

MEAT, MIND AND MADNESS

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Animals, like man, metabolise stress chemicals in their bloodstream when under severe stress. These chemicals are similar to those found in Schizophrenic patients and can be transferred to man – and affect his mental health – by the eating of meat.

A woman kept a bottle of strychnine in a cupboard and used it as a threat to commit suicide whenever she had a quarrel with her husband. One day, annoyed at this unfair advantage she had over him in their quarrels, the husband emptied the bottle and put salt water in it. At the next quarrel he refused to give in to her demands upon which she uttered her customary threat to poison herself with the strychnine if she did not get her way. As he still did not yield to her demands, she ran off in a rage, grabbed the bottle and drank its contents. Almost immediately she showed the characteristic symptoms of poisoning: spasms of the throat, limbs and trunk, clenched fists and jaws, etc. The stunned husband had great difficulty in convincing her that she had only drunk salt water; only after drinking some himself was he able to break the spell.

A man was once bitten by what he thought to be a rattle snake. He soon showed all the signs of severe poisoning and was almost dead when a doctor finally arrived to attend to him. It was then discovered that the serpent was not, in fact, a rattle snake at all but a harmless non-poisonous snake.

These are but two examples that show how powerfully the mind and imagination can influence the well-being and health of our bodies. It is obvious that our opinions about diets and our mental attitude towards the food we eat could also bring about all manner of physical effects and complications affecting our health which have nothing to do with the real nutritive value of or deficiencies in the food. The majority of people care little about what they eat or what the effect of their diet might be on their health and emotional well-being. Although this is incredibly short-sighted and often disastrous, there are, on the other hand today far too many people who worry themselves sick about what they should and should not eat and drink.

Too much concern about such things as artificial fertilisers, insecticide sprays and additives in food – harmful as many of these things are – often produce food phobias and diet obsessions that can undermine a person's health much more than if he ate the foods he is so worried about. These obsessions result in the adoption of all kinds of strange diets; perfectly normal foods are considered

to be lethal poisons. Others become wonder foods, to be eaten in great quantities – panacea for all manner of ills and diseases.

One is often led to wonder whether some people are so odd and deranged because they follow such peculiar diets or whether they chose such strange diets because they were cranks anyway! Still, there is today great need to establish the truth about the relationship between health and diet, as there is increasing evidence that man is becoming dangerously careless, or over-concerned, about the role of food in his mental and physical well-being.

The article deals primarily with some interesting experiments conducted in this respect at the Walla Walla College, Washington, U.S.A., under the direction of Dr. Joseph Barnes. It concerns the effect of certain types of diet on mental health.

The greatest affliction today in the Western world is not cancer, heart disease, diabetes or any of the other debilitating sicknesses and “modern” diseases. There is a problem greater than all these diseases put together: mental health. More than one half of all hospitalised patients in the developed countries suffer from some form of mental distress. All types of psychosis are on the increase in the Western world.

There is an urgent need to try and discover the factors that cause mental disease; we must arrest its destructive grip on civilised man.

We know that the social stresses and psychological tensions of modern life often stretch people’s endurance to the limit. When the tension becomes unbearable there is a tendency to seek a way out, sometimes by committing suicide but more often by detaching one’s self from the awful realities of everyday living. Some escape real life by creating a world of their own mental making. They may imagine themselves to be Napoleon, waiting escape from their confinement and anonymity to conquer France and the world. Others feel pursued and threatened by some mighty but unreal adversary; they may become schizophrenic or suffer from manic-depressions.

One woman, otherwise quite normal, had the obsession that the Communists were thwarting her life; she was convinced that they were planning to kidnap and kill her. As no psychiatric treatment had any effect, it was suggested that she went on a long holiday to tear herself away from the familiar landmarks that constituted her make-believe world: her job, neighbours, etc. Although she at first refused, terrified at playing into the Communists’ hands, she did eventually do so, without telling anybody. After a week or so, her doctor received a letter from her saying that she was now perfectly all right; the Communists had left her alone. The letter came from Eastern Germany Such detachment from reality is typical of people suffering from psychosis.

Unsettled and irregular living conditions and feelings of insecurity are often at the base of psychiatric disturbances. Mental institutions are often able to improve the condition of their patients not so much by giving them psychiatric treatment but by introducing stability and regularity into their life. The rhythmic daily routine of eating, exercising, working, resting and sleeping at the institution eventually starves out the phobias and complexes by removing the stressful conditions that initiated and supported them.

What is so alarming is that there are today millions of people who suffer from psychosis and live in society as if they were quite normal. They have woven their complexes and irrational fears so convincingly into the pattern of their daily existence that their behaviour does not, on the whole, seem so odd as to require psychiatric treatment. Yet their lives are burdened and poisoned with mental disorders.

People who live in stressful conditions are going through a mild form of the type of treatment used in brain-washing prisoners of war. Starvation, deprivation of sleep, exposure to flashing lights and irritating noise, incessant questioning; sudden relief and a feeling of security with good food, rest and exercise, abruptly broken and replaced again by privation and fatigue; the whole sequence repeated again and again – all this eventually disorganises and disintegrates the human personality; it makes it into a mental and emotional wreck.

But do students at a modern American college live such different lives from this? Their food consists of hamburgers and cold drinks; they sit up late at night studying, pressed into assimilating a barrage of facts and figures whilst the constant threat is lurking in the background: pass or serve in Vietnam! Throughout, there is an atmosphere of social and academic competition, of unyielding mental and emotional pressure and strain. Then there is sudden momentary relief in sport, entertainment and holidays, after which the whole process starts again. Here is, in short, the recipe for psychological breakdown.

This article will deal with but one of the factors that lies at the root of mental disease; food. That food plays an important role in the educational performance and social behaviour of children has been known for some time. It was found that children from poor parents often have no breakfast before coming to school, and the degree of their delinquency and lower intelligence was significant when compared with children from more affluent parents. That it was the lack of food and not just the poorer social environment that caused this was proven when these children showed keen improvement in both their educational achievements and their social behaviour when they were provided with good luncheons at the school.

The elements in food – or their absence – that have an adverse effect on mental health are probably many. Some definite relationships have now, however, been established. A study into the effect of vitamin B deficiency on a group of women recently yielded some surprising results. When their vitamin B intake was reduced to below minimum requirements, these women showed, after a few weeks, signs of derangement and psychosis which worsened as the experiments continued. There was almost instantaneous recovery when vitamin B was added back to their diet.

One of the organic forms of psychosis is alcoholism. An interesting experiment was done at Walla Walla College to establish whether there is a link between diet, hereditary factors and alcoholism. Rats were used in this research. Now rats do not normally drink alcohol; nothing will persuade them to do so. It was found, however, that a diet deficient in vitamin D created a craving for alcohol.

Two groups of rats were put on such a diet. One group was kept away from alcohol whilst the other was offered drinking water mixed with some alcohol. The rats in this group became true alcoholics; a chain reaction started which drove them to consume increasing quantities of alcohol.

After a while both groups were taken off their deficient diets whilst the alcohol was taken away from them as well. After a period of adjustment and adequate food they were given the opportunity to breed. It was then noticed that the alcoholic rats were significantly slower in their rate of procreation than the others.

The offspring of both groups were brought up normally – on adequate diets and without alcohol. When mature, they were given a choice of ordinary drinking water and water mixed with alcohol, and although the new litter of rats from both groups had never tasted any alcohol nor experienced any dietary deficiencies, the offspring from the alcoholic rats went straight for the alcoholic water whilst the others shunned it!

This experiment seems to prove that a dietary deficiency can not only introduce a craving for alcohol; it can run riot and develop into a state of irreversible alcoholism that is hereditary; it can be transferred to one's children!

We know that mental and emotional conditions can affect the metabolism and chemistry of the body. Fear, for instance, causes the hormone adrenalin to be injected into the blood stream.

There are distinct chemical differences between the blood of schizophrenic patients and that of normal people. Whether these chemicals are produced because of the psychotic tensions in the personality or whether the chemicals actually initiate the mental disturbances, has not been conclusively established.

It is likely that it is a two-way process where one thing causes the other and where both operate in a vicious cycle.

When a monkey is injected with the blood plasma from a normal human being there is no noticeable change in his behaviour. If the same is done with the plasma collected from a schizophrenic patient the monkey will almost immediately become emotionally deranged and will behave in the same irrational way as the schizophrenic donor. He is, quite suddenly, mentally impaired. It takes him five hours to perform a task he could previously do in forty-five minutes.

Another disturbing finding is that when one takes some blood from a normal human being who is under severe emotional stress and injects this into a monkey's blood stream, the monkey will behave as if the blood had come from a schizophrenic. It seems as if the same stress chemicals are present in the blood of normal people who are under temporary emotional stress, and in persons suffering from permanent severe psychosis. Does this perhaps show that continual stress can eventually disintegrate the defence mechanism of our body and personality and bring about a permanent change in the blood-chemistry and wreck our mental health?

Another question also arises, is it possible that such stress chemicals can find their way into our blood stream through foods we eat? When we eat the flesh of animals we also consume the hormones, uric acid and other waste products that were present in the blood at the time of slaughter and with which the flesh is saturated. If these animals were under stress at the time of their death would we ingest stress chemicals when we eat their flesh? And, like the monkey, would we somehow reflect the terror and emotional distress of another animal in our behaviour? Could this, eventually, be a contributing factor in driving many of us mad?

These appear to be far-reaching questions and we shall have to carefully go into the various factors involved before making a commitment. The first thing is to establish whether or not animals are under stress at abattoirs.

Most people have, at some time or another sensed an atmosphere of depression and gloom in houses and around certain people. It is a subjective experience, our psyche instinctively reacts to a subtle emanation of worry, discord, hatred, etc. Now animals usually have to wait for one or more days in the stock yards near abattoirs before being lead inside to be slaughtered. It is extremely likely that they are aware of their impending doom; they are closely linked to their own species through highly developed instincts as any nature lover will know. Animals can sense danger before it is visually apparent, and there is no doubt that the mass murder of animals will be sensed by those that are kept captive near the scene of murder.

An animal is usually led into the slaughter house through a narrow passageway a chute just wide enough to allow it to walk single file. It is hurried along with an electrified prodding device which makes it jump and panic but which achieves its purposes; it makes the animal run fast and not waste precious time. At the end of the chute the animals pile up in great terror and panic to await the slaughter-man who is armed with a pneumatic gun. This gun is meant to fire a bolt into the back of the head where the spinal column meets the skull, instantly severing its connection with the brain. This is the so-called “humane killer”. However, the killing is not always efficiently done. By the slaughter-man’s own admission, it is often difficult to aim accurately and in 50% of the cases the first shot fails to kill instantly.

Being mortally wounded and in dreadful pain the animal struggles fiercely whilst the slaughter-man shoots wildly into the brain to knock the animal out. All this is being anxiously watched by the waiting animals that will soon go through the same ordeal.

In the big abattoirs it takes up to 15 to 20 minutes before the animals are bled. Their flesh and organs are therefore thoroughly saturated with the stress hormones produced during their anxiety. In fact it is considered essential to let the animals experience excitement and panic before killing them as this apparently “improves” the flavour of the meat. We now know what ingredient is responsible for this delectable tang.

The Hebrews were warned not to consume the blood of animals. To this day the Jews demand Kosher meat – meat that has been drained of as much blood as possible by cutting the throat of the animal and letting it bleed to death.

Rabbis usually do the killing at specific times in local abattoirs.

The animal is again led through a chute and is then fitted with steel clamps around its legs. It is suddenly turned upside down, hoisted up and then lowered down in such a way that its head is resting on a block. Then, after being blessed by the Rabbi, the jugular vein is cut with one swift swipe of a specially sharpened and consecrated knife. Bleeding profusely, the animal is often hit on the head with a sledge hammer to knock it absolutely unconscious.

With our present knowledge we might conclude that Kosher meat is not likely to be much different from the flesh of any animal killed by the humane method. It might have been in Biblical days, but in today’s big abattoirs Kosher animals go through the same agonising waiting and prodding experiences as the ones that are destined to fill the stomachs of the Christians. By the time the Rabbi sharpens his knife, the animal’s flesh is already infused with stress chemicals: the instantaneous bleeding no longer produces the quality of meat as implicit in the Divine Law of the Torah, which prescribed Kosher meat. We can therefore

be reasonably sure that stress chemicals are present in the blood of all slaughtered animals. Can this, if ingested, lead to psychotic disturbances?

This was tested by Dr. Barnes on two groups of rats. The first group (group A) was given ordinary rat food which contains a certain percentage of animal protein. The second group (group B) was given the same food except that some dried blood, taken from the abattoir – slaughtered animals, was added to it. The rats were kept on these diets for about 5 weeks and were then subjected to a number of tests.

Both groups were put in cages which had electrified bottom grids, and both were subjected to mild electric shocks. This did not injure them or cause them any pain; the shocks only alerted the animals and caused them to expect an attack. They would rear up on their hind legs, bare their teeth and assume a defensive stance.

The rats of group A soon went about their normal activities as soon as they saw that the shocks were not followed by an attack. And although, with repeated testing, they started to show signs of stress, their behaviour did not materially deteriorate. Group B, however, showed a decidedly different sort of reaction to the shocks. Although they took up the same defensive stance, they also started to attack one another. Some savage fights eventually resulted. They were obviously highly distressed shocks. They became extremely aggressive and irrational in their behaviour.

After the experiment autopsies were performed on some of the rats. It was found that the rats of group B had suffered severely from haemorrhages of the stomach lining; their greater emotional involvement in and reaction to stress created by the shocks had caused physiological damage as well. Such haemorrhages usually precede the formation of ulcers.

If we are to draw any conclusions from all these facts it is this: the alarming incidence of mental disease and severe emotional disturbances in the Western world is the result of the inter-action of great stress and irregular, unnatural living conditions, deficient diets, etc. This places excessive strain on the body and the human psyche which eventually brings about a permanent change in the chemical composition of the blood and is soon followed by the disintegration of the personality.

Psychotic conditions and anxiety can be transferred from a man to an ape and from a cow to a rat by simply taking the stress chemicals in the blood of one animal and introducing them into the body of another. The eating of meat involves such a transfer of stress chemicals. An animal is subjected to extreme stress before being killed in an abattoir; its flesh is saturated with blood and stress hormones that can create aggressive and irrational behaviour in rats.

The inference is clear: although there may be many other factors that are responsible for our crowded mental institutions, one has been positively identified: the chemical transfer of stress and anxiety from animals to men by the eating of flesh.

Voltaire was right then, when he said: “Men fed upon carnage and drinking strong drinks have all an imprisoned and acrid blood which drives them mad in a hundred different ways”.

The Maha Bodhi