

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.

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

To view and/or download a Hope Channel program on this week's lesson, visit www.lifesbeat.org.

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 Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Genesis 1:26–29*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the best diet, as God has determined it, and its benefits for our health.

Feel: Appreciate the bounty provided by God for our nourishment and enjoyment.

Do: Make the best choices for a healthful diet, based on available foods.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God Saw That It Was Good

A God has made several adjustments in the diet He has recommended for us after the Fall and the Flood, though fruit, grains, and nuts remain superior food components. What are the benefits of eating those foods that most closely follow God’s original plans for our diet?

B What are the health risks of compromising with God’s plans for diet?

II. Feel: Enjoying What Is Pleasant and Good

A There is a wide variety of flavors, textures, and colors available in the foods that God has designed for us to eat. What can we do to educate our appetites to appreciate these beautiful and tasty foods better?

B Preparing foods in a wholesome manner and presenting them attractively helps improve the nutrition and awaken the appetite. What can we do to enrich others’ enjoyment and appreciation of God’s original diet for us?

III. Do: Choosing God’s Choices

A What can we do to help ourselves and our families make more positive choices toward a more healthful diet?

▶ **Summary:** Fruits, grains, nuts, and vegetables prepared in a wholesome manner and eaten in moderate portions can go a long way in preventing disease and promoting health and happiness.

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.

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Eating a healthy diet promotes health and a solid relationship with God.

Diet matters. The opening chapter of the Creation narrative (*Genesis 1*) introduces humanity’s ideal diet. Elsewhere the Bible delineates in detail those things that God considered food and those things He did not. This delineation is debated among Christians. Some say that after the Cross we are free to ingest anything into our bodies—that is, until a person becomes specific as to the actual substance in question. Ask if cocaine is acceptable or marijuana or heroin or meth. Almost no believer would argue that these are acceptable. (However, some who claim Christianity do use marijuana and consider it to be a protected exercise of religious freedom.) One argument is that no one should be able to tell me what to put in my body; but whose body is it, according to Scripture? If we put glue into an engine that was made for gasoline, we would expect negative consequences. We could argue that it is our car, and we can fuel it any way we want to. However, the manufacturer did not design the engine for glue; thus glue is *not* fuel. There is a manual that states what must be used in the engine. God designed our bodies. It makes sense to fuel those bodies with the best grade of those things God calls food. God’s “Manual,” the Bible, tells us what those things are.

Activity: Test class knowledge! Bring a colorful spread of foods, representing the original diet of fruits and grains. Talk about what each provides nutritionally and why each is tasty. Provide a variety that uses each of the primary colors. (Remember: many things we call vegetables are actually fruits [botanically]; for example, tomatoes, cucumbers.)

► STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Original Diet (*Review Genesis 1:26–30 with the class.*)

Diet matters. Ask a coach. Among athletic pursuits, the most physically

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED


demanding, in a cardiovascular sense, are swimming and track and field. It is not surprising, then, that workshops on nutrition are quite common at coaching clinics for track and swimming. Coaches recognize that food is the basis for energy, and energy is needed for optimal performance. Bad food has a negative impact on the body and thus a negative impact upon performance.

Paul said that athletes pay all this attention to the body for a medal that tarnishes. How much importance do Christians place on what they eat? Our goal goes far beyond success in the Olympics or world championships! Our sights are set on a heavenly reward that never tarnishes or fades. Interestingly, diets advocated at many track clinics seem to be modeled on the first chapter of the Bible. If it is good for winning races, is it possible that such a diet would benefit a believer who is fighting the more strenuous battle against temptation? Daniel and his friends apparently thought so (*Daniel 1*). Rather than subject their bodies to the rich menus offered by their captors, they chose a simple, vegetable diet. Remember who came out ahead! Adherence to principle in diet provided the foundation for all their other significant accomplishments. If our biblical heroes and outstanding athletes recognize the value of the original diet, what are we waiting for!

Consider This: Diet is not only a matter of what we eat but also about how we eat, how much we eat, and the condition of what we eat. Noah took the fruits of the vineyard, an original diet item, and misused them to get drunk. Solomon writes numerous times against the sin of overeating. Even how we eat—gobbling our food as compared with eating at a normal pace—can make a difference in our health. What eating habits do we need to modify in order to gain the maximum benefit from our food? What steps can we take to ensure that the food we eat is fresh and in peak condition?

II. Food in the New Testament (*Review 1 Corinthians 10:31 with the class.*)

During the time of Paul's missionary travels, there was a controversy regarding the consumption of food offered to idols. Some believed that eating flesh that had been offered to idols was a betrayal of faith in God. Others reasoned that since they did not worship idols and had full faith in the true God, they were not honoring the pagan images. They simply were enjoying food that was otherwise approved by God.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Craig S. Keener in the *IVP Bible Background Commentary* of the New Testament says, “Whatever meat was left over from sacrifices was taken to the meat market in the large agora in Corinth (not far from where Paul had once worked—Acts 18:3). Not all meat in this market had been offered to idols, but some of it had. In comparatively large cities, Jewish people often were allowed to have their own markets so they could avoid such food. In other cities, they would ask about the source of the meat.”—Page 474.

Some have overlooked this historical context for statements regarding clean and unclean foods made in Paul’s letters to the Romans, Corinthians, and Timothy, twisting them to say that the issue was Jewish dietary law. This is not true. In fact, the clean/unclean distinction preceded the origin of the Jewish nation by hundreds of years (*Gen. 7:2*). Peter’s experience in Acts 10 yields further evidence that Christ’s closest followers honored the clean/unclean distinction in diet years after the Cross. Within the medical community, there are those who do not subscribe to the clean/unclean distinction for religious reasons but who nevertheless promote the use of clean meats for health reasons. One such doctor writes, “Early Christians observed the biblical distinction between clean and unclean meats at least until A.D. 70. The early Gentile Christian church observed the Old Testament law. . . .”—Rex Russell, *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1996), p. 145.

Consider This: What would you say to a fellow Christian who says that the Bible teaches that we can now eat anything we want to eat because we are living under the New Covenant? How might your concern for the conscience of other believers influence your choice of foods? What health benefits do Christians who observe the dietary laws of the Old Testament have that the others do not?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: There are some believers who think that they are living healthy lifestyles based solely on the fact that they abstain from unclean meat. We know, however, that healthful eating is more

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

comprehensive. Using the food pyramid activity below, discuss how the believer can build a healthy, balanced diet. A good resource to guide the discussion would be a registered dietician. You may discover that there are many vegetarian and vegan dieticians in your community who might assist you, even if there are no dieticians in your church. If your church, or one nearby, is active in the CHIP (the Coronary Health Improvement Project) program, look to your CHIP leaders for assistance with this section of the lesson. Otherwise, there are some physicians, nurses, and athletic coaches who have educated themselves in this area and may be a resource for leading this part of the discussion.

Activity: Plan a class lunch for the next time that you meet. Rather than a potluck, this lunch should be planned carefully, based on your knowledge of a healthful diet. Use the food pyramid described in Thursday’s study as the basis for your plan. Create a meal that is simple (few complex preparations), natural (as close as possible to how God gives us the food in nature in order to benefit from its nutrients that overprocessing can destroy), and attractive (blending various colors and tastes). Include items from most of the food groups.

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: While the activity in Step 3 focuses on an upcoming weekend, use the remaining study time to dream up creative ways to promote healthful eating among peers and/or secular associates who do not believe yet in Christ. Be clear about the target audience. Is your target audience new Christians who have not learned about their responsibility to eat a healthful diet? Is it long-time believers whose consciences need awakening? Or is your audience those people who are health-conscious for other reasons but who yet have not embraced faith in God?

Activity:

Option A: A jingle contest: Write songs or poems that promote a healthful diet. Those members with multiple talents may add music. The focus could be balanced diet, obesity, fat reduction, overeating, eating disorders, or anything relating to food.

Option B: An art contest: Provide tools and materials for various types of artistic expression—pencils and paper to draw, Sculpee® for sculptors, and so on. Note: “Contest” is used loosely—no judges needed.

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ What are the extremes in diet that we need to avoid?
- ❸ 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.
- ❹ 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?