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By Larry Burk

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The noosphere

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Subtitle: The noosphere

I was intrigued by the Sept. 14 article about Merab Morgan from Henderson, N.C., who lost 37 pounds on a 90-day McDonald's diet. Interestingly, the only menu item she avoided was French fries which for those of us growing up in the 1960s was the main reason for going to McDonald's in the first place. Those fries were truly the food of the Gods.

Unfortunately, these days it is now good advice to avoid the McFries, although at one time they could have been considered "sacred food" because they were cooked in beef tallow and actually good for you. Under pressure from low-fat, low-cholesterol dietary dogma during the 1980s, McDonald's switched to cooking their fries in vegetable oil in 1990. Then in an attempt to simulate the old famous flavor they added mysterious undefined "natural flavor" which usually means an unhealthy additive like MSG (monosodium glutamate).

To understand the concept of sacred food it is necessary to take a journey back in time to when there were still indigenous people on the planet who had not been exposed to refined food from trading posts. Such people were described in the classic text Nutrition and Physical Degeneration published in 1939 by Weston A. Price, a dental researcher who traveled around the world in the 1930s in search of the most remote tribes with the best teeth (see pictures at www.westonaprice.org).

He managed to find isolated villages of Swiss, Gaelics, Eskimos, North American Indians, Melanesians, Polynesians, Africans, Australian Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, New Zealand Maori, and Peruvian Indians who had perfect teeth. By that he meant full sets of 32 pearly whites with no cavities, no malocclusions, and all the wisdom teeth (perhaps being wise comes from eating real food).

Some tribes were primarily vegetarian dairy farmers, while others were primarily meat-eating hunters. However, the diets varied with their geographic locations, and he was only able to find two common denominators. All ate some type of raw or fermented food like poi made from taro root, and all ate some type of sacred food high in saturated fat. The raw/fermented food provided the healthy gut bacteria and living enzymes necessary for proper digestion, and the sacred food

provided the essential fat and vitamins to make the hormones necessary for growth, development and procreation.

These nutrient-dense sacred foods included beef tallow, cream and butter from Alpine pastures, shellfish and coconuts on Polynesian islands, seal oil and fish eggs in the Arctic and insects in Africa. It is ironic that the rise in heart disease in the previous century paralleled the systematic demonization of butter and the increasing use of industrially-produced vegetable oil which is gray and rancid before it is dyed and deodorized to make it taste like butter and seem to be edible.

Not only did these people have great teeth, but they also had excellent health and pleasant dispositions. Swiss Alpine villagers who left home to venture out into the modern world returned with cavities that would then heal upon resumption of their traditional diets. Amazingly, the size of their jaws was reflective of the quality of the maternal diets. If the mother's diet became modern during a single generation, the older siblings would have large jaws with all their wisdom teeth, and the younger ones would have small jaws with crowded teeth.

Sacred food was particularly reserved for women of child-bearing age, their mates and children, which suggests that the epidemic of infertility in the modern world may be related to the deterioration in the quality of our food. My wife, an acupuncturist/herbalist specializing in infertility, puts her vegan clients on a diet high in saturated fat and fermented foods such as miso or soy sauce (not tofu or soy milk which is unfermented and less digestible) for several months and finds their success rate in getting pregnant goes up significantly.

Since we can no longer get real sacred fries from McDonald's, you can start eating a sacred diet by substituting butter for all vegetable oil products (except coconut and cold-pressed virgin olive oil). Then drink whole milk from a local farmer and avoid low-fat yogurt. Once you've eaten real whole milk yogurt, you'll never eat the fake stuff again.

Dr. Larry Burk, Trinity '77, is a physician in Durham. His column runs every other Wednesday.

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