

# The turnaround in nutrition



By Dr Jasmin Peschke

*At the Research Conference Dr Jasmin Peschke spoke about how we need to rethink and reappraise our attitude towards food and nutrition.*

**I**N 1921 ITA WEGMAN, the doctor who developed anthroposophical medicine with Rudolf Steiner, founded the first anthroposophical hospital in Switzerland. She began to use mistletoe for cancer patients. Some years later, a specialized hospital for anthroposophical cancer treatment using mistletoe and a holistic therapeutical approach was built up. In this hospital nutrition played a key role. The management decided not to save money with the patients' nutrition, which is really quite extraordinary considering the conditions that we have today.

The kitchen hospital's chef accompanied the patients with training and advice. The first task he gave them was to answer three questions: What do you eat? How does it taste? How do you digest and tolerate what you have eaten? He experienced that this was the first step for the patients on the way to become healthy.

Today this method would be called "mindful eating". Nutrition psychologists and nutrition therapists use the method as a sustainable way to reduce weight in obesity programmes. This "mindful eating" enables one to perceive different food and tastes and how they are tolerated by the organism. The effect is an enhanced feeling of self-connectedness. This means that you listen to your inner signals which in turn tell you what is good for you to eat – because what tastes good and what is pleasant can be digested and tolerated. This can also be called "somatic intelligence". Connectedness thus enhances somatic intelligence. Perceiving the body and its signals is a key for health. It is important to learn that we don't have to fulfil expectations on what to eat and what is healthy, but we have to have what we ourselves need. The body does not have to function like a machine and eating does not replace an emotional satisfaction. The consumer should thus not be the victim of publicity and trends.

Considering that 40 million people are killed each year by non-communicable, nutrition related diseases (e.g. diabetes, cardiovascular diseases etc.) this approach seems worth practising. In addition, one third of the world's population suffers from malnutrition, which can either be too little or too

much food. The effects are either underweight and hunger or overweight and obesity. In 2017, 821 million people suffered from hunger, with the number steadily increasing each year. That is why the FAO announced the theme of the World Food Day 2018 as 'Zero hunger by 2030 is possible'. Taking into account that so many people are concerned with nutrition – whether too much or too little – it is obvious that this is a remarkable economic factor. So the food industry steps in and defines food quality and what is healthy food. We are tempted to pass the responsibility for a healthy development of our body, soul and spirit to industry.

In our society daily nutrition is characterised by many new, steadily changing dietary trends such as clean eating, which means choosing unprocessed, freshly cooked food without additives, colours and aromas. Vegan diet has become very well-known and many new products such as, for example, lentil noodles and almond drinks can be purchased. To buy ethically justifiable food is discussed in journals and street food has become common. Having a meal once a day together in the family is no longer a habit. A diet free from gluten, salt or dairy is often more a means to express one's own individuality than a real medicinal concern. Allergies and intolerances tell more about the fear of the food than of intolerable constituents or the quality of the food.

At the same time new products are introduced at short intervals such as green smoothies, edible insects or black sandwiches. The latter are coloured with coconut shell coal and have no dietary purpose but are intended to make people curious about consuming something special. Insects are advertised as an environmentally friendly and climate neutrally produced source of protein.

We can question whether superfoods like Chia, Goji, Matcha, Moringa are really 'super'. Coconut oil, for example, was said to be good for the health, against inflammation, cancer etc. but now you can read in the papers a headline stating that coconut oil is poisonous. Both are exaggerations. We can say that the effects of the superfoods and secondary nutrients are unclear. An investigation on Goji berries showed for example that the claimed effects cannot be proven. The latest news from today are out tomorrow!



With so many new diets and products the confusion increases on what is really needed and what is healthy and good food. This lack of orientation leads to uncertainty. As a consequence, scientific comments and advice on food as well as recipes are invited. Consumers believe more in advertising than in themselves. Self-proclaimed experts suddenly become authorities. This is a sign that a clearly arranged, transparent structure of life with comprehensible values is required.

Another thing that can be observed is that the values consumers have do not lead to subsequent action. The German nutrition report of 2016 published a survey with 1000 consumers who were asked about animal husbandry: 70% expect animal welfare to be the main task for farmers before mentioning food quality. And 90% would pay more for meat of happy animals, but the demand for low price meat is still increasing.

To put it drastically: meat from mass production regardless of the animals' welfare just because of low prices is still a reality.

Daily cooking it is also getting less popular, although more and more cookbooks are on market, to name one more contradiction.

We can conclude that there are many inconsistencies. In addition, a fragmentation in society can be observed because relations are not reliable any more and it might not be true that a strawberry yoghurt contains real strawberries.

What we really need is our own, inner judge and creativity for realising our daily diet. How can we develop this inner judge?

Albert Einstein, the famous physicist, says: "The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them."

That means we need a turnaround in nutrition. This turnaround begins with the three questions as a means to develop the sense to know what we need and what is good or not good for us. This is an easy way for everyone to start with the turnaround and to start with being independent of the food industry.

Subsequently conscious living is realised because it is the individual who decides on his own values, and it is up to the individual to take care on what to eat and what to do out of a mindful attitude. And it is the individual to develop an inner certainty of what the need is and what his own values are because he is connected to himself. The individual is the sculptor of his own life, his diet and as consequence of the environment he lives in. Because through what the

consumer buys and eats he shapes the world. The consumer is the co-producer and he decides at the cash desk how our world looks like. That means in concrete terms: food quality is a question for society, not a technical or economic question. This is meaningful, satisfactory and a source of health for the individual.

This is the approach of salutogenesis that Antonovsky already introduced in the 1970s. It means that we look at what keeps us healthy and that we feel coherence as a source of health. That leads to an understanding of the connections and relations in life, to a conviction to be able to design our own life and to the belief in the sense of life. This attitude is also named as resilience, to be able to deal with what comes towards us and not becoming ill from it.

The implications of applying the three questions as a first step to healthy food and a healthy life are that perceiving food really consciously leads to an interest in where it comes from and how the biography of it looks like. In concrete terms it means that we want to meet food, meeting not only consuming food because we eat food, not nutrients. Thus connections that are urgently needed are realized and the consumers start being co-producers. The mindful attitude leads in addition to a better appreciation of the food chain elements and to humanity in economics. Economy should be driven by understanding and brotherhood not by egoism and profit maximization.

Consumers are no longer the victims of the food industry but are taking responsibility for their own diet, for the environment and thus contribute to a healthy world by a healthy, sensually pleasant, sustainable diet.

The diet of the future is a mainly plant based diet with biodynamic/organic, regional, seasonal and fair produced food with a low grade of processing. This has a positive effect on life and environment. That means maintaining the environment, unpolluted water, animal welfare and fair economic relations as the main pillars of health.

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