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Editorial Musings

Dr. Kendra Gaines, Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

Long ago in my writing workshop for graduate students, I wanted to emphasize just how important solid evidence was for any thesis assertion. Seizing upon a topic that I knew was near and dear to the hearts of most of the students, I announced, “My thesis is that French fries are very bad for your health and you must stop eating them.” I paused as they absorbed this (to them) rather ghastly pronouncement, and then asked, “Are you convinced? Will you now stop eating them?” Heads shook negatively all over the classroom.

Having recently read a substantial article on this very topic, I continued, “Do you actually know what is in those commercial French fries? I bet you thought they were just potatoes and oil and salt, right? Wrong! They are more filler—largely cellulose, actually—than potato. Indeed, there’s some sawdust in them, and the word “potato” comes far down on the formally published list of ingredients. In between all that are numerous chemicals whose names I cannot pronounce. Are you salivating yet?” The classroom-wide look of disbelief and disgust was notable. I

concluded with, “Look it up. Think about it. If you still want to eat those things, go ahead. But at least you’ll have a clearer idea of just what you’re putting into your own body.”

I then asked them to observe their own internal reactions to what we had just discussed. I said, “You blew me off when I simply said what I thought. But you did some serious thinking about the thesis when I provided you with supporting evidence to back up what I said. If this were all in writing, you’d be looking at references from credible sources and you could pursue this assertion without difficulty. You might even change your eating habits! But this shift in your reaction came about only because you heard supporting evidence. That is what makes all the difference.”

I’ve been remembering this exchange recently with all the articles appearing on the downside of so-called ultraprocessed foods, so near and dear to the stomachs of so many people. Ultraprocessed foods are everywhere, in energy bars, breads, pre-packaged meals and snacks, even in beverages. The ubiquitous pizza is an ultraprocessed food! I won’t go into the science of it all, as the details have been well documented. But the negative impacts of this “food” are rapidly making themselves known. Doctors have observed the rise in diabetes among much younger people, and cancer is now beginning to appear in people under twenty. These are undeniable and well documented facts that should give everyone pause. But do the facts matter? At least three things stand in the way of people paying attention to these facts and then turning their backs on ultraprocessed foods. One is money. These foods tend to be cheaper and easier on the budget, at least initially (before medical bills start coming in). Two is ease of access; no one has to cook or clean. Just open and eat. And third is the all-too-human conviction that “it won’t happen to me.” There might even be a fourth consideration, namely the well-known effort by the fast-food industry to make their offerings addictive through salt, grease, and sugar. Taken

together, these factors guarantee that fast, ultraprocessed food will maintain its popularity status well into the future.

But for those who cherish their good health, who are willing to go to a bit of effort to cook and prepare whole foods, this information is the writing on the wall. The supporting evidence is all there, and the conclusion is inevitable: WHOLE food sustains and supports ongoing good health. Ultraprocessed food does just the opposite.

Think about it. Consider the evidence which is easily found. And then remember that, yes, it could happen to you—and indeed, to anyone. The choice to eat whole foods is the right choice.

Bio:

Dr. Kendra Gaines received her doctorate in English Literature from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. She taught at Northwestern, as well as University of Michigan, before moving to Tucson. At the University of Arizona, she served for 16 years as Senior Tutor and Instructional Specialist in, first, the Department of English, and then at the UA's Writing Skills Improvement Program. Dr. Gaines has taught at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for almost 30 years, teaching for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Chapman University, Park University, and Pima College. Dr. Gaines teaches online as well. She is completing her seventeenth-year teaching both English and Philosophy courses for Colorado Technical University. She has also been teaching online for Park University, work which has included several blended (both online and in person) courses and is a full Professor of English at Akamai University.

Email: ijhcjournal@earthlink.net

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31907 East Davis Ranch Rd.
Marana, AZ 85658

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