The documentary *What the Health* is generating a lot of buzz these days. Its claim? Animal sourced food is slowly killing us and most of our major diseases can be prevented by adopting a plants-only diet.

The evidence? Nonexistent when you do the fact checking. (Complete list of scientific references at article's end.)

Filmmakers Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn try to stir up some credible statistics to support their vegan agenda, but to those who understand the scientific method, this film is totally unconvincing. They repeatedly indulge in what's called confirmation bias, i.e., talk only to those who believe exactly as you do; offer a few studies with cherry-picked data; and never admit to the extensive body of opposing evidence from highly respected sources. Oh, and be sure to stick in some emotional testimony and made-for-Hollywood drama. This is sure to work up fear and dread in your viewers.

I do appreciate that the filmmakers remind us of the link between poor food choices and disease, whether vegan or omnivore. However, *What the Health* is irresponsible journalism. It fails to present any valid evidence that an omnivorous diet is inherently unhealthy and that plants-only eating is the road to disease-free good health.

Below are 9 reasons why *What the Health* will have you shaking your head in disbelief long before the credits roll.
Conveniently omitted from this heavily biased documentary are decades of research confirming that the healthiest, longest-living populations on earth consume fish, meat, and/or dairy as a regular part of their diet, along with an abundance of plants. These cultures include, among others:

- Japanese (Okinawa)
- Italians (Sardinia)
- Costa Ricans (Nicoya)
- Greeks (Ikaria)
- Spanish
- French
- Swiss

**Sardinia: Long Lived Blue Zone**

As one of many examples, Sardinia boasts more centenarians than anywhere else on the planet. (Age 75 is considered youthful here!) Residents on this Mediterranean island consume plentiful local sheep or goat's milk, rich in protein, calcium, zinc and anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids.

Their diet is low in sugary foods and high in fresh vegetables. Small quantities of local fish or meat are eaten several times a week, and an afternoon glass of red wine is considered essential—alongside a generous chunk of goat cheese.

Sardinians, whose livestock roam on open pasture, enjoy enormous benefits from their varied diet and active lifestyle. These benefits include high bone density, low risk for fractures, and low chronic disease rates. Conversely, research to date on vegans reveals significantly lower bone mineral densities compared to meat or dairy eaters. Moreover, vegans suffer from a substantially higher risk for fractures and osteoporosis.

**Serious Vegan Health Issues**

Why does *What the Health* fail to even mention all the health issues that cause many vegans to quit? These health woes, showing up in many respected studies, include:

- Seriously low serum levels of brain-protective DHA omega-3 fatty acids
- High levels of pro-inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids
- Increased risk of anxiety and depression
- Increased risk of dental caries and gum disease
- Inadequate protein and calories during critical growth years
- Fertility issues, including low sperm count
- Vanishing menstrual periods due to insufficient calories and fat to support normal hormone production as females try to “get vegan skinny” (Amenorrhea, the loss of menses for 3 months or more, has serious implications for reproductive and heart health.)

What about the claim that meat and dairy eaters are harming their hearts? Data from four combined studies—two Seventh-day Adventist plus the EPIC-Oxford and Heidelberg—conclude that both fish eaters and dairy/egg consumers have lower levels of heart disease incidence than vegans.

**Well Researched Mediterranean Diets Ignored**

Rigorously studied for over half a century, traditional Mediterranean-style diets are consistently lauded by nutrition authorities as the world’s healthiest, resulting in prolonged life and reduced risk for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Included in these
high-fat diets are nuts, olive oil, fresh fish, legumes and veggies, with pastured meat, eggs, and fermented dairy consumed in moderate amounts.

While the world's best diets contain plentiful phenol-loaded plants, they are not vegetarian—and not even close to vegan.

Why were all these long-life, hale and hearty populations—the world's so-called “blue zones”—never mentioned in What the Health? Because veganism is agenda-driven. And when you start with a conviction instead of a question, you put on blinders to an abundance of scientific and historical evidence.

Not once does this film recognize traditional, whole food omnivorous diets that confer superior health and have stood the test of time. Just as critical, it fails to present even one population group that has thrived on a vegan diet. Why? Because there are none.

Instead, What the Health plays on our fears and indulges in bias and bad science.

And I won't even comment on narrator Andersen's habit of showing up unannounced at institutes like the American Cancer Society, insisting that receptionists respond to his urgent questions about diet and disease links. When these front desk, low-paid employees aren't able to answer his questions, he concludes this is proof of collusion and deception.

What the.....??!

Stuck in the 1980s

In their rush to condemn all animal-derived nutrition, the filmmakers fail to make the critical distinction between GMO corn-fed factory animals from Big Ag and grass-raised herbivores from family farms; between highly processed dairy, like America's sugar-drenched uncultured yogurt, and the acidophilus-rich, protein-dense organic yogurt eaten by healthy Greeks for centuries.

In failing to distinguish the nutrient-dense, grass-fed animal nourishment of our ancestors from the processed, GMO grain-stuffed, antibiotic-injected animal food thrust upon an unwitting public for the past 50 years, What the Health loses all credibility. It's like this film is stuck in the 1980s, with a few carefully selected pro-vegan doctors spouting old, invalidated myths to advance their belief system.

What The Health Sound Bites Debunked

“Americans eat way too much protein!”

Actually, nearly 60% of us fail to meet even the minimum daily protein requirement to avoid muscle wasting, according to the National Health and Nutrition Survey. Recommendations have been steadily rising, especially for active people, and our protein needs increase further as we age.

“We are not carnivorous apes!”

Umm, apes aren't carnivores and neither are humans. A doctor actually said that??

“The largest, strongest animals are herbivores!”

They also have simple brains. Despite almost non-stop grazing, large herbivores simply can't get enough calories and essential nutrients on their vegan diet to support a large, complicated, labyrinth brain. Energetically, it's an evolutionary trade-off. Omnivorous humans got smaller bodies, way smarter brains.

More myths spouted by this nonsensical film

“Eating 1 egg per day is just as bad as smoking 5 cigarettes per day!”

“More carbs equals less diabetes!”

“All animal food is bad for you!”

Never, of course, does this film note that whole eggs are rated the highest in biological value of all foods (a perfect 100, along with breast milk); that they don't raise cholesterol in the vast majority of us; and a plethora of new studies confirm it's healthy
to eat an egg every single day.

Likewise, a growing number of experts believe diabetics need to monitor their carbs and reduce intake.

The filmmakers also refuse to acknowledge that high cholesterol has been vindicated as the cause of heart disease: half of all heart attack victims have normal cholesterol levels. And the renowned Framingham Heart Study adds a further fascinating twist: “In Framingham, the more saturated fat one ate, the more cholesterol one ate, the more calories one ate, the lower the person's serum cholesterol.”

The vegan propensity to select a few outlier sources that support their ideology—and ignore exceptional research recognized by the larger scientific community—creates a huge trustworthiness gap in their argument. The pro-vegan China Study has been debunked for this same reason; moreover, it didn’t even study vegans!

Meanwhile, we won’t know the lifetime health results of today's vegans for several generations. It’s simply too new a diet in human history.

**Veganism Has ZERO Historical Record of Success**

Another basic truth remains unspoken in this misleading film.

**Not once is it revealed to would-be vegans that a plants-only diet is new in human history.**

Except for a few scattered, tiny enclaves of religious cults over the centuries (and we've no idea if they died young or old), veganism as an extended lifestyle has never been done before.

As I write in [Vegan Betrayal](#): “Veganism is, in a word, untested. Only now it is being tested on the bodies of our daughters, sons, friends and lovers, maybe even you.”

So why are vegan proselytizers promoting this restrictive diet for everyone—adults, children, even infants—when we don’t yet have the lifelong health data to know if this non-historical leap to plants-only will prove wise or tragic?

**Proposed Law in Italy Would Jail Parents of Vegan Children**

In Italy, 5th “longest-life” nation on earth (just behind ham-loving Spain and dairy-adoring Switzerland), a proposed law would mean jail time for parents who force a vegan diet on their children. In France, the parents of a baby breastfed by a vegan mother who died from malnourishment did indeed serve time in jail.

I don’t necessarily agree with this, but we also can’t argue with Italy and France's outstanding omnivorous health results. Which brings us to Italian Emma Morano who, upon reaching 116 years, credited her astonishingly long life to daily fresh eggs and an early bedtime.

**Veganism is Not A Bloodless Diet**

Although their long-term health outcomes are unknown, vegans seem convinced they are at least winning the ethical argument. So the creators of *What the Health* chose to include scenes of animal slaughter, and that’s a good thing. All meat eaters need to comprehend the source of their food, numbers involved, and ethical and environmental implications.

But what this film fails to disclose is that industrial plant agriculture, which almost all vegans rely upon (think Whole Foods, Natural Grocers, Safeway, etc.) is responsible for the death of billions of wild animals. How so? From scraping away the native landscape, intensive field operations, pesticides if non-organic, and fish-killing nitrogen runoff into rivers and lakes.

In many cases, whole intact ecosystems—grasslands, wetlands, forests—are destroyed in order to cultivate giant fields of hemp, flax, rice, soy, peas, wheat, etc. By contrast, Alaska’s wild salmon fisheries are a rare example of ecosystem sustainability in the commercial world.

Yes, entire food chains of native animals and plants once thrived in our agricultural fields, and most of that land is used to feed humans. (Just 33% of croplands worldwide are used for livestock feed, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.) Is the life of a field mouse of less worth than that of a chicken? Not according to PETA and animal rights doctrine.

Veggie or omnie, everyone who eats large-scale industrial food is implicated. So if these film-makers really care about animals,
they should be telling all of us to stop supporting carbon-intensive, soil-depleting, wild-animal-destroying industrial agriculture. And give our loyalty and dollars instead to small, organic, no-till, mixed animal-plant farms which replenish the soil, store carbon, and regenerate the earth!

**Vegans Dropping Out En Masse**

Political vegans, the kind who preach or make biased documentaries, want you and everybody in the world to go vegan just like them. It’s very similar to the fervor of a religious fundamentalist. Their way is the only way. And the rest of us have not yet “seen the light.”

The truth is a lot of ex-vegans HAVE seen the light. According to a large respected survey, 70% of vegans ditch their diet; 86% of vegetarians. Nearly 1/3 of these vegans/vegetarians cite poor health as a prime factor, with 82% from this group confirming that their health improved within 2 days to 3 months once meat was reintroduced.

But this survey was conducted by the American Beef Association, right?

No, it was conducted by a pro-vegan group, The Humane Research Council, which was hoping to uncover very different statistics. Releasing these damaging numbers is testimony not only to the integrity of this group, but the failure of veganism as a valid, complete, long-term diet. Health concerns commonly cited by vegans include:

- weakness
- ongoing fatigue
- depression
- endocrine disruption/loss of menses
- poor sleep
- anxiety
- dental problems, including demineralization
- plummeting concentration and brain fog

Vegans do get favorable marks for lower blood pressure and body weight. Certainly you can lose pounds on this low-calorie diet. And if you’re old, obese and diseased, it can start you on a path toward better health. Traditional healing practices prescribe a vegan-type diet as temporary medicine for just such times—much like your dog seeking grass when he’s sick. So yes, short-term veganism may work for purposes of cleansing or healing from illness or disease. However, this restricted diet was never, ever meant to be a long-term lifestyle.

**Missing Nutrients in Plants**

Nutrient deficiencies can take years to reveal themselves and by then any damage to your health can be severe or even permanent. That's unfortunate because there are a whole lot of nutrients and compounds in animals that aren't found in plants, or exist in deficient quantities. These include vitamin B12, vitamin D3, retinol (true vitamin A), taurine (a functional nutrient), carnitine, carnosine, heme iron, creatine, conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), and the long-chain fatty acid DHA. (Research on algal DHA is largely industry-funded; thus far it shows increased LDL cholesterol.)

What's more, nutritional science is still in its infancy. New nutrients and co-factors are continually being discovered, and isolated supplements can never replace the complex synergy of whole foods. Eating a wide variety of organic, whole, real foods from both plants and animals—as all the longest-living populations on earth do—is the very best way to ensure your body is getting all the nutrients it needs. Our ancestors resorted to eating only plants during times of drought or illness, not by choice, and always returned to a mixed diet in order to get the entire palette of nutrients that humans evolved to need. And yes, despite what this film infers, the science is clear: our human ancestors were omnivores.

**What Anthropologists Say About Plants-Only Diets**

“Animal foods play a special role in the nutritional physiology of our species,” confirms anthropologist Marvin Harris. The
hominoid that rigidly stuck to plants, the big-jawed vegetarian with massive molars, *Paranthropus robustus*, did not in the end turn out to be so robust. Its line went extinct. The Homo erectus line survived in large part due to a varied diet that included meat, resulting in a large, complex, problem-solving brain. Meanwhile, the docile, plant-eating *P. robustus* vanished into the African mist.

Researcher Suzana Herculano-Houzel of the Institute of Biomedical Sciences confirms:

> It is biologically implausible that humans evolved our large brain on a plants-only diet.

Our ancestors needed meat in order to obtain all of the nutrient-dense calories, proteins, fatty acids, and vitamin B12 required for large-brain evolution and maintenance.

**What The Health: Confusing Ideology with Facts**

In summary, pro-vegan advocates, including the directors of *What the Health*, are confusing ideology with the facts. Yet the science is clear. Our ancestors, including our great-grandparents, ate whole animal food along with plants—and thrived. (Past humans died from infectious diseases, not cancer, diabetes, and heart attacks.) Understanding how our bodies evolved to need the nutritional collaboration of both plant and animal food is a fascinating journey—and one that every vegan or would-be vegan should undertake.

Anthropology, history, and non-biased nutrition research tell us something very different than “eat only plants!” Moderation not extremism. Plentiful plants balanced with select amounts of highly nutritious, animal-based whole foods, like wild Alaskan salmon, wild sardines, and pastured organic eggs. Vegans are messing with our complex dietary co-evolution with other animals and plants. And they're dropping out in droves for good reasons.

Bottom line: this film offers a simplistic, sensationalized view of humankind's evolution and dietary needs. It lacks complexity, credible evidence, and any real depth of understanding.

**About the Author**

Mara Kahn, MS, is a science writer and freelance journalist who began investigating veganism after her daughter lost her formerly vibrant health on a plants-only diet. After five years of research in the nutrition and anthropological literature, Kahn published *Vegan Betrayal*. The book was attacked by vegan activists—and praised by reviewers who actually read it, including ex-vegans who appreciated its abundant science and testimonials. *Vegan Betrayal* includes over 400 citations from authoritative nutritional, environmental, and historical sources, along with extensive interviews and the personal stories of former vegans.

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Joel and Sergine Le Moaligou convicted of causing child's death, *The Guardian* 01 Apr 2011
"WHAT THE HEALTH" OR "WHAT THE ....?!"
Living Green in an artificial world
How to live naturally when so much around you seems synthetic
Sarah Pope

Make Your Home Nontoxic

CLICK HERE
After watching What the Health, your friends start side-eyeing the hunk of butter you just plunked into your coffee. If you're looking for some real science behind the claims in this movie, read on. Here are the top 10 claims from What the Health and the real science behind them.

1. Meat is as dangerous as cigarettes. Nope. But when someone lumps all meat together as being bad for you, regardless of quality, you can bet there's more fear-mongering than science behind the claim. In What the Health, the documentary's anti-cheese meat-hating doctor Neil Barnard, M.D. sent researchers into fast food restaurants to test for carcinogens in their products. Surprise! They found carcinogens in every chicken sample they took. In other news, water is wet.

In the spirit of so many food documentaries and diet books that have come before, What the Health promises us there is one healthy way to eat. And it involves cutting all animal products from our diet. The film is filled with bad gotcha journalism. Abuses of science aside, Andersen also repeatedly engages in poorly executed gotcha journalism in an attempt to suggest patient groups are trying to cover up the truth about diet he's stumbled upon. On numerous occasions during the film, he calls these groups, such as Susan G. Komen or the American Heart Association, which he correctly points out often take money from the food industry. The Incredibly Bad Science Behind Dr. Esselstyn's Plant-based Diet. The skeptical cardiologist has heard a few cardiologist colleagues rave about the movie "Forks Over Knives" and promote the so-called "whole-foods, plant based diet." One of the two major physician figures in the movie is Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, a former surgeon and now a vegan evangelist. I truly believe that health care practitioners would best serve their patients — from a weight and diabetes and heart disease and cancer prevention point of view — from following an individualized approach to life style management, considering what's best for both health and happiness, on an individual basis, than trying to advance the point of view that there is one best diet and.