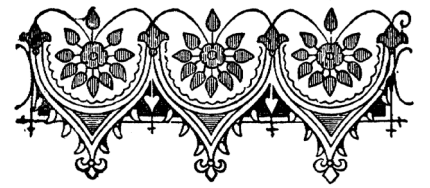


# Health & Wellness



## Choices in Food and Healthcare



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

*People are fed by the food industry which pays no attention to health — and are treated by the health industry that pays no attention to food.*  
—Wendell Berry

Looks like that's about to change. But maybe not for the best.

In 2007 I attended a conference called Food As Medicine, created by the Center for Mind-Body Medicine at Georgetown Medical School. Targeted toward health professionals, it was a pioneering course developed by Dr. James Gordon and taught by a Who's Who in Functional and Holistic Medicine. The course started with the evolution of the human diet and advanced through to the science of nutrition, micronutrients, macronutrients, core imbalances, the physiology of the gut, food allergies, disease states, toxins, nutrigenomics, mindfulness and more. It was jam-packed with practical, useful, and much needed information, recipes, and cooking demonstrations. Nothing like this had existed in my medical school training even though it was the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (400 B.C.) who said "Let medicine be thy food and let food be thy medicine".

The course was based on six basic principles:

- Eat in harmony with one's genetic programming, the way our hunter-gatherer ancestors ate. This is described as a whole-foods, plant-based diet with as little processed food and added sugar as possible. It would contain far fewer grains and dairy than our current Standard American Diet (SAD) and include cold water fish (salmon, sardines, and mackerel), and more intestine-benefitting fiber. (Our Paleolithic ancestors took in 100 grams/day compared to Western diet's 15 grams/day of fiber.)

- Use foods, rather than supplements to treat and prevent chronic illness whenever possible. As our environment and lifestyle become more toxic each year, I believe a combination of diverse healthy foods and targeted supplementation seems necessary. Healthy food choices should be the foundation and supplements should be individually targeted for support.
- Recognize the role of stress on intestinal function and nutrient bioavailability. Slow mindful eating would allow more enjoyment from food, reducing the quantity that we eat and eventually influencing better food choices.
- Appreciate that all humans are biochemically unique. We each have some different micro and macro nutrient needs based on our genes, lifestyle, state of health, and content and source of our foods. Dr. Gordon always stressed experimenting with different diets and foods and paying close attention to the outcomes.
- Begin the treatment of chronic conditions with nutrition, exercise, and stress management rather than medication. Find root causes of health conditions rather than using a pill for an ill and reserve medications for when they are indicated and necessary.
- Use these guidelines sensibly, being flexible when necessary, noticing effects, and not expecting perfect compliance at all times. Finally to not judge oneself or others for their food choices.

I incorporated these ideas into my life and my practice as did other holistically oriented practices and organizations in my area. The Suppers Program, now Eating For Your Health, is entirely focused on teaching these principles — in very unique ways.

Imagine my surprise when one morning (25 years later), on NPR Morning Edition, I heard a brief segment on Food Is Medicine. The interviewee said that health care across the nation is heading in this direction and there's quite a buzz about it.

The "buzz" is related to the Sept. 2022 White House hosted Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health. The "bold goal" laid out by President Biden was to

end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030. I remember thinking that this could be a good thing: supporting local farmers, organic gardening, soil enrichment, funding earnest research on the health effects of organic vs. non-organic foods, promoting healthier choices in the supermarkets, disincentivizing high sugar or high salt content processed foods, increasing access to healthy foods in all neighborhoods, creating community exercise and stress reduction programs... My imagination ran wild with the thought that empowerment and health could return to healthcare and that health professionals would be given the time to educate and guide patients to healthier lifestyle choices.

The radio episode discussed a research study done by the Kaiser Permanente hospital system where 10 weeks of medically tailored meals made by a local non-profit organization were given to patients discharged from the hospital. Compared to those not given medically tailored meals, the study patients with type II diabetes had better blood sugar control and reduced medical costs. Those with congestive heart failure had fewer deaths and re-hospitalizations. Kaiser then committed 50 million dollars in support of its Food Is Medicine initiatives.

Medically Tailored Meals and Produce Prescription Programs are two of the early programs cited as winning strategies by the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. So far, seems good. On Sept. 28, 2022 the administration published a Fact Sheet announcing more than 8 billion dollars in public-private partnership commitments as part of their Call to Action with 2.5 billion going to start-up companies pioneering solutions for ending hunger and food insecurity. This is not for supporting small, local, and regenerative organic farms but per the Rockefeller Foundation's True Cost of Food Report, the solution is healthier, more resilient "food systems" across the US. Looks like we are moving in the direction of indoor vertical farms with computer controlled optimized environments. So far these big-box store sized buildings, shipping containers, or underground tunnels use LED

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INTEGRATIVE AND HOLISTIC HEALTH AND WELLNESS

**Here's what "food systems" have brought us so far —advertised as healthy, sustainable food:**

**Impossible Burger** (tagline: "far better for you and the planet")

- 14+ patents (up to 100 pending)
- Potato protein and genetically modified soy protein
- Levels of glyphosate (Round-Up) measured at 11.3 parts per billion
- Heme iron from genetically engineered yeast (DNA from soy leghemoglobin inserted)
- This soy heme iron is responsible for its red meaty look, taste and smell (but heme iron may be the link between meat and colon cancer)
- Omega 6 inflammatory oils, binders, and flavorings

**Synthetic meat** (tagline: "sustainable, combats climate change, promotes animal welfare")

- Cultured meat (cell-based meat)
- Produced from animal tissue cells grown on fetal bovine serum (blood of cow fetuses)
- Only available in Singapore so far
- A highly processed food — associated with increased calorie intake and weight gain (NIH study)

**A new 26 story pig farm skyscraper in China**



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lights, hydroponics or aeroponics to grow greens (so far only greens), without pesticides (that's a plus) in half the growing time as field-based farms. These "systems" may not be dependent on the weather but they are dependent on the power grid remaining invincible. Bowery indoor vertical farms has met the call to action by a commitment to donate over 10,000 pounds of produce in 2023. Other players in these public-private partnerships include: Chobani, Danone, Dole, Tyson Foods; Door Dash, Instacart, Google, Sysco; FMI the Food Industry Association, The National Grocers Association, National Association of Chain Drug Stores; supermarkets HyVee, Meijer, and Publix; Warner Brothers; Walgreens, Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC, Novo Nordisk, Mass General Brigham, Nemours Children's Health, Boston Medical Center, Association of American Medical Colleges, American Academy of Pediatrics.... These aren't my top choices in healthy nutrition but they are all partnering with non-profits and the government for this mission. I wonder what's in it for them? And of course, then what's going to be in it for us?

Public-private partnerships are wrought with danger as there is always an imbalance of power. Private corporations hold all the power — especially giant corporations and large

lobbying associations.

As this movement progresses, will we have labeling on foods grown in vertical farms vs. field-based farms? Will we know in restaurants what is being served? Since there has been no will to create a federal mandate for labelling non-GMO foods, it's hard to imagine we will know when we are eating CRISPR gene edited foods. Will we know when we are eating cricket protein (Google the Dutch edible insect network.) What if you don't want your medically tailored meals? Will your insurance company drop you? Will other food options exist? Big Medicine, Big Pharma, Big Ag all rolled up in one is too much complexity and control for my liking. I would rather support my local organic farmer, support Northeast Organic Farming Association — New Jersey (NOFA-NJ), save seeds, and start planning a garden of my own.

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