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Nutrition and Health in Human Evolution-Past to Present.

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Abstract

Anyone who wants to understand the biological nature of humans and their special characteristics must look far back into evolutionary history. Today's way of life is drastically different from that of our ancestors. For almost 99% of human history, gathering and hunting have been the basis of nutrition. It was not until about 12,000 years ago that humans began domesticating plants and animals. Bioarchaeologically and biochemically, this can be traced back to our earliest roots. Modern living conditions and the quality of human life are better today than ever before. However, neither physically nor psychosocially have we made this adjustment and we are paying a high health price for it. The studies presented allow us to reconstruct food supply, lifestyles, and dietary habits: from the earliest primates, through hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic, farming communities since the beginning of the Anthropocene, to the Industrial Age and the present. The comprehensive data pool allows extraction of all findings of medical relevance. Our recent lifestyle and diet are essentially determined by our culture rather than by our millions of years of ancestry. Culture is permanently in a dominant position compared to natural evolution. Thereby culture does not form a contrast to nature but represents its result. There is no doubt that we are biologically adapted to culture, but it is questionable how much culture humans can cope with.

Keywords: behavior; cultural evolution; diet; environment; evolution; health; hunter-gatherer; industrial revolution; microbiome; neolithization; nutrition; primates

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