

Nutrition *in the* Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26–30; 7:1, 2; 8:20; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; Prov. 23:19–21; Acts 10:1–28; Rom. 14:17; 1 Tim. 4:1–5.*

Memory Text: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (*1 Corinthians 10:31, NIV*).

A writer argued against belief in God, in the supernatural, or in any spiritual realities at all. He believed only in the material world, only in material things.

“Man is,” he said, “what he eats. Period.”

However extreme his position, he does have a point, at least somewhat. Though we certainly are more than what we eat, what we eat helps make us what we are. Our blood, bones, fat, and tissues all are fed by the food we put in our bodies. We know that if we stopped eating, we would die. We know, too, that our food impacts our physical being in many ways. Anyone who has ever eaten too much, or eaten the wrong things and become sick, knows how much food impacts us physically—and mentally, as well. Indeed, diet can impact our thoughts, which should not be surprising, because our brain is central to thought, and our brain is affected by the foods that feed it.

This week we will take a look at diet, this very important component of a healthy lifestyle.

The Week at a Glance: A good diet is a very important factor in living a healthy lifestyle.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 19.*

The Original Diet

Read Genesis 1:26–30. What does it tell us about the original diet? What might it mean that both humans and the animals had a similar diet?

God planted a garden full of fruits and nuts for the nourishment of our first parents. We only can speculate how different this produce may have been from what is available to us today, and we assume there was a wide variety of colorful, tasty treats, a great variety of fruits and nuts in the large cornucopia provided by God. We can imagine the tree of life, planted near the beautiful river, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves were for healing of all peoples and for the prevention of all diseases and sickness. This is how the apostle John describes the tree in Revelation 22:2, 3; this description of life in Eden is so brief, and we are left with many unanswered questions, but we do know Adam and Eve enjoyed food from one tree in the Garden that is no longer available to us.

Scientific research has confirmed that a vegetarian diet is healthier than a diet high in meat full of saturated fat. The Adventist Health Study, conducted by Loma Linda University, compared Seventh-day Adventist church members in the United States who share similar demographics and lifestyles except for two different categories of diet. When those who eat a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet (plant food plus eggs and milk) were compared to omnivores who included red and white meats in their diet, the vegetarians had less heart disease, less types of cancers, less hypertension, less diabetes, less dementia, and less osteoporosis—leading to an increased life expectancy. The Adventist vegetarians enjoyed eight to ten additional healthy years of life by eating more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts. They also ate less refined grain products, sugar, and prepared foods. Other studies conducted in Europe, Australia, and South America confirm these findings, and more than four hundred reports on the health of Seventh-day Adventists have now been published in scientific journals.

Some people tend to make diet the central focus of their religion, the idea being the stricter the diet, the holier the person. At the same time, why is it important that we watch our diet and seek to eat as healthfully as we can?

The Post-Flood Diet

As Christians we should not forget the fact that the first sin of humanity dealt with appetite. Adam and Eve were told not to eat of a certain tree (*Gen. 2:16, 17*), and they ate of it anyway (*Gen. 3:6*). This was sin, pure and simple. Hence, however much we must be careful not to make an idol out of diet, we must not diminish its importance. In the midst of so many voices, we need to seek wisdom in order to find the right balance in how we should eat and drink.

Read Genesis 9:3, 4 and compare it with Genesis 1:26–30. What change came to the human diet because of the Flood? Why do you think this happened? How does this change reflect an even greater disharmony brought to the earth because of sin?

Only after the Flood, with so much vegetation destroyed, did God give humans permission to eat animals. What a major shift in the whole balance of relationship between man and beast. We are so used to it today that we surely do not realize what an incredible change this must have been.

Read Genesis 7:1, 2; 8:20. How do these verses dispel the idea that the distinction between clean and unclean meats began with the Jewish nation?

These verses prove that the difference between clean and unclean meats did not originate with the Jewish economy. How could it have, when there were no Jews or Jewish nation at this time? No question, when God called the Jews out and made them a separate people under the covenant with Him, He gave them a detailed revelation of the distinction regarding clean and unclean meat. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 provide very extensive expositions on this topic. Though a certain amount of debate exists in the theological and even the medical world regarding the reasons for the distinction, the health component seems one of the most obvious reasons. Many of the animals deemed unclean do not exactly constitute the most healthful things a person can put in his or her body (such as rats, pigs, snakes, and vultures), do they? If, as we believe, God wants us to take care of our bodies, it would make sense that He would show us what things are not good for us to eat.

Food in the New Testament

As we saw yesterday, the distinction between clean and unclean foods did not start with the Jewish nation. Nevertheless, many today assert that in New Testament times, the Bible obliterated this distinction, and it does not matter now what people eat.

Yet, that really does not make a whole lot of sense, if you think about it. Diet, after all, plays such an important role in our health; thus, it is very hard to imagine why the New Testament would show no concern about diet, which is so crucial to healthful living.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1–5. What is Paul saying? Does this mean that we can now eat unclean meat?

In this particular case, Paul was dealing with future heresies that would forbid believers to partake of two things that God gave humanity at creation, food and marriage. The foods involved are all foods that God had created for human consumption. Paul's words here should not be taken to mean that unclean foods were "created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth" (*1 Tim. 4:3, NIV*). Otherwise, what? A rat should be "eaten with thanksgiving"?

In his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians (*Romans 14, 1 Cor. 8:4–13, 10:25–28*), Paul addressed the implication for Christians of the widespread practice in the Gentile world of offering flesh food to idols. Early Christians struggled with the question of whether the eating of such food was an act of pagan worship. Those strong in their faith did not believe it was, and thus they could eat all edible things offered to idols. Those who did not have such a strong faith used only vegetables, which were not offered to idols. Paul urged that no one should despise those who eat only vegetables or judge those who "eat all things" suitable for food.

What's wrong with using Acts 10 as proof that the New Testament has done away with the clean/unclean distinction in regard to human diet? See Acts 10:28.

Where are you in the whole question of diet? What improvements do you know that you should make in what you eat, in how you eat it, or even in the amount you eat?

A Balanced Diet

“Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags” (Prov. 23:19–21). What important health principle do we find in these verses? How can we learn to apply this principle to ourselves, in the area of health and temperance?

“In order to know what are the best foods, we must study God’s original plan for man’s diet. . . . Grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables . . . prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible are the most healthful and nourishing. They impart a strength, a power of endurance, and a vigor of intellect that are not afforded by a more complex and stimulating diet.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 295, 296.

Just because someone is a vegetarian does not automatically mean that he or she is eating a healthy diet; at the same time, just because someone eats some meat does not automatically mean he or she is defiling their body temple. Other factors for a good diet are important, as well.

You could be a vegetarian and yet at the same time be consuming too much fat, too much salt, or too much sugar, all of which can lead to a variety of serious health issues, things like diabetes, heart attacks, stroke, and cancer.

Or you simply could be consuming too much food in general. You can be on the strictest total vegetarian diet possible, and yet, because you eat too much, you could become overweight with some very negative health consequences.

In diet, as with all things, temperance is important. Too much of even good food can be detrimental to your health. In general, the idea is to eat a wide variety of healthy food, certainly enough to meet all your nutritional needs, while at the same time not overeating and taxing the system. As with everything in health, balance is the key.

Our church does not make vegetarianism a test of fellowship. And it should not either. Many faithful Adventists choose not to be vegetarians. What, though, are the advantages of being a vegetarian, if you are in a position to get enough of the right foods for a proper diet?

Diet Today

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). How are we to understand this text in the context of the whole question of diet and health? What are some of the extremes that we need to avoid?

As Seventh-day Adventists, we should be very thankful for the counsels we have been given on health. The best medical science affirms the basic principles of the kind of diet we advocate. In Ellen G. White’s last address to the General Conference in 1909, she counseled, “We do not mark out any precise line to be followed in diet; but we do say that in countries where there are fruits, grains, and nuts in abundance, flesh food is not the right food for God’s people.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 159. In other words, if we are in a position to eat this way, we should seek to do it. It does not make us righteous, it does not make us holy, and it certainly does not put us in a position to judge those who do not eat the way we think is best. It can, though, make us healthier, and who does not want good health?

Today, nutritionists often display what is called a food pyramid, a diagram that shows what the best foods are and the amounts that should be consumed. At the base of the pyramid are the whole grains: breads, pasta, and brown rice. These should be eaten in the largest quantities, about six to eleven servings per day. The next level includes fruits and vegetables, recommending about five to nine servings per day. Next are dairy products and eggs, about two to three servings a day. These can be important for vegetarians, in order to make sure that we get enough vitamin B₁₂ in our diet. Total vegetarians should take vitamin B₁₂ supplements. The next group, almost at the top (which means these should be eaten in even smaller amounts), includes legumes, nuts, seeds, and meat alternatives for vegetarians. A nonvegetarian diet would include fish, fowl, and meat, but only in moderate quantities. Finally, at the top, which means one should consume the smallest amounts, are fats, oils, sweets, and iodized salt.

Our health is a precious gift. Diet plays an important role in health. How wise, then, for us to seek to do the best we can in what we eat. How important for us to exercise self-discipline and self-control when tempted to eat what we know is not good for us. God gave these truths to us for our benefit. When we ignore them, we hurt ourselves and, as so often is the case, others are made to suffer, as well.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*.

From the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, we read: “Christian behavior . . . means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures.”

Twenty-second fundamental belief: “*The original diet*. The Bible does not condemn the eating of clean animals. But God’s original diet for man did not include flesh foods because He did not envision the taking of any animal’s life and because a balanced vegetarian diet is the best for health—a fact for which science offers mounting evidence.

“The diet God ordained in the Garden of Eden—the vegetarian diet—is the ideal, but sometimes we cannot have the ideal. In those circumstances, in any given situation or locale, those who wish to stay in optimum health will eat the best food that they can obtain.” —*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* 2nd ed. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 318.

The General Conference Nutrition Council, in their Position Statement of 2006, titled *Vegetarian Dietary Guidelines*, states, “We recommend the generous use of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits; a moderate use of low-fat dairy products (or nutritional equivalent alternatives); legumes, nuts, and seeds; a very limited use of foods high in saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, and salt.”

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the dietary challenges that you face in the area where you live? Is there an abundance of food that can lead to eating not only the wrong foods but also to overeating? Or is there a struggle to get enough of the right foods? What can you as a class do to help those who could be struggling either way?
- 2 What are the extremes in diet that we need to avoid?
- 3 How should our understanding of the nature of humanity impact our understanding of how important our physical bodies are? In other words, because we do not believe that the soul is immortal and can exist independently of the body, should not we then have even more reason to take care regarding how we treat our bodies? Explain.
- 4 Many new Seventh-day Adventists do not know a thing about a healthy diet. How can we help them learn about this important topic in a balanced way that doesn’t push them into extremism or turn them off?

The Little School That Could

by SARAH KIDEN

Like most church schools, the primary school in Yei, a city in southern Sudan, was established with more faith than financing. Three teachers were appointed, and they set up their classrooms in the church sanctuary until the members could build a school. In Sudan, as in many developing countries, most teachers are high school graduates with no specific teacher training.

When the school grew to 200 students, church members could wait no longer. They built a four-classroom school constructed of poles plastered with mud and covered by a thatched roof.

The school continues to grow and has become an important part of religious outreach in the city of Yei. Church members produce a radio program for the local Christian radio station, and children from the school have become an important part of the programming. They take turns reciting Bible verses and singing songs on the live radio programs. This radio program has helped boost the church's outreach into the community and has increased the school's enrollment, as well.

People in the community often ask how the children can learn so many Bible verses and so many songs. And some ask how their children can be a part of the Yei Seventh-day Adventist Primary School.

Enrollment continues to increase, and today more than seven hundred students study there. The school has added more classrooms and teachers to accommodate the increased enrollment. And more children want to study there.

Emerging from a civil war that spanned several decades and destroyed most public buildings, Sudan struggles to provide an education for its children. The few schools that exist can't accommodate the thousands who want to learn to read and write. Churches have stepped into the gap and provide the bulk of education in southern Sudan.



Textbooks are another challenge. Relief agencies have provided a few textbooks for teachers in schools, but the children have none. They must write down everything that they need to learn. It is slow progress, but it is the only way for now.

Your mission offerings support education in Sudan and around the world. Thank you for your support and your prayers.

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