

The Hunza Health Secrets

Probably the most dramatic proof of how the body is affected by the quality of foods ingested was furnished by the British medical researcher, Major-General Sir Robert McCarrison, former chairman of the post-graduate Medical Education Committee in the University of Oxford and director of research on nutrition in India.

As a member of the Indian Medical Service, Dr. McCarrison's duties included supervision of a people known as the Hunzas, in northern India.

For centuries rumours of an earthly paradise hidden in an almost inaccessible valley in the high Himalayas intrigued the outside world with stories of a 'Lost race' who had learned to stop the ageing process.

Occasional travellers returned with incredible stories of a nation where people stayed youthfully active for as long as they lived and where "young" oldsters of a hundred years or more were the rule instead of the exception.

After two thousand years of almost complete isolation, the people of Hunza have made the secrets of their remarkable way of long and healthy life available to the rest of the world. They have evolved a way of living, eating and thinking that has substantially lengthened their lifespan and dramatically reduced susceptibility to most of the illnesses to which "civilised" people are prone.

In Hunza, people manage to live to over one hundred years of age in perfect mental and physical health; and men father children at ninety. Cancer, heart disease, heart attacks, high and low blood pressure and childhood diseases are virtually unknown. In fact, sickness is extremely rare. There is no juvenile delinquency in Hunza, and divorce is a rarity. There are no jails, no police, no army. There is no need for them, as there has not been a crime reported for the last one hundred and fifty years.

Dr. Robert McCarrison, the brilliant English surgeon, took up the study of certain diseases common to the people of Asia. He was interested in finding out to what degree diseases in Indian peoples were caused by faulty food.

He was amazed by the remarkable health and vitality of these people. He wrote in his classic book 'Studies in deficiency diseases':

My own experience provides an example of a race unsurpassed in perfection of physique and in freedom from disease in general. I refer to the people of the State of Hunza, situated in the extreme northernmost point of India (now part of Pakistan). Amongst these people the span of life is extraordinarily long.

During the period of my association with these people, I never saw a case of asthenic dyspepsia, of gastric or duodenal ulcer, or appendicitis, or mucous colitis, or cancer.

Dr. McCarrison puzzled over why the Hunzas should have enjoyed health so superior to that of their dyspeptic neighbours. He found that the Pathans, who live in the region of the Khyber Pass, were great hillmen and adept at primitive agriculture. They are comparatively well and were by no means a lazy people. The Sikhs also fit into this category. In an article written by him in 1925, Dr. McCarrison wrote that the Sikhs, the Pathans and other Himalayan tribes "are of fine physical development and power of endurance, but by no means even compare with the Hunzakuts."

The question that now absorbed his mind was: "How is it that man can be such a magnificent creature as the Hunzakut? And he proceeded to view the ills of both civilised and primitive man.

The only difference he could find was in their diet. The Hunzas practised a Spartan form of agriculture, returning all organic matter to the soil. Their food consisted chiefly of raw fruits and vegetables, sprouted pulses, whole grains, nuts milk products from goats, and occasionally a small portion of meat, usually during holidays and weddings. Since chickens have a natural urge to peck at seeds, and since seeds are more valuable than money in Hunza, until recently no chickens were allowed in the state.

The Hunzas grow apples, pears, peaches, apricots, black and red cherries, mulberries; and the stones of the fresh apricot are cracked open and kernels also eaten. They eat their vegetables mostly raw. They grow spinach lettuce, carrots, peas, turnips, squash, young leaves and various herbs, and they sprout pulses and eat them. Whole grains: wheat, barley, buckwheat, and small grains. Of cereal foods they eat wheat and a great deal of millet. By stone grinding the whole grain remains in the flour and as a result is very nourishing. Nuts: the Persian Walnut, almonds, pecans, hazelnut, apricot kernel. These are an excellent source of high grade proteins and fats. Very little fat of any kind is consumed by the people through ghee, butter apricot oil and negligible quantities of animal fats. Apricot kernel oil is the most important source of fat. Milk products: fresh milk, unboiled, unpasteurised and buttermilk, clarified butter (ghee) cottage cheese, yoghurt and sour milk. Meat does not form an important part of the Hunzan way of life. Most foods are consumed raw. Complete absence of foreign additives. Nothing whatsoever is added to either the soil or the food of the people or the animals. No sprays or spray materials of any kind are used on their crops, and no unnatural chemical fertilisers are used on their lands. All fruits and vegetables that are dried for storing have been exposed to the sun and air. No foreign substances are added or treatments used.

All children in Hunza are breast fed. A boy child is breast fed for three years and girl child for two years. There is no specific prenatal care, and the good health of the mother is passed on to the infant...and the breast feeding gets the child off to an extremely good start. It is interesting to note that in Hunza no one eats before going to bed at night. None of the people, including children, eat between meals. There are practically no cases of overweight among the people of Hunza. Hunzans are light eaters. Their diet is comparatively meagre. They use less fat of any kind than most people found throughout the world. They have very little animal fat and no fish. And yet there are no more energetic people found in the world and they are continually active.

We are taught that the diet should consist of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins, water and oxygen. However, it is doubtful that the Hunzakuts are aware of these facts.

The scriptures say "Disease never comes without a cause. The way is prepared, and disease invited, by disregard of the laws of health and of nature.

"A large part of our nutritional problems grow out of our refusal to eat natural foods. Our preference for the manufactured articles-those that have been demineralised, devitaminised, denatured, standardised, pasteurised, homogenised, cooked, canned, frozen, and in other ways rendered less valuable as foods-creates dietary problems that are not adequately solved by the present reliance upon supplements and substitutes. We go to great lengths to spoil our foods and then complain about the climate. We live on a diet of white flour products, degerminated and demineralised corn meal, denatured cereal, white sugar, pasteurised milk, embalmed flesh foods, canned fruits and vegetables, candies, cakes, pies etc., and expect to render such diets adequate by "supplementing" them with fish oils, brewer's yeast, wheat germ, black strap molasses, honey, yoghurt, powdered skimmed milk, cider vinegar, etc."-Dr.Herbert M.Shelton.

"The strange absence of principle which characterises this generation, and which is shown in their disregard of the laws of life and health, is astonishing. Ignorance prevails upon this subject, while light is shining all around them."-Counsels on diet and foods.

Dr.McCarrison noted that the neighbouring villages to the State of Hunza were addicted to white man's foods. To test his theory that foods made the difference, Dr.McCarrison began his historic feeding experiments in 1927.

For the first phase of his experiments, Dr.McCarrison chose healthy albino rats, then placed them in good conditions with fresh air, sunlight, comfort and cleanliness. He chose their diet from foods eaten regularly by the Hunzakuts: chapattis made of wholemeal flour, lightly smeared with fresh butter; sprouted pulse; fresh raw carrots; raw cabbage; unboiled milk; a small ration of meat with bones once a week, and an abundance of water.

In this experiment almost 1200 rats were watched from birth to the twenty-seventh month, an age in the rat which corresponds to that of about fifty years in a man. At this stage some of the the Hunza-diet-fed rats were killed and carefully examined. Dr.McCarrison's report was remarkable:

"During the past two and a quarter years there has been no case of illness in this "universe" of albino rats, no death from natural causes in the adult stock, and, but for a few accidental deaths, no infantile mortality. Both clinically and at post-mortem, examination of this stock has been shown to be remarkably free from disease. I have failed to find either clinical or microscopical evidence of any hidden disease.

His experiments did not, however, stop here. Next he took diseased rats and placed them too, on the Hunzakut diet. They all became well. The results startled even Dr.McCarrison. Then he took batches of rats and placed them in clean, comfortable surroundings and fed them the food of the

people of India. The rats living on the various Indian diets, which consisted of rice, pulses, cooked vegetables and condiments were soon plagued with diseases and miseries of many kinds. In every case the average health standard of the people whose diet was fed to the rats was mirrored in the health of the animals, including the percentage of specific diseases, and even mental condition and temper. The rats that ate the diet of the Hunzas had the same astonishing health, vitality and gentle tempers; the animals grew rapidly, were never ill, had healthy offspring, and autopsy revealed virtually nothing wrong with their organs.

During the course of his experiments on some 2243 rats fed on faulty Indian diets, he found and listed diseases of every organ of the body.

Among the ailments they suffered were diseases of the respiratory system, adenoids, pneumonia, bronchitis, pleurisy, pyothorax and infections of the nose; infections of the ear; infections of the eye; dilated stomach, growths, ulcer and cancer of the stomach, inflammation of the small and large gut; constipation and diarrhoea; diseases of the urinary passage, such as Bright's disease, stones, abscesses, inflammation of the bladder; inflammation of the womb and ovaries, death of the foetus, premature birth, haemorrhage; diseases of the testicles; inflammation of the skin, loss of hair, ulcers, abscesses, gangrene of the feet; anaemia of the blood; enlarged lymphatic glands, cystic and suppurating glands; goitre and diseases of the special glands; wasting, enlargement of, and inflammation of the muscle, and inflammation of the outer lining of the heart; inflammation and degeneration of the nervous tissues, diseased teeth and bones; dropsy; scurvy; feeble growth, feeble appetite, weakness, lassitude, and ill temper.

Dr. McCarrison wrote, "All these conditions of ill health had a common causation: faulty nutrition with or without infection. I found that when, growing rats of healthy stock were fed on diets similar to those of people whose physique was good, the physique and health of the rats were good; when they were fed on diets similar to those of people whose physique was bad, the physique and the health of the rats were bad; and when they were fed on diets similar to those of people whose physique were middling, the physique and health of the rats were middling."

In later experiments, Dr. McCarrison gave a set of rats the diet of the poorer classes of England; white bread, margarine, sweetened tea, boiled vegetables, tinned meats and inexpensive jams and jellies. On this diet, not only did the rats developed all kinds of diseased conditions, but they became nervous wrecks: "They were nervous and apt to bite their attendants; they lived unhappily together, and by the sixtieth day of the experiment they began to kill and eat the weaker ones amongst them."

As early as 1921 Dr. McCarrison wrote his book 'Studies in deficiency diseases' which he said provided experimental evidence that "appeared to me to warrant the conclusion that food of improper constitution" was responsible for a large proportion of ill health in Great Britain.

"The eating practices of most people are matters of habit and custom, rather than of intelligent planning. Our people are influenced more in their eating by advertising than they are by any knowledge of foods. They eat what has been made to taste good, rather than what is truly good.

They eat foods which they know contain poisons- chemical preservatives, coal tar dyes, artificial flavourings, etc-with no thought of these poisons, and reject good foods only because they have not learned to eat them. Seasonings, rather than flavours of foods, determine what is liked by their indiscriminating tastes."-Dr Herbert M.Shelton.

[Note: A good public library may have books on "The Hunzas"]

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