

## CHAPTER TWO

# WHAT'S REALLY IN OUR FOOD?

Your choice of diet can influence your long term health prospects more than any other action you might take.

*-Former U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop*

As I explained in CHAPTER ONE, my family and I are vegetarians first and foremost for moral and ethical reasons, not necessarily for health reasons. But the health benefits cannot be denied, as you will see in this and the subsequent chapter *Why We Were Not Meant to Eat Meat*. This chapter arose out of the need to answer some basic questions such as, “*But aren’t the vegetarian meat substitutes artificially processed?*”, and “*I try to only eat organic meat, isn’t that OK?*”, and “*What’s so bad about eating meat, anyway?*” Before we get into the “meat” of this chapter (no pun intended), let me go over a few terms and their definitions so I can make sure that everyone is on the same page. To begin with, we’ll start with the definition of a *vegetarian* and a discussion of the different types.

### What is a Vegetarian and are there different types?

A vegetarian is someone who doesn't consume meat, poultry, pork, fish or seafood. Technically, there are three types of vegetarians; lacto vegetarians, lacto-ovo vegetarians, and vegans. Vegans are sometimes also referred to as “strict” vegetarians. Lacto vegetarians, like myself and my family, include dairy products in their diet, but do not eat eggs or anything that contains eggs or animal rennet (also known as enzymes – see below). Lacto-ovo vegetarians include dairy products and eggs in their diet. Vegans do not consume animal products of any kind, including butter and honey.

Animal rennet is obtained from the stomachs of young mammals. In most cases the source is from the lining of young calves. Rennet is used in most cheeses as an enzyme in the cheese hardening process. Many lacto vegetarians do not eat cheeses that contain animal rennet or animal enzymes. Many organic cheeses are made from vegetable enzymes and are suitable for

these vegetarians. Normally, if the source of the enzymes is vegetarian, it will be noted in the list of ingredients.

Some people who eat fish still consider themselves to be vegetarians. In our opinion, and by the strictest definitions, people who eat fish or seafood are not considered to be vegetarians. As my daughter likes to say, "What plant do fish come from?"

## What does "Organic" Mean? What are GMOs?

Nowadays, it seems as though everything is "organic", which is the catch phrase of our times. On the one hand, it's good because it shows that people are becoming more aware of what they put in their bodies. On the other hand, it's a bit confusing, even for a vegetarian. The definition of "organic" is food that is produced according to certain production standards. For crops, it means they were grown without the use of conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers, human waste, sewage or sludge, and that they were processed without ionizing radiation or food additives. For animals, it means they were reared without the use of growth hormones (more about that later). In most countries, organic produce must not be *genetically modified* (GM). To be certified organic, products must be grown and manufactured in a manner that adheres to standards set by the country they are sold in. In the United States, the standards are set by the National Organic Program.

GMOs are *Genetically Modified Organisms*, also known as GMF, or *Genetically Modified Food*. Genetic modification is exactly what it implies; the combination of genes from different organisms to create a new, genetically modified organism. This is done with animals, plants, and some types of bacteria. The reason for this is namely scientific, yet there is evidence of more and more genetic modification of our food as well. For example, certain crops of vegetables, primarily corn, soybeans, potatoes, and tomatoes are known to be the subjects of genetic modification for various reasons; to produce pest resistant crops, to increase shelf life, or to insert certain medicinal qualities to improve nutrition in third world countries. There is a considerable amount of controversy surrounding this, because regardless of the reasons, the conclusion is that genetic modification is not a natural process and therefore leaves the door open for unnatural consequences. The controversy intensifies considering the fact that in the United States it is not mandatory to state on a label whether a product has ingredients that were genetically modified or not. For vegetarians, this is of particular concern since some genetic modifications actually have genes from meat, in order to create a firmer texture or deeper color, for example. Hey, call me crazy, but personally I have a problem with eating some corn, for instance, that's been cross bred with a pig. It's kind of creepy and makes me feel like I'm in *The Matrix* or something. For this reason, I always check the labels of the products we use to ensure that the ingredients are not genetically modified. Most of the products we use (in the Product Guide in CHAPTER SIX) have a disclaimer right on the label that says something to the effect of "made from soybeans that were not genetically modified."

## How is our food processed? Aren't the Vegetarian meat substitutes processed food?

Before we get into how our food is processed, let me just say that yes – some of the vegetarian substitutes are processed before we eat them. But, by the same token, unless you are growing chickens or pigs in your back yard and killing them yourself for food, then the meat you eat, even if it is considered “organic” is processed as well. The question then becomes; *how* is it processed and how does the process *affect our bodies*? There's the short answer and the long answer. Let's take the short answer first; how are vegetarian substitutes processed? As an example, we'll look at one of the items we eat a lot of. It is called “wheat meat” or “Seitan” and is a processed form of wheat gluten. The “process” of preparing this product dates back to 7<sup>th</sup> Century China. At that time, Buddhist Monks (vegetarians) were looking for alternatives to eating tofu all the time (can you blame them?) and, purely by chance, stumbled upon a new texture while making wheat bread from scratch. While kneading the bread in a tub of cold water, they noticed that the starch began to dissipate and eventually they were left with a chewy, protein-rich substance that they subsequently broiled in vegetable broth to give it flavor. Lo and behold, “wheat meat” was born. Over the next several centuries, this process spread to Japan, then to Europe and finally the Americas. More flavors were added to the broth, resulting in more flavors of “wheat meat.” This same type of process is used for most of the vegetarian substitutes – whether it is for tofu (separating the soy curd from the soy beans by cooking them and extracting their milk), or from extracting the protein from various plants to make *texturized vegetable protein* (also known as TVP) which is what most veggie burgers are made from. So, clearly, there's nothing going on that's very controversial here. This is about as much processing as our vegetarian meat substitutes get. Coupled with the fact that vegetarian food does not stay in your digestive system for very long (at the most a few hours compared to animal food which can stay in your system for a few days), the food, even if it were to go through some “harmful process” (which, according to my research it doesn't) it does not hang around long enough for it to cause you any trouble. OK, now for the long answer; how is meat processed and how does it affect our bodies and our health?

Animals are becoming more diseased and it will not be long until animal food will be discarded by many.....Foods that are healthful and life sustaining are to be prepared, so that men and women will not need to eat meat.

-Ellen White

## Meet Your Meat

The path an animal travels before it reaches the grocery store and you purchase it in those nice, neat little plastic packages is absolutely shocking. To be honest, until I started to do research for this book, even I had no idea. The real shock is that all of this information is readily available; most of it even comes directly from government organizations such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) but it seems that no one knows about it because there are no "warning labels" on the food that we eat. There is so much information regarding meat processing and its perils, but I am not going to go into a lot of it here because, honestly, you should do your own research and make your own decisions. Don't take my word for it. I've already made my choice. I'm just leaving you with a little food for thought so that at the very least you can start to make some informed choices.

In this section, I am not going to even touch upon the ethical implications of eating meat because it is already covered in CHAPTER THREE. I just want to take a look at the actual meat processing industry and cite some of the research from the professionals in that field regarding *what's really in our food*. Let me start by saying that it has only been in the last generation that our meat has become so unhealthy. The main culprit for this is the advent of *factory farms* which are mass production meat processing facilities that have replaced small, personally owned farms in the last few decades. For a really interesting video (actually a cartoon) that illustrates the evolution of factory farms, check out *The Meatrix* at [www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com). It puts things in simple, entertaining terms that even your children will understand. You can also visit our website at [www.21stcenturyvegetarians.com](http://www.21stcenturyvegetarians.com) for more informational videos about the same subject. So, in a nutshell, you are not eating the same quality of food that your parents ate. Quite simply, the country could not keep up with the demand for burgers, chicken, and ribs because we as a nation "evolved" into an instant society and everything had to be done now, including our food. Our population exploded and so did our gluttony for fast food. Factory farming was instituted to keep up with the demand (that is still growing as we introduce our new citizens to the "American way of life") and it has some dire consequences as discussed next. I'm only going to tackle what I call the "big three"; hormones, bacterial contamination, and antibiotics.

## Hormones

This past Father's Day, my family and I were at my father-in-law's house and I happened to bring an advance copy of this book, just to get his feedback and show him some of the recipes. As a government meat inspector for over 40 years, and as a man who is now in his mid 70's who rarely eats meat, it was a good opportunity to discuss some of what he's seen over the years and to ask him about his diet today. He shared with us his memories of his days in the

industry, from a meat packer to an inspector, where he was required to do actual autopsies on the slaughtered animals. One of his memories was from years ago where he was performing an autopsy on a cow that weighed in excess of 2,500 pounds and was pure muscle. His thought was "How can an animal that eats nothing but grass weigh 2,500 pounds?" On one hand, this proves that you can be muscular and not eat meat. On the other hand, the meat industry was not happy with this because the meat was too muscular and a little too tough for the consumers. A series of growth hormones and other chemicals, a "cocktail" if you will, was developed to inject into the cows to make them reach physical maturity quicker and also to make them fatter. Years later, when he did another autopsy, he noticed that the meat was "marbelized" which means that it had visible strands of fat running through it. When cooked, this meat was juicier and more tender, and since it was produced in less time (due to the growth hormones) it resulted in a bigger bottom line for the meat processors. That is what it's all about – money. It shouldn't surprise you, but what may surprise you is to what extent the industry will go to satisfy our ravenous appetites and to fatten up their bottom line. The only problem is that they are fattening up us and our children as well. It is simply impossible to ingest the flesh of drugged animals and not have their flesh, as well as the drugs that they have been given, not become a part of us. So, if your food has been given growth hormones, you may have just as well taken the "cocktail" yourself. A recent study even showed that over 12% of organic, "free range" meats which were supposedly hormone free, tested positive for the same hormones that are used in the factory farms. This means that even the more expensive organic meats can have the same chemicals and hormones that the factory farmed animals have. Now let's take a look at a few facts regarding how hormones are used and the effect that it has on our bodies:

- According to the USDA, by 1999, *99 percent of cows on large feedlots in the United States were given synthetic hormonal implants.*<sup>1</sup> Some of which were the same *hormones illegally used by some athletes and are prohibited for over the counter use by humans*, yet their use is not adequately regulated in animals. This means that these hormones are present in the meat and milk that are consumed by us. Consuming hormones, even in small amounts, can totally disrupt the natural balance in our body, which can have a grave impact on adults and especially children.
- When **children** eat the flesh of cows that were treated with hormones, *the spike in hormone levels can disrupt the development of their brain and sex organs. The amount of estradiol (a hormone) in two hamburgers eaten in one day by an 8-year-old boy could increase his total hormone levels by as much as 10 percent*, based on conservative assumptions because young children have very low natural hormone levels.<sup>2</sup>

### *“Throwin’ Down” Vegetarian Style!*

- Here’s the real shocker: In Puerto Rico in the early 1980s, thousands of *children experienced premature sexual development and painful ovarian cysts; the culprit was meat from cattle that had been treated with growth-promoting sex hormones.*<sup>3</sup> The hormones in meat-based diets are also to blame for the early sexual development of young girls in the Western world – *nearly half, (50%!) of all African-American girls, and 15% of their white counterparts now enter puberty at the age of 8.*<sup>4</sup>

I nearly cried when I came across that last statistic. Nearly half of our young black girls are reaching puberty by the age of 8?? That’s tragic!!! And we wonder why we have a problem in our community with teenage pregnancy. I know there are a host of other socio-economic factors for our young girls getting pregnant but it’s hard to deny the fact that looking 18 at the age of 8 does not have something to do with it. The growth cycle in our children is accelerating just as fast as the growth cycle of the meat that they eat. We have had personal experience with this; my daughter recently told me that at least 15 of her college girlfriends were talking one day (girl talk) and they mentioned that they all started their periods at the age of 9 or 10. My daughter started at the age of 13. On another occasion, I was talking to a girlfriend of mine about the concept for this book, and she mentioned that her daughter started her period at the age of 8 or 9, and the doctor advised her to take her off milk and meat products. Within three months, her period stopped. Now that’s dramatic. Imagine the chemical upheaval that we are putting our young girls through. It’s hard enough to go through puberty as a teenager, but as a child? Now that’s just sad.

### **Bacterial Contamination**

OK, now this is where things just get *nasty*. I cover this briefly in the next chapter but I will go into a little more detail here. Remember the factory farms I mentioned earlier? Well, on these farms, thousands of animals are crammed into tiny, filthy spaces, some with absolutely no fresh air or water, where they live among their own feces, vomit, and other sick and even dead animals for their entire existence before they are led to the slaughtering floor which is equally disgusting. As promised, I’m not even going to touch the ethical implications of treating one of God’s creatures in such a manner, just to fill our stomachs. Let’s look at the health ramifications only:

- Most of the flesh from the **10 billion cows, pigs, and birds** butchered every year in the U.S. is *contaminated with dangerous bacteria* like *E. coli*, campylobacter, listeria, and other bacteria that live in the *intestinal tracts and feces of animals*.

- According to Steve Bjerklie, the executive editor of *Meat Processing* magazine, “Nearly every food consumers buy in supermarkets and order in restaurants *can be eaten with certainty for its safety—except for meat and poultry products.*”<sup>5</sup>
- A recent president of the U.S. Meat Inspection Union, warns, “The [USDA] labels are misleading the public. *The label should declare that the product has been contaminated with fecal material.*”<sup>6</sup>

(When my son read this, he so eloquently said: “*Y’all be eatin’ that boo boo meat.*”)

- Regarding the meat processing system, according to former USDA microbiologist Gerald Kuester, “There are about fifty points during processing where cross-contamination can occur. *At the end of the line, the birds are no cleaner than if they had been dipped in a toilet.*”<sup>7</sup>
- The bacteria that thrive on meat and other animal products can cause food poisoning, which can result in symptoms ranging from stomach cramps and diarrhea to organ failure and death. Every year in the U.S., there are *75 million cases of food poisoning, and 5,000 of these cases are fatal.*<sup>8</sup> *The USDA reports that 70 percent of food poisoning is caused by contaminated animal flesh.*

(It’s that **Boo Boo Meat**, Y’all! I have not had a case of food poisoning since I became a vegetarian over 22 years ago!)

## Antibiotics

Antibiotics are given to animals so that they can survive their miserable existence and live long enough to be slaughtered, and of course, sold at a profit. The only problem is that in addition to ingesting the growth hormones, “boo boo” and other toxins that is in their flesh (such as the highly poisonous substance arsenic which is used in chicken feed to kill off parasites), we are also ingesting the antibiotics they are given. Not only does that create the definite potential that humans will become, over time, more susceptible to bacterial and other infections due to the fact that the normal doses of antibiotics will no longer be effective, but here’s the real tragedy; roughly *70 percent of the antibiotics used in the U.S. each year go to animals raised for food.*<sup>9</sup> What’s wrong with this picture? Are there not children dying across the world for lack of proper life-saving medicines? It’s crazy that we are using resources to make medicines that make our animals sick just so we can eat them which makes us sick and then we need more medicines to keep us alive but we can barely afford them because the cost

*“Throwin’ Down” Vegetarian Style!*

of health care in the U.S. is so high because so many people are so overweight and so sick from eating animals and maybe, just maybe, we are spending too much on the infrastructure of keeping these filthy, sick animals alive so we can eat them and .....get the picture? We are in a vicious cycle of sickness, disease, and death. It reminds me of a quote by Baroness Benita von Klinspor, the author of *Rejuvenate! My Health and Beauty Tips*, in which she said; “Growing old does not make us sick.....it’s growing sick that makes us OLD!” It’s so logical! Yet, as vegetarians, we are sometimes regarded as “extremists” because we don’t buy into the insanity of eating flesh which will make us prematurely old and sick! On this point, I agree with Dr. Dean Ornish, famed physician and author when he said:

I don't understand why asking people to eat a well-balanced vegetarian diet is considered drastic, while it is medically conservative to cut people open and put them on cholesterol-lowering drugs for the rest of their lives.

**-Dean Ornish, MD**

## What’s the Government’s Doing about This?

I am so tired of lamenting the ills of society and blaming the government for our station in life; economically, socially, or physically. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t think the government, in every way humanly possible should protect us from things that may harm us, but let’s be honest, how often does this really happen? Can anyone say *Hurricane Katrina*? The purpose of the government, as my husband (a Political Science major in college) says, is to manage society and create an infrastructure and a set of rules so that we can *manage ourselves* without having to deal with anarchy and chaos. Whether it is the responsibility of the government to have our personal best interest in mind or not is irrelevant; *it aint gonna happen*. We MUST take control of our lives and make responsible choices. The information is there for you to see for yourself. Everything I have presented in this chapter is readily available and much of it came from government issued research. If you want to fight city hall, go ahead. I’m serious - it’s an honorable thing to do and someone has to do it. Anyway we can help each other is important. If I were to fight city hall for anything, it would be at a minimum to pressure the government to at least put warning labels on animal products, the same way it has done for cigarettes. I do believe that one responsibility of the government is to make the relevant information clear and let me decide for myself if I wish to buy a product based upon the health and safety issues.

But, alas, the real government is the corporate machine and as long as we keep feeding that fat pig, and it keeps feeding our government, things are not likely to change too soon. *You* have to change. *You* have to make a decision to put forth the effort into educating yourself on

what you are putting into your body, and more importantly, into your children's bodies. It starts with you and ends with you. If you wait around for the government to take care of you, your family, your health, your finances, whatever – it would be a cold day in, well, you know where.....

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