

Myths About Meat

Carl Ferré

DEAR EDITOR,

I am a new student of Macrobiotics. In the "Back Page" section (March/April 2003), a writer claims that her husband, a runner, needs meat. Ruth Heidrich, a tri-athlete and PhD from Hawaii, is a vegan, and takes no supplements. It seems the myth of meat for athletes will never die. Runners in particular can fare well on a macrobiotic diet. She also comments that her grandson needed meat because he was not developing well. Perhaps the boy was not eating a balanced macrobiotic diet? My son is now 24. He has never had meat, and graduated Summa Cum Laude from a fine University recently. He is in great health, and never ate meat when young. The myths about meat seem to never die.

Many follow Macrobiotics, it seems, but stray from its basic concepts.

*John Mooter
Cincinnati, OH*

Hi JOHN,

Thank you for your response that arrived just as we were sending this



CARL FERRÉ

issue to press. The question of eating meat within a macrobiotic practice has been debated for many years. I remember the issue being debated at my first French Meadows camp in 1977. At the time I couldn't understand how anyone could be saying that one could eat meat and still be called macrobiotic. Now, my perspective has changed somewhat. Since this debate strikes right at the heart of macrobiotic understanding, I plan to

write more on the subject in a future issue of *Macrobiotics Today*. . . .

Carl Ferré

DEAR EDITOR,

It is one thing to eat meat (other than fish), and another to call oneself macrobiotic and eat meat regularly. What is next? Dairy? What is Kushi's view?

*John Mooter
Cincinnati, OH*

JOHN,

Thank you for your comments and questions and for your patience in waiting for response. There are many myths that never seem to die, both without and within macrobiotic circles. I agree with you that in general runners can fare well on a macrobiotic diet. However, I do not agree that if a person needs meat it means that he or she is a macrobiotic failure. Further, in my opinion it is just as much a myth to say that all runners can fare well on a macrobiotic (vegetarian) diet as it is to say that all athletes need meat.

One of the most basic concepts of macrobiotics is that each individual is

unique and has unique dietary needs. Further, one's dietary needs can change over time. There have been times in my macrobiotic practice that I felt the need to include some meat, starting with fish, then turkey, and chicken. Currently, I avoid chicken and only have small amounts of turkey during the holidays. I continue to have fish occasionally, but don't feel I need it other than to be sociable or for pleasure.

We could debate whether or not I, or anyone else, really needs to eat meat at all. Nutritionally, it has been demonstrated that all the recommended daily requirements of all nutrients, including B₁₂, can be found in, or transmuted from, vegetarian sources. There is more to life than nutrients, however, and, in my case, at a particular time I felt absolutely sure that I needed meat to reverse an adverse condition.

It was my decision and I accepted full responsibility for it. Still, it was not an easy choice for me after twenty plus years of no animal food whatsoever. After I made the decision I felt very happy. I then realized that the difficulty was caused by adherence to a mental construct. In fact, I believe that the moment I decided it was okay to eat some meat was the very moment that healing began.

When one becomes ill, the macrobiotic viewpoint is that change is required. When change is required because of an illness, those coming from a typical meat-and-sugar diet that change to a macrobiotic grain-and-vegetable diet many times experience a dramatic change. Those already using a macrobiotic diet can try a cleansing or centering diet – most times the change is less dramatic as are the results. Those already using a cleansing diet have nowhere else to go but back to meat and/or sweeteners. Those who understand the process eat as widely as their condition allows during periods of wellness and then restrict the diet in a cleansing way when necessary.

I restricted my diet to very well-chewed grains; i.e., a number seven diet and even that was not working. Simply put, I had to relax (change). Yes, one could say that my eating was not balanced enough and that if I had included the "occasional fish," or a wider variety of "acceptable" foods, or had chewed my food better all the time, that I would not have needed to eat meat. This was not the case and my need for meat was real. When I put the first bite in my mouth every cell in my body seemed to scream, "finally – thank you."

I began to gain weight (over 30 pounds) and felt good for a while. Of course, at some point it was time to change again. Just like the first time, my body told me. In fact, I believe

"In the final analysis, however, there is no need to fear animal products."

my body is always telling me but I am a poor listener. I have written about what I call the intuitive voice inside each of us. We only have to listen. Paraphrasing Ohsawa, the more "learning" we have the harder it is to be open to simple truth.

As I read Ohsawa, he began around 1930 with an explanation of macrobiotic principles, which could be applied to all areas of life. As time went on he saw that people lacked the clarity to comprehend these principles. While general dietary guidelines were given along the way, it wasn't until 1960 that specific diets appeared in Ohsawa's writing in the first edition of *Zen Macrobiotics*.

The chapter entitled, "Ten Healthful Ways of Eating and Drinking" clearly shows five diets that are vegetarian and five diets that include animal products. As Mike Chen pointed

out during a lecture at this summer's French Meadows camp, all ten diets must be there so that both yin and yang are represented. Later in the same chapter Ohsawa states, "In the final analysis, however, there is no need to fear animal products. All depends upon quantity, for quantity changes quality."

On the other hand Ohsawa also writes that animal foods ". . . are avoided in order to develop men who can think." Ohsawa's thinking is that the judgment of those who eat animal foods gravitates to the lower levels while the judgment of those who do not elevates to the higher levels. That idea coupled with repeated statements to avoid chemically fed animals and any food that is artificial or industrially prepared clearly shows that Ohsawa only meant for small quantities of meat to be used occasionally if meat was to be used at all.

I, too, have a son who is doing quite well as a macrobiotic vegetarian. A couple of his brothers do better with some animal foods however. In fact, in our family, three do better as vegetarians and three needed, or have needed, some meat. Interestingly enough, the ones requiring some meat all have type O blood and the vegetarians all have type A blood. While we haven't written much about the different blood types in *Macrobiotics Today*, it is worth noting that we fit the profiling of Peter and Whitney D'Adamo (*Eat Right for (4) Your Type*) regarding blood type diets. Other folks have reported similar findings in their experience.

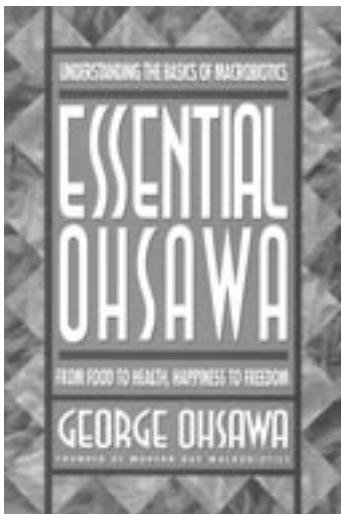
Some twenty-five years ago I had the good fortune to attend a lecture by Rolling Thunder. I still recall his saying that one should eat a small amount of the same foods as what one's ancestors for the prior seven generations ate. This keeps one connected to his or her roots. For most of us, that would mean including some meat regularly.

I still remember a conversation with Jerome Canty during the 1977

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French Meadows camp. He said that he felt macrobiotic people needed to learn how to prepare meat in a macrobiotic way. At the time, I felt meat was totally unnecessary and didn't see any value in learning how to prepare meat at all. Now, I see value as an exercise to learn yin/yang theory, for when non-macrobiotic family and friends visit, and when needed for a specific purpose.

It is easier to find naturally fed animal foods these days and thus the use of meat becomes more of an option. Keeping a proper proportion and leaning to prepare it using macrobiotic cooking principles is still required and expected. When someone who has been using macrobiotic principles for many years tells me that they include some good quality meat in their diet I no longer automatically think that that person is not macrobiotic. I respect and accept their decision.

When someone new to macrobiotics tells me they are practicing macrobiotics and include meat in their diet, I have to wonder if they have studied the principles carefully enough and know the techniques required to be successful. Still, I hesitate to say that they are not macrobiotic. Even those who include meat “regularly” would be considered “macrobiotic” in my opinion as long as they are following macrobiotic principles.

I do agree that those new to macrobiotics be advised to avoid animal products until they have studied the principles long enough to understand their proper use and quantity. This recommendation fits with Ohsawa's idea of giving specific dietary guidelines to be used until one's cloudy thinking becomes more clear and one's veiled judgment becomes more revealed. What I would ask of everyone is to be more tolerant of what it means to be practicing macrobiotics. The more inclusive all people can be the better.

There are as many ways to practice macrobiotics as there are people

practicing macrobiotics. In other writings, I have grouped the various ways of macrobiotic practice into three categories; namely, dietary, theoretical, and intuitive. Those following a dietary approach refer to the various lists of foods to eat and those to avoid. While I don't pretend to know how Michio Kushi would answer your question, a look at his Standard Macrobiotic Diet shows that meat, other than occasional fish, should be avoided while following macrobiotics in such a way.

Those using the theoretical principles have more freedom and can use a wider variety of foods once they have a working knowledge of those principles and the affects that each food produce when prepared and consumed in various ways. The same food that can be prepared and eaten in a healing way can be prepared and used in a way that can lead to sickness – even those on the “approved” list. This is why it is important for everyone to study the principles!

Those practicing macrobiotics in an intuitive way have complete freedom and no food is excluded from them. Of course, it requires a high level of understanding of the other two categories. In other words it requires the continued use of the basic concepts. The understanding of these concepts can change for each individual over time.

If basic macrobiotic concepts were taught in an inclusive enough way from the very beginning, then people would understand how meat could be used within a macrobiotic diet. And, no one would feel they have to quit macrobiotics altogether just because one day they wake up and want an egg, or, should I say it, bacon. Understand the process, be tolerant of others, and be as inclusive as possible. Good luck with your macrobiotic practice.

Carl Ferre is author of Pocket Guide to Macrobiotics and editor of Macrobiotics Today magazine.