

# ***Reflections on Reading Weston A. Price – Price's Dietary Wisdom***

**by Michael Babcock**

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Weston A Price, DDS. *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*, 1945, Price-Pottenger Nutrition Foundation, San Diego, CA. This book can be ordered direct from the publisher at (619) 574-7763, or order from their website (<http://www.price-pottenger.org/books.htm>).

I recently read an extraordinary and thought-provoking book, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration* by Weston A. Price, DDS. In the 1930's Price, a dentist from Cleveland, Ohio, became interested in the deteriorating dental and general health of his patients and of modern Americans. He noticed that each new generation seemed to have more cavities and more dental problems such as crowded teeth and narrow bridge formation, accompanied by an increase in other health problems, such as allergies, fatigue, behavioral problems and asthma. Suspecting that the cause of this worsening dental and overall health might be nutritional and suspecting the many processed foods in his patient's diets, Price decided to travel the world to examine firsthand cultures still eating their traditional diets, devoid of modern, processed foods.

He eventually studied fourteen different cultures, including a remote island in Scotland, tribes in Africa, Eskimos in Alaska, Polynesian islands, and a village high in the Alps of Switzerland.

## **Cultures with Radiant Health**

He found that, despite widely differing diets, all of the people he studied experienced radiant health with a nearly complete absence of dental problems. In some groups less than 1% of the permanent teeth were decayed -- in other words, he needed to examine three or four people to find one cavity. There was a nearly complete lack of degenerative illness. He was amazed to find cultures where no one had ever had tuberculosis (one of the major killers of his time) or cancer.

Let me repeat this: ***the widely diversified cultures he studied all enjoyed radiant health, free from cavities, other dental problems, and degenerative illnesses.*** What is more, the people all seemed happy and there were no prisons or jails -- because there was no need for them. However -- and this is a big however -- within one generation of the introduction of modern foods, usually white flour, sugar, jam, canned foods and the like, these people began to suffer from the same health problems that plagued modern (1930's) civilization.

While eating traditional foods there were virtually no dental problems that in modern culture would require orthodontics -- narrow bridges, crowded teeth, overbites. Yet when the parents (not the children) began eating processed foods, these problems appeared in the next children born. ***One generation is all it took to destroy radiant health*** and replace it with orthodontic defects, rampant tooth decay and degenerative illness. In many instances Price was able to compare the native peoples on their traditional diets with white settlers who were eating modern, processed foods: the contrast of native health with the settler's health problems is most striking.

The book conveys its message with both words and a meticulous photographic record that is absolutely convincing. The contrast between the faces of peoples before and after the inclusion of modern foods is quite startling. Viewing these pictures and reading the catalog of problems that developed after modern foods arrived absolutely shows that eating modern processed foods leads invariably to dental and orthodontic health problems

accompanied by degenerative illness. Among the other problems that he noticed was an increase in tuberculosis, an increase in cancer and a decrease in mental capacity. All this in just one generation.

Food was important to these people. In many countries it took a great deal of time and effort to obtain needed foods, in contrast with our modern world where we expect our food to be readily available, easy to prepare and dirt cheap. We settle for fast foods and convenience foods without a thought about the long-term consequences to our health or our children's health. One long-term consequence is that we will eventually pay out many times more on disease-care than if we paid more attention to our food. Rather than having a food industry that focuses on providing us maximum nutrition, we have one that focuses on maximizing profits and shelf-life.

It is telling that *dental problems never existed in isolation*: the existence of cavities and defective dental structure was accompanied by physical illness and problems. When the people were healthy, they had very few cavities -- despite the fact that they did nothing to clean their teeth! The teeth of many of the Swiss he visited were covered with green slime but they had no cavities.

So why in the United States does dental care consist entirely of telling us to clean our teeth? Despite all the flossing, brushing and the fluoridation of our water we still have rampant dental caries and orthodontic problems. The solution, in clear photographic and verbal form, has been available since Price's travels: cavities come from eating processed foods. Yet we focus entirely on the external teeth while ignoring the fundamental cause and treat dental health as unrelated to overall health. A prospective buyer always checks the teeth of an animal as an indicator of overall health: why do we treat humans differently?

Ask yourself: if this information has been available since the 1930's why are we not told! I have never had a dentist tell me that if I want an absence of dental problems I should avoid all processed foods and white sugar. I have never been told what foods I should be eating. It is as if a termite inspector told me to wash the walls that were crumbling behind the paint.

### **What is Radiant Health?**

It bears mentioning that most of us don't even have a concept of what it is like to have a high degree of health. We accept as normal any number of symptoms such as dental caries, headaches, generalized achiness or a "weak" back. We assume that a natural part of aging is to slowly lose our capacity to do physical activity and that degenerative illnesses such as arthritis are inevitable.

I, personally, can mostly only imagine what it must be like to wake up every day feeling an energetic well-being that I could count on lasting throughout the day. What would it be like to be radiantly healthy? To be alert, energetic, active and pain-free all day every day. To not have to worry about "catching a cold" or exhausting myself by doing normal, every day activities.

The people Weston A. Price observed had an incredibly high level of health. When I look at animals in nature, I see a energetic capability, a vital life-force that is palpable. Price's work shows that a sense of physical well-being is our birth-right -- that we are genetically programmed to have radiant health -- and that it was available to the people he studied largely because of the way they ate.

## Observations about Diet

So what should we be eating? Although the diets of the many groups varied there were certain common factors:

- All foods consumed were raised in a manner which we would label “ organic “ -- no pesticides and no commercial fertilizers.
- All foods were what we would call “whole foods.”
- All diets included a healthy source of saturated fat from animal sources.
- None of these cultures consumed polyunsaturated oils.
- There was usually a source of fermented food, such as yogurt or fermented cabbage (sauerkraut).
- Meat eaters always consumed the entire animal -- the organ meat was considered the most nutritious and some meat was consumed raw.
- Grains were always soaked, fermented or soured (to neutralize the phytates in whole grains: phytates inhibit the absorption of minerals).

Perhaps the most important point is that these cultures ate only *complete, nutrient-dense* food. There was no “junk food.” There was no “processed food.” There was no “fractionated food.” Just real, whole food direct from nature.

Why are whole foods so important? Recently in the news we have been introduced to the “miracle” of folic acid -- said to help prevent miscarriages, atherosclerosis caused by homocysteine, and possibly Alzheimer’s Disease. For years Americans received too little of this nutrient because they were eating white, processed flour, from which the folic acid was removed. So now the food manufacturers remove the folic acid in milling and then put it back as a synthetic vitamin. (At the International Health News Database, see “Folic Acid: Summaries of the latest research concerning folic acid” – <http://www.pinc.com/healthnews/folate.html>.) So why take it out in the first place?

But what else has been removed from the flour that we don’t yet know about? What will be the next “miracle” nutrient to be discovered? It might even be pantothenic acid or choline -- other B vitamins that we now strip out of our food. How can we be so stupid!

Price estimated that the people he studied all received ten times as much of vitamins A & D as Americans of his time. *Ten times!!* Price believed that these fat-soluble vitamins were the key to their health. And where did they come from? In many instances the much-maligned saturated fats. None of the diets he studied had any heart disease despite eating, in some cases, large quantities of saturated fat. Price also estimated they received about four times as much of other minerals.

No wonder they were so healthy! We have replaced nutrient-dense foods with processed flours and sugars -- not only don’t they provide us with any nutrition, they rob vitamins and minerals from other bodily functions so we can process the denatured food through our system. They dangerously give us energy without substance -- energy that allows us to keep going without rebuilding our reserves. I have read estimates that 16% up to 25% of the calories of Americans come from sugars or desserts -- about 1/4 of our diet. These

people ate none. **None!** They were radiantly healthy. We are not. Are we really unable to perceive the obvious?

And can we overestimate the importance of not having so many chemicals and additives in the diet? Each non-natural substance we add to a food is something else that our body has to deal with. Again, contrast these people, who were exposed to virtually no chemicals and additives and were radiantly healthy, to modern people, who are exposed to thousands of different chemicals and additives, and whose health is terrible. This shouldn't be very difficult to understand.

Price even included a chapter on soil health which points out how quickly the dense nutrients created in top soil over the millennia are used up and are no longer available to the food. It is so self-evident that the nutrients in the plant are dependant on the nutrient in the soil: studies are finding that organic food does have higher mineral and vitamin content as well as phytonutrients -- plant compounds that can fight cancer. (See "Organics for Health" by the Institute of Science in Society – <http://www.instituteforhealth.org.uk/OrganicsForHealth.php>.) What else are we taking out of the soil that could help us achieve radiant health?

There are a few things that Price did not find:

- There were no vegetarians and there were no low-fat diets.
- Certain of the populations (Swiss, African, Eskimo, Scottish) did not consume many vegetables yet remained healthy.
- The diet of some populations -- the Masai of Africa, for example -- consisted exclusively of meat (or blood) and full fat milk and yet there was an absence of the degenerative illnesses that modern medicine tells us will result from consuming such items.
- Nearly every culture consumed some foods, often in large quantities, that are now considered unhealthy with no detriment to health: this included raw milk and cheese by the Swiss; red meat by the Masai; large amounts of fat eaten by the Eskimos; shellfish and coconut oil eaten by the Polynesians.

## Conclusions

Since the 1930s there has been knowledge about how to be healthy that has been basically ignored. Weston Price teaches us is that the only criteria for the food we eat ought that it be healthy, natural, and nutrient dense. The people he studied ate 100 percent whole, nutrient-dense, nourishing food. There were no cheats. Everything contributed, not detracted from, nutrition and health.

Basically what he studied were people eating the foods that human beings evolved through millennia to eat. Every time we eat a processed or created new food, we are eating someone's attempt to improve upon nature and evolution: not necessarily a good idea, as the current epidemics of type II diabetes, cancer, heart disease and obesity in America shows us!

Something very refreshing about the people he studied was that they were real people eating real foods. Too many diet or medical studies are of people eating someone else's modern idea about what constitutes nutrition. There is a reason that degenerative illnesses

are considered diseases of civilization: Price confirmed that people eating the natural diets that we evolved to eat did not suffer from these illnesses.

The first question that arose for me even while reading the book was why the information in this book was not common knowledge. It is so exciting to find out that there have been many people who did not suffer from the ill-health and degenerative illnesses that we simply take for granted. ***Why on earth is this book not the best-known book anywhere on health?*** The book makes it so obvious -- when previously healthy people begin eating processed foods such as sugar and white flour, they lose their health. So simple. Why is this not widely known? Why is this knowledge ignored?!?

The most important question that arises for me after reading this book is: how much do I want to gamble with my health? I ask you as well: how much do you want to gamble with your health and with the health of your children?

How much sugar is too much? How much processed food can I eat without compromising my immune system? Do I feel as healthy as I would like? If these people were radiantly healthy without eating sugar and I do not have that level of health, do I want to continue feeling sub-par? Is eating sugar and processed food really worth remaining more unhealthy than I want?

Do I really want to replace living, healthy foods that provide health-giving substances that we haven't begun to discover with manufactured crap that "tastes" good but provides only processed, devitalized nutrients? I can imagine what it is like to be radiantly healthy every day of my life: why would I want to eat in a way that decreases the possibility of having that degree of well-being? If these people were getting so many more vitamins and minerals from whole foods, shouldn't I start eating as many nutrient-dense foods as possible immediately? What am I waiting for?

If you can honestly say that you have as much health as you would like, that you can't conceive of feeling better, than go ahead and ignore what Price found: eat all the processed foods and sugar you would like. But if you can conceive of feeling better, why on earth are you willing to take the chance of not improving your health? If you don't believe me I challenge you to read the book.

### **Yes, but . . .**

One common reaction I get when I tell people that these 14 populations on natural diets had no degenerative illnesses is: "But they exercised more and they had no stress in their life." People figure they don't need to change their diet because it was the exercise and the stress. But couldn't it work the other way? Maybe they had the energy to work hard and were more stress free because of their diet? And if that diet is part of the equation, doesn't it make sense to adopt it in some form or other? And what is our excuse for not dealing with the stress and the lack of exercise? Do we really want to argue about why we can't get healthy? Wouldn't it be better to start creating health instead?

Another reaction dismisses everything Price found as "genetics." T. L. Cleave, writing in *The Saccharine Disease*, (John Wright & Sons Limited, 1974), makes the point that among wild animals, hereditary defects are rare. Although in civilized humans they are somewhat higher, true "hereditary defects" rarely exceed 4 or 5 individuals per 1,000 live births (for such things as club foot, cleft palate, or congenital malformations of the heart). He argues that when the frequency of occurrence is higher than this, that hereditary defect as a cause is "highly improbable." The question, he says, is "whether the body is built wrongly or is being used wrongly."

If we are designed to eat nutrient-dense, whole foods and we are instead eating processed foods that are antithetical to good health, we have used our body wrongly -- we have not given it the nutrition that it is designed for. It becomes absurd to talk about someone being genetically more prone to a heart-attack when the foods being consumed are modern processed foods. All too often people use the reason of "genetics" to excuse the fact that they are using their body wrongly. Certainly, genetics plays a role in the various strengths and weaknesses of our body: but it is the height of stupidity to blame genetics for an illness when we are consuming foods not suited for our body. What we are essentially saying is that certain people are more genetically pre-disposed not to get as sick on diet of unhealthy foods.

Often people refer to something they read in a newspaper, such as an article saying saturated fats are bad or one about the necessity of avoiding eggs. Any one who has followed nutritional advice through conventional media can only be amazed at the level of ignorance displayed in print and on television. Remember that the same people who for years told you to eat margarine (now known to be extremely unhealthy because of the presence of *trans* fatty acids) are still giving you dietary advice. If you doubt that much of the dietary advice we are given is profit-driven by food manufacturers with a direct financial stake in what you eat, I recommend the article "The Oiling of America" ([http://www.westonaprice.org/know\\_your\\_fats/oiling.html](http://www.westonaprice.org/know_your_fats/oiling.html)), which shows how the conventional dietary recommendations on fat are largely driven by vegetable oil manufacturers. Contrast this with the dietary advice from Weston A. Price, which was time-tested by millennia. The people he studied ate foods discovered over time to build radiant health in themselves and their children. These people did not work for nor were they funded by someone with direct financial outcome in what they ate.

### **Specific Steps**

And, as they say, the proof is in the eating. These peoples were healthy and happy. They must have been doing something right. If we look around at the general level of health of our society and the culture in which we live, we might well ask what we have to lose by trying something different and time-tested. The health in our culture is pathetic: how can we ignore the wisdom in this book?

One saving grace is that a diet based on Price's work is anything but painful to adopt. What this book says and what it shows us in words and images is that old-fashioned, good-tasting whole food is healthy. Perhaps the hardest thing to overcome is the decades of brain-washing we have been through about what constitutes good nutrition.

There are several specific steps anyone can take right now to improve their health. If you can't do everything all at once, do what you can.

1. Eliminate sugar, white flour and other processed foods from your diet.
2. Start eating natural, whole, unprocessed foods.
3. As much as possible purchase organic vegetables and meat from animals raised as naturally as possible (without the use of growth hormones and antibiotics).
4. Educate yourself as to truly healthy ways to prepare food and to eat (see below).

## Where to go From Here

I can not recommend strongly enough that you read Price's book *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration*. It is an incredible and inspiring motivator for change. "Nasty, Brutish & Short?" ([http://www.westonaprice.org/traditional\\_diets/nasty\\_brutish\\_short.html](http://www.westonaprice.org/traditional_diets/nasty_brutish_short.html)) by Sally Fallon & Mary Enig is a shorter summary of the book. The website of The Weston A. Price Foundation ([http://www.westonaprice.org/splash\\_2.htm](http://www.westonaprice.org/splash_2.htm)) is a great place to read about Price's discoveries and the dietary implications.

The best modern re-telling and updating of Price's work is *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon (New Trends Publishing, Revised and Updated Second Edition, 1999. Order direct from New Trends Publishing (<http://www.newtrendsublishing.com/>)). The first chapter provides an excellent and very convincing overview of nutrition and the recipes will get you moving in the right direction.

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