

Getting Started with Macrobiotics



by Verne Varona

D E P A R T M E N T

The Art of Chewing

(The following is a condensation from the book, "God Work: The Forgotten Art of Chewing," by Verne Varona. It is scheduled for Winter, 1983 publication from Natural Living Press.)

Masticate: 1.To chew 2.To reduce to a pulp by crushing or kneading.

Gulp: 1.To swallow eagerly, or in large drafts or morsels.

Random House Dictionary

(Scene) Brooklyn, New York. White Castle Hamburger Diner. Tony Manero is wolfing hamburger after hamburger. Tony's friend, Eddy, is horrified.

Eddy: Hey, Tony...how come you don't chew, man, you eat like a dawg, jeez, just like a dawg...

Tony: Lemme alone, huh?

Eddy: Like a dawg! Doncha know how ta chew?

Tony: Look, when my mother dies, I'll give you the job, o.k.?

-**"Saturday Night Fever"**

Poor chewing is a widespread habit that exacts a tragic toll. The sixth leading cause of accidental death in the United States, ranking ahead of airplane crashes, is now "Food Inhalation"--death by choking on bits of improperly chewed food. The rise in choking deaths means that eating has become one of the nation's most hazardous pastimes.

Yet the act or, more properly, the art of chewing has a distinguished history. For thousands of years in traditional societies, the taking of nourishment was regarded as a sacred act. The breaking of bread with someone is still a universal sign of peace and comradeship.

Our manner of eating is also a prime indicator of our intuitive understanding. It is a personal expression of our freedom--the freedom to create or to degenerate our health. Whether or not we take full responsibility for

our health by developing the knowledge and will to respond to our nutritional needs is strictly a personal choice. And this choice begins with the simple and mechanical act of chewing.

HORACE FLETCHER & "FLETCHERISM"

At the beginning of this century, the forgotten art of chewing enjoyed a brief revival through the efforts of Horace Fletcher, a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At forty, Horace considered himself an "old man." He was fifty pounds overweight, wrought with frequent colds and flu, constant indigestion and bouts of fatigue. His life insurance agent evaluated Horace as a poor risk and turned down his application for policy coverage. Horace self-reflecting and, after careful analysis, began to experiment with his eating habits and patterns. The conclusions he reached subsequently formed the basis of "Fletcherism":

1. The foremost rule is complete mastication. Chew your food to a pulp or milky liquid until it practically swallows itself.
2. Only eat when hungry.
3. Enjoy every bite or morsel, savoring the flavor until it is swallowed.
4. Do not eat when tired, angry or worried, and don't think or talk about unpleasant subjects at mealtime.

After five months of observing the above rules, Horace lost sixty pounds and felt better than he had in over 20 years. His well-being increased beyond his wildest expectations. On his fiftieth birthday, he bicycled more than two hundred miles over uneven French roads and experienced no fatigue or stiffness.

Still, unhappy with being touted a fanatic by his peers, Horace submitted himself to a battery of scientific tests to validate his principles of "Fletcherism". At Yale University, he doubled the world's record of lifting 300 pounds of dead weight! At the University of Pennsylvania, he broke all college records for power lifting. His test auditors at various universities were so impressed that they began the "Fletcher Program" of complete mastication and reduced food quantities with similar results.

At the age of sixty-four, Horace still maintained his weight and an active daily schedule. He rarely suffered from colds,

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fatigue, or insomnia. In his own words: "I have done this simply through proper mastication and by keeping my body free from excess food and the putrefaction of the food that the body does not want and cannot take care of."

CHEWING & DIGESTION

With the increased consumption of sweets, dairy and animal food, most of us have become lazy chewers. This is because the salivary enzymes have little effect in breaking down such foods. Proteins and fats begin their digestion in the stomach and upper part of the small intestine. It is only with the release of stomach acids or the secretion of bile salts produced by the liver and stored by the



gall bladder that these proteins and fats begin to be broken down.

Further adding to this tendency toward jaw lethargy is the fact that refined, fatty and high protein foods often have little texture or taste after a few chews. If held in the mouth for long, their additives may create an unnatural and unpleasant aftertaste and odor which rises into the nasal passage. As a result, most people have developed the unconscious habit of moving their food to the back of the palate and swallowing it before it

is thoroughly masticated.

The widespread preference for diets heavily laden with meat, dairy, and sweets is accompanied by an equally widespread insensitivity to food quality and taste. Our sensory perceptors have become dull and confused. Many people cannot imagine a bowl of oatmeal, for example, without the addition of some sweetener such as raisins, milk, brown sugar, honey, or cinnamon. They find it unthinkable to have something "bland" in their mouth that demands work to produce a sweet taste. This is an example of the instant gratification with which our society has become so imbued. No doubt, it also relates to poorly regulated blood sugar levels that roller coaster throughout the day because of the excess intake of refined sweets.

Chewing enables us to distinguish the refined and fake from the real. Real food should become tastier and naturally sweeter the more it is chewed and mixed with saliva. Relaxed chewing also enables us to enjoy the whole spectrum of taste and aroma by allowing the throat to open up. The irony of the recent and very positive trend toward eating whole foods is that we are changing the quality of our food, yet we are still maintaining chewing habits left over from our previous way of eating. Those who have managed to effectively make dietary changes toward eating whole foods will find their health progress even more by thorough and conscious chewing.

MORNING OATMEAL AT THE COFFEE SHOP

WAITRESS: "Just plain? Nothing?--Ugh! Plain, right? No butter, sugar? How about some milk? You don't drink milk? Maybe syrup?"

AUTHOR: "No thanks, plain is fine..uh, why yes, I usually eat it like this, really."

WAITRESS: "Must have an ulcer, huh?"

"BLOOD SLUDGING"

Insensitivity to taste may have its roots in what has become known as "blood-sludging," or blood-clumping. If the blood is being deprived of fresh oxygen, normally delivered to remote arterioles and capillaries, then all systems function less efficiently. Our arteries, composed of various cell layers, are dependent

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upon the blood for oxygen nourishment. This oxygen passes from the blood to the arterial walls. The result of a high fat diet is cellular oxygen deprivation. Ingested dietary fats create a "clumping" of the red blood cells and a plaque build-up along the arterial walls.

In an experiment performed at New Hampshire University, one researcher used baby hamsters to experiment on fats and blood clumping. He observed the normal activity of the red blood cells passing in single file through the minute capillaries by stretching the hamsters' cheek linings. Within one and one-half hours after giving the hamsters heavy cream, he observed the blood cells beginning to clump within the small arteries. As a result, capillary blood circulation became jammed creating acidity, reducing the oxygen demands of the heart, and--from the pressure of the blood within the arteries against the smaller arterioles--the seepage of blood fluids through the arteriole into the tissue, causing tissue swelling (edema). After fasting the hamsters from that point for three days, the researcher still found a 5 to 10% oxygen deprivation in their bloodstream. This sludging effect, whether in hamsters or humans, creates an overall oxygen shortage that impedes the efficient discharge of waste products such as carbon dioxide. This waste, also known as carbonic acid, becomes toxic and tends to offset the healthy effects of alkaline blood. Therefore, constant overeating and underchewing of poor quality foods creates not only oxygen deprivation but also acidic blood.

Eventually, arterial blockage may occur in any body part. If the fine bones and vessels of the inner ear become blocked, this results in hearing loss. When blockage occurs in the brain, we experience a stroke. If it is near the heart, we suffer angina. In the very fine arteries of the mouth, such blockages may be responsible for decreased sensitivity of taste and for speech related problems. These symptoms are so common in the elderly that they have become synonymous with aging.

TRANSMUTATION & CHEWING

If cooking is considered to be an external form of transmuting our foods for better assimilation, then chewing may be considered the first step of internal transmutation.

Moderate cooking helps to soften the cellular walls of the plants we eat, causing them to swell and become more palatable. By chewing, we break down these walls to release the locked-in nutrients. Chewing to a liquid state, as Horace Fletcher noted, increases the body's assimilation capacity--so vitally important for villi absorption within the intestines. This is especially important when eating to cure illness. Under pressure or mealtime tension, chewing and the release of the stomach's powerful digestive acids is inhibited, thus creating additional digestive burden.

Consciously creating a peaceful mealtime environment increases the likelihood that we will slow down and remember the importance of this simple act. This is especially helpful in educating children to its importance. In so doing, meals become a pleasant (and healthy!) ritual imbued with more respect.

NEW AGE CHEWING COMPLAINTS

Occasionally in one of our chewing seminars, I hear typical "non-chewer" complaints such as "Grains are heavy," or "I get gas when I eat grains." How one eats grains is the key. They can be heavy and dull or impart a wonderful lightness, offering that after-meal buoyant feeling. It is solely dependent on your method of eating and chewing. Grains eaten in the same way that fruits are commonly eaten--minimal chomps followed by large gulps--prove disastrously heavy. Carbohydrate digestion begins in the mouth when the enzymes in our saliva, particularly the alkaline ptyalin, mix with our food. Proper chewing will promote smooth digestion, thereby avoiding this heaviness. To further facilitate the chewing of whole, complex carbohydrates such as cereal grains, it is advisable to cook food to a drier consistency. Eating dry food tends to attract or generate more saliva, while eating soft or wet grains (e.g. watery oatmeal) provides little incentive to chew.

Conscious changes should also be made in one's table manners. For example, adding excess sauces and tamari to prepared foods at the table tends to encourage poor chewing. Also, holding fork or chopsticks near the face, armed with the next mouthful before the first is sufficiently chewed, is a practice not likely to inspire good chewing habits.

To appreciate the importance of chewing, the

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following points may be considered:

1. Cleanliness

In the Essene Gospel by Josephus & the Contemporaries, simple rituals were described that preceded mealtimes. The Essenes wore white cotton garments donned especially for meals, and practiced meditation as a form of graceful prayer before and after the meal. While this may be somewhat extreme for most of us today, saying a simple grace as a thankful offering to those who have nurtured this food for our development and to the forces beyond the visible that are responsible for its growth makes us more conscious of our eating habits and quantity of intake. Keeping your immediate surroundings orderly and tidy also serves as a conscious reminder to eat in an orderly and grateful manner.

2. Volume

Discussing food inhalation in the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. William Eller of Holy Cross Hospital in Fort Lauderdale, Florida wrote, "The average size of the pieces of meat some people have tried to swallow is astonishing; the general size approximates the measurements of a pack of cigarettes."

The National Safety Council reports that 2500 people die yearly by choking on food. Phrases like "let's grab a bite to eat" or "I need something to wash this down" reveal our greed more clearly than any sermon on the need to help the world's starving people with



C.A.R.E. packages.

Take small bites and a smaller quantity of food on your plate. Put just enough in your mouth to chew amply. Eating large quantities of good food is just as poor a practice as eating junk food. Anything in excess becomes toxic, regardless of quality.

If you experience extreme cravings or fatigue when making a transition to whole foods, you might find it very beneficial to eat more frequent, but smaller meals each day. This is a standard recommendation for hypoglycemics, as it allows the blood sugar to normalize.

3. Grinding Motion

Many people chew with a fixed gaze, chomping up and down. Yet the human jaw is unique in its ability to operate in all directions, especially in a sideways grinding motion. Since most of our teeth are for the grinding of food (28 grinders, 4 canines for tearing), it would serve us well to experiment with side-to-side grinding.

Oriental medicine relates the teeth to the spinal vertebrae. They are almost equal in number, and have direct correlation to the central nervous system. Just as the stimulation of the spinal vertebrae (e.g., chiropractic) affects our many organs and associated systems, chewing may have an analagous "massaging" effect throughout the entire nervous system.

4. Fluid Separation

Ever eat taffy? I remember it as a real childhood passion, rolling and squeezing it with my tongue to extract all the sweet fluid possible before finally swallowing the taffy itself. In order to efficiently chew, a similar technique should be applied when eating whole foods, especially cereal grains. Indeed, this is the main problem that most grain eaters have. When we begin to chew, an abundance of saliva is secreted. We tend to prematurely swallow the grain with the saliva, instead of swallowing the saliva and continuing to work on the partially chewed grain. It is impulse. For maximum chewing, you should try to separate the fluid, using the tongue and cheek linings, and continue to work on the grain. This technique is essential in order for our bodies to properly assimilate whole grains, especially when degenerative sickness is present.

5. Breath

And when you eat, have above you the angel of air, and below you the angel of water. Breathe long and deeply at all your meals, that the angel of air may bless your repasts. And chew well your food with your teeth, that it may become water, and that the angel of water may turn it into blood in your body. And eat slowly, as it were a prayer you make to the lord. For I tell you truly, the power of God enters into you, if you eat after this manner at his table."

--Jesus, Essene Gospel of Peace

People today are oxygen starved for numerous reasons including air pollution, inactivity, overeating and excess fat intake. For many smokers, eating to excess is usually followed by the need for a calming after-dinner smoke. Too often, this is the only time they consciously breathe deeply--through a filter! If you're a smoker, you might find that your "need" for smoking can be curtailed simply by taking ten long and deep breaths after a meal, preferably outdoors. An important, but frequently overlooked, aspect of eating is the posture you maintain. Keep your back erect when eating to facilitate even and deep breathing.

6. Gratitude

In every major city, there exist individuals who gather a large percentage of their foods from supermarket trash bins. The amount of food that is wasted daily, whether through overeating, in food preparation, or careless discarding is truly astonishing and characteristic of our loss of gratitude. If we each had to provide all of our food for ourselves, the idea of waste would hardly occur.

NON-CREDO

A popular macrobiotic motto, 'non-credo' (Latin for 'do not believe'), reminds us that the most important discoveries we make in our lives are those we experience for ourselves. In this way, the experience becomes our personal realization, something which engenders true faith, as opposed to abstract theory or doctrine which demands belief. While this article may stimulate your interest, it is only designed to encourage your own exploration.

WHAT ELSE WILL CHEWING DO FOR YOU?

- Quiet any fears that you have about choking and ending up as a National Safety Council statistic.
- Develop your facial muscles for that "lean and hungry look."
- Promote blood and ki circulation throughout the facial area, especially since many digestive acupuncture points are located around the mouth.
- Improve memory and will, due to the stimulation of cerebro-spinal fluids throughout the brain.
- Catch small rocks in your seaweed!

A Zen roshi to whom I once gave a shiatsu massage told me that he believed chewing could develop refined and precise thinking. I think, furthermore, that chewing is a primary statement of our biological superiority as humans ... Chew on that for awhile.



Verne Varona has been a student and teacher of the macrobiotic way of life since 1969. In addition to book writing and research, he has directed workshops for medical groups, major universities, prisons, senior citizen organizations, healing symposia and on national television.