truth is protein, essential amino acid, mineral, and vitamin (except for B12 which is synthesized by bacteria, not animals) deficiencies are never caused by a diet based on whole plant foods when calorie needs are met. Ms. Planck's distortion of nutritional science is a serious matter that needs to be fixed.

Reference: Millward DJ. The nutritional value of plant-based diets in relation to human amino acid and protein requirements. *Proc Nutr Soc.* 1999 May;58(2):249-60.

Addition comments not sent to the newspaper.

Nina Planck writes: "You cannot create and nourish a robust baby merely on foods from plants."

The scientific truth is: Babies at 6 weeks of age require human breast milk and any other diet means malnutrition. Imagine if the exact opposite approach killed an infant with a formula made of pulverized beef and cow's milk, would this have received similar worldwide press? I believe the case would have been properly considered child neglect (intentional or not) and have gone unnoticed except for those intimately involved. "People love to hear good news about their bad habits" so the tragedy of the death of an infant caused by misguided parents who fed their infant apple juice and soy milk for the first 6 weeks of life has been used to justify eating meat and drinking cow's milk.

Nina Planck writes: Protein deficiency is one danger of a vegan diet for babies. Nutritionists used to speak of proteins as "first class" (from meat, fish, eggs and milk) and "second class" (from plants), but today this is considered denigrating to vegetarians.

The scientific truth is: Confusion about our protein needs came from studies of the nutritional needs of animals. Mendel and Osborne in 1913 reported rats grew better on animal, than on vegetable, sources of protein. A direct consequence of their studies resulted in meat, eggs, and dairy foods being classified as superior, or "Class A" protein sources and vegetable proteins designated as inferior, or "Class B" proteins. Seems no one considered that rats are not people. One obvious difference in their nutritional needs is rat milk is 11 times more concentrated in protein than is human breast milk. The extra protein supports this animal's rapid growth to adult size in 5 months; while humans take 17 years to fully mature. The world's authority on human protein needs, Prof. Joseph Millward, wrote the following: "Contrary to general opinion, the distinction between dietary protein sources in terms of the nutritional superiority of animal over plant proteins is much more difficult to demonstrate and less relevant in human nutrition." (References in my April 2007 newsletter.)

Nina Planck writes: The fact remains, though, that humans prefer animal proteins and fats to cereals and tubers, because they contain all the essential amino acids needed for life in the right ratio. This is not true of plant proteins, which are inferior in quantity and quality — even soy.

The scientific truth is: Proteins function as structural materials which build the scaffoldings that maintain cell shapes, enzymes which catalyze biochemical reactions, and hormones which signal messages between cells—to name only a few of their vital roles. Since plants are made up of structurally sound cells with enzymes and hormones, they are by nature rich sources of proteins. In fact, so rich are plants that they can meet the protein needs of the earth's largest animals: elephants, hippopotamuses, giraffes, and cows. You would be correct to deduce that the protein needs of relatively small humans can easily be met by plants. (References in my April 2007 newsletter.)

Nina Planck writes: Yet even a breast-fed baby is at risk. Studies show that vegan breast milk lacks enough docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, the omega-3 fat found in fatty fish.

The scientific truth is: Only plants can synthesize essential fats. Any DHA found in animals had its origin from a plant (as alpha linolenic acid). The human body has no difficulty converting plant-derived omega-3 fat, alpha linolenic acid, into DHA or other n-3 fatty acids, supplying our needs even during gestation and infancy.

Reference: Langdon JH. Has an aquatic diet been necessary for hominin brain evolution and functional development? *Br J Nutr.* 2006 Jul;96(1):7-17.

Mothers who eat the Western diet pass dangerous loads of environmental contaminants through their breast milk to their infants. Meat, dairy and fish in her diet are the source of 80% to 90% of these toxic chemicals. The cleanest and healthiest milk is made by mothers eating a starch-based vegan diet.

Nina Planck writes: A vegan diet is equally dangerous for weaned babies and toddlers, who need plenty of protein and calcium.

The scientific truth is: Infants should be exclusively breast fed until age 6 months and then partially breast fed until approximately 2 years of age. Starches, fruits, and vegetables should be added after the age of 6 months. The addition of cow's milk causes problems as common as constipation and as devastating as type-1 diabetes. (See my May 2003 newsletter on Marketing Milk and Disease.) Adding meat to an infant's diet is one of the main reasons all children raised on the Western diet have the beginnings of atherosclerosis by the age of 2 years.

Nina Planck writes: "An adult who was well-nourished in utero and in infancy may choose to get by on a vegan diet, but babies are built from protein, calcium, cholesterol and fish oil."

The scientific truth is: Babies are ideally built from mother's breast milk initially and then from whole foods. Hopefully, parents will realize that the healthiest diet for the entire family (after weaning) is based on starches with the addition of fruits and vegetables. (Vitamin B12 is added to the diet of pregnant or nursing mothers and after 3 years of following a plant-based diet strictly.)

Nina Planck has been allowed by the New York Times to exploit the tragedy of a family and to spread

commonly held, but scientifically incorrect, information on human nutrition. The author and the newspaper should be held accountable. Hopefully, the end result will be that people desiring the truth will take the trouble to look at the evidence. If this were to be the case, then this New York Times article could be the beginning of long overdue changes in the ways people eat. Write and tell everyone you know that the New York Times has done a sloppy job, and damage to the public, by allowing harmful lies to be spread—especially when you consider that Planck's message promotes a diet known to cause obesity, type-2 diabetes, heart disease, and major cancers.

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