

The Weston A. Price Foundation

Modern Baby Books: Full of Bad Advice

SEPTEMBER 20, 2005 BY LISA BIANCO-DAVIS
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Walk down the “Baby & Childbirth” section of any bookstore or library and you will be faced with a bewildering array of books aimed at the pregnant woman. These books are written by doctors, obstetricians, midwives, mothers. . . and others. Unfortunately none of the authors appears to have read the work of Weston A. Price.

My husband and I are expecting our first child later this year. Being a first-time mom who is familiar with the work of Dr. Price, I was naturally curious to see what the pregnancy books had to say on the matter of nutrition. So I went to our local library and checked out an armload of books. I was surprised, not by the variety of the advice between the different books, but by the consistency of the message. Many of the pregnancy books included the USDA food pyramid, and parroted government recommendations. And while some of their advice is useful, much of it is misleading or just plain wrong.

When Weston Price studied healthy traditional societies, he found that they placed a strong emphasis on the nutrition of couples prior to pregnancy and of women during pregnancy and lactation. The foods these societies considered absolutely essential for producing healthy children were seafood (fish and shellfish, fish organs, fish liver oils and fish eggs), organ meats, insects, animal fats, egg yolks, whole milk, cheese and butter from cows eating green grass. When studied in the laboratory, Price found these foods to be high in minerals and vitamins, particularly the fat-soluble vitamins, A, D and K₂ ([Price’s “Activator X”](#)

(<http://www.westonaprice.org/health-topics/abcs-of-nutrition/on-the-trail-of-the-elusive-x->

[factor-a-sixty-two-year-old-mystery-finally-solved/](#)). He determined that these traditional diets provided ten times the amount of fat-soluble vitamins compared to the American diet of the 1930s.

Let's look at the modern pregnancy books' recommendations regarding these foods that were considered essential to traditional societies.

SEAFOOD

The modern books generally recommended some seafood, and rightly state that fish is a good source of the important Omega-3 fatty acids. However, they suggest limiting the amount of fish due to fears about mercury contamination. (One of the books specifically recommended farm-raised fish containing chemical colorants and fed on artificial diets, in order to protect children from mercury contamination of wild fish!?) None of the books mentions the nutrient-dense seafood—shellfish, fish organs, or fish eggs. Although some authors mention cod liver oil, none of the books I reviewed recommended it. One book strongly cautioned against fish oils due to worries about “excessive” levels of vitamins A and D. “Fish oils (e.g., cod liver oil) and liver are not recommended as safe sources of vitamin D for pre-pregnancy or pregnancy.”⁸

ORGAN MEATS

A few of the modern pregnancy books mentioned the fact that organ meats are rich sources of iron and vitamin A. However, none recommended them. In fact, most contained misleading or outright false statements about vitamin A. “Vitamin A is found in orange and leafy green vegetables, liver and other organ meats; butter and whole and fortified milk.”³ The truth is, fully formed vitamin A is *not* found in orange and leafy green vegetables, it is only found in animal sources. Some books warn against consuming “too much” vitamin A, claiming that more than 10,000 IU per day increases the risk of birth defects. A couple of the books do make the important distinction between natural vitamin A in foods and synthetic vitamin A from supplements. Synthetic vitamin A—in multi-vitamin pills and processed food like margarine—has been linked to birth defects and is best avoided by everyone. A couple of books said that you couldn't overdose on food sources of vitamin A, but one book in particular cautioned several times against consuming liver or other organ meats. “Liver, which

can be extraordinarily high in fully formed vitamin A, is one of the best sources of iron and sometimes is recommended for women with iron-deficiency anemia. It's also a nutritious, inexpensive source of folic acid and other nutrients. However, due to its excessive vitamin A content, we recommend that liver not be consumed in any appreciable quantity beginning in

the month before pregnancy.”⁸

Weston Price emphasized the fact that neither protein, minerals nor water-soluble vitamins can be utilized by the body without vitamin A and that only animal sources can provide adequate amounts of this vital nutrient. But instead of encouraging pregnant women to consume natural sources of true vitamin A such as liver and other organ meats, cod liver oil and eggs, butter and cream from pasture-raised cows, the modern books tell expectant mothers to meet their vitamin A needs from beta-carotene, claiming that beta-carotene will be converted into vitamin A “as needed.” These authors do not seem to understand the fact that the conversion of beta-carotene to vitamin A is dependent on many factors, including sufficient fat in the diet, and that the production of vitamin A from plant pre-cursors is difficult for a large portion of the population, including those with digestive and thyroid problems.

ANIMAL FATS

When comparing the advice of the modern pregnancy books with the wisdom of traditional societies, the differences are nowhere more apparent than on the subject of fats. The various books contained copious warnings to avoid fat in general and saturated fat in particular.

Some examples of the modern advice are:

- “Your body’s need for fat is minimal, reduce your intake by trimming fat off meat, using less butter, drinking low-fat milk, boiling or steaming foods...”¹
- “Limit total fat intake to 25 to 30 percent of total calories by cutting back on saturated fats in fatty meats and dairy products...”²
- “You can’t eat butter because its high saturated fat content increases the risk for heart disease...”²
- “Choose lean meats and trim fat from meat before cooking. With poultry, remove skin.”⁴
- “Saturated fats are the least healthy (fat) and are best used in small amounts. Go easy on butter, fat found in meats, coconut, coconut oils, and palm oil.”⁵
- “Babies don’t need any oil...”⁷

These views are typical of modern fat-phobia, but supported neither by the evidence of healthy traditional societies nor by the discoveries of modern science.

Readers of *Wise Traditions* know that saturated fat is not to blame for heart disease, cancer

or the myriad other ills that are frequently attributed to it. In fact, saturated fats play many important roles in the body chemistry. Many of the healthy peoples Weston Price studied went out of their way to obtain saturated fat, such as hunting specific animals during the season that would maximize that animal's fat content; and these cultures preferred the fattiest portions of the animals, often throwing the lean muscle meats away.

EGG YOLKS

The modern pregnancy books misunderstand the nutrient value of eggs. Most of the books do recommend eggs but advise no more than 2 per day, and a few books say to have eggs no more than 2 or 3 times per week, or consume whites only. Most of the books recommend eggs for their protein content, and many of the books encourage consuming egg whites without the yolks to avoid their naturally occurring fat content. The books also contain mistaken information about cholesterol, claiming that diets high in cholesterol cause heart disease, and consequently recommend egg whites only (throwing away the nutrient-dense yolks). One author even recommends egg substitutes (which caused rapid death in test animals). "Egg yolks contain a significant amount of fat and cholesterol. The refrigerated egg substitutes available at your grocery store offer a cholesterol-free and lower-fat option."⁴

In the recipe section of one book every recipe calling for eggs uses egg whites only. The recipe for "Creamed Eggs" uses egg whites, olive oil, skim milk, white flour, salt, pepper, sugar and whole-wheat English muffins. The author notes that it was her husband's grandmother's favorite egg dish, "of course she used cream and put the egg yolk on top."⁶ I say, we need to return to the traditional recipes and include the cream and egg yolks! While it is true that eggs do contain fat and cholesterol, these are valuable natural substances, especially needed in the diets of growing children.

Egg whites are a great protein source, but the yolks are even more valuable as a food for the growing baby, supplying vitamins A, D and E along with nutrients that are critical for brain development, namely EPA, DHA and choline.

Many of the books also caution against consuming raw or lightly cooked eggs out of fear of salmonella or listeria. In fact, it is fine to consume the yolks raw (as in smoothies or salad dressings). The whites, however, should usually be cooked to neutralize enzyme inhibitors that can interfere with digestion.

WHOLE MILK, CHEESE AND BUTTER

Nearly every modern pregnancy book I looked at recommended consuming milk and dairy products to ensure an adequate calcium supply. However, not one of the authors points out the fact that calcium from typical store-bought pasteurized milk is poorly absorbed. Nor do they mention the fact that too little phosphorus also inhibits calcium absorption, but the complete destruction of the enzyme phosphatase (needed to assimilate phosphorus) is the standard test for the pasteurization of milk. But instead of recommending raw milk—Nature’s perfect food—they all warn against it! “Drink and eat only pasteurized milk products, and avoid all soft cheeses such as brie, Camembert, Roquefort, feta, and Mexican varieties. These cheeses, as well as unpasteurized milk and raw foods made from it, can give you a form of food poisoning called listeriosis.”³

“Pregnant women should *completely avoid* . . . raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods that contain unpasteurized milk.”⁴

Actually, raw milk is safer than pasteurized milk. Raw milk from healthy, pasture-fed cows has been a staple in many cultures for centuries, and has contributed to fabulous health, not caused disease.

Most of the books recommended using skim milk, reduced-fat cheese, and avoiding butter, in a misguided attempt to keep women from gaining too much weight or to restrict saturated fat and cholesterol—oblivious to the fact that cholesterol and saturated fat are needed for brain development. “Opt for lower-fat versions of the dairy foods that offer such great nutrition benefits: low-fat or nonfat yogurt and milk, nonfat cream cheese and sour cream, reduced-fat cheeses (search out those that are 50% fat reduced).”⁶

“Because they are an animal source, dairy foods can also contribute to saturated fat and cholesterol intake, so choosing lower-fat or fat-free versions of these foods can help keep your levels down.” They claim that “Skim milk has all the important nutrients in the same quantity as low-fat or whole milk.”⁴ But skim milk has none of the fat-soluble vitamins in milk

fat that Weston Price found to be so important to maintaining superb health.

A few of the books noted that some people do not digest lactose (milk sugar) in milk well, so they recommend getting calcium from soybeans, tofu, nuts, seeds, broccoli, dark leafy greens, soymilk and fortified orange juice. These authors do not understand that consuming milk in its natural raw state and/or fermented allows many of these so-called “lactose intolerant” people to digest dairy products. They also fail to mention rich bone broths, another excellent source of calcium and other minerals used by many cultures that do not drink milk.

One book, when discussing feeding children, advised against all milk, saying, “Children do not need whole milk. They do not need that for the developing brain. That myth is old, was never true and has been discredited.”⁷ I can see how someone could come to that conclusion. It would seem like an old myth to read that even as late as the 1920s doctors were recommending milk for the treatment of many diseases, and that milk has been viewed as a healthful food far back into antiquity. But at the same time you can find studies in the late 20th century that have linked milk consumption to asthma, frequent ear infections, diabetes and a host of other illnesses. It would seem logical to conclude that milk was never a healthy food, but this conclusion would overlook several important changes that happened to the production of milk during that time frame.

The first important change took place in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when people in cities began confining cows into concentrated feedlots, and feeding them cheap waste material instead of allowing them to graze on green pastures. This led to illness in the cows, and in the people who drank their milk. The second important change was instituted in order to combat the disastrous health effects of these confinement dairies. Around 1910 most American cities required pasteurization and by 1950 most milk was pasteurized. These changes, coupled with homogenization, have changed milk from a health-giving food into a disease-producing substance.

In contrast, Dr. Price found several cultures that relied heavily on the whole raw milk from cows grazing on green pastures. The mountain Swiss and the Masai are prime examples of healthy primitive cultures that depended on the nutritive value of whole raw milk products. Weston Price observed traditional people going to great lengths to obtain foods high in fat-

soluble vitamins for pregnant women. "Among the primitive Masai in certain districts of Africa," Dr. Price wrote, "the girls were required to wait for marriage until the time of the year when the cows were on the rapidly growing young grass and to use the milk from these cows for a certain number of months before they could be married." In the Swiss Alps, the butter from cows eating rapidly growing green grass was a sacred food, considered very important for pregnant women. When cows eat rapidly growing green grass, the butterfat they produce contains the highest levels of vitamin A, D and K₂ (Activator X), all important catalysts for growth and nutrient assimilation. Traditional societies always consumed their milk, cheese and butter raw and often cultured them, and they valued the bright yellow butter from grass-fed animals.

Some of the other nutritional topics the pregnancy books covered were the basic food categories, vitamin supplements and the subject of vegetarian diets.

CARBOHYDRATES

All of the books I reviewed encouraged using carbohydrates as the primary source of calories. Since they want everyone to limit their fat (and to some degree protein) intake, they have to rely on carbohydrates for the needed calories. Many of them followed the food pyramid guidelines of 6-11 servings of grains and cereal per day. And while they do recommend whole grains rather than refined flours, not one of the books mentions that the digestibility and nutrient content of those whole grains would be greatly improved by soaking, sprouting or sour leavening. Traditional societies used these methods in order to deactivate the enzyme inhibitors, and anti-nutrients, such as phytic acid, contained in whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes.

The modern books claim that in order to have healthy children, a woman needs to get 45-65 percent of her daily calories from carbohydrates. This is patently untrue, and would come as a surprise to the healthy Eskimo women studied by Dr. Price. Reports show that Eskimos consuming their native diets obtain about 80 percent of their calories from fat, with the remainder primarily from protein and very little from carbohydrates. About Eskimos, Dr. Price wrote, "One does not get a conception of the magnificent dental development of the more primitive Eskimos," Price wrote, "simply by learning that they have freedom from dental caries. The size and strength of the mandible, the breadth of the face and the strength of the

muscles of mastication all reach a degree of excellence that is seldom seen in other races.”

PROTEIN

The modern pregnancy books rightly stress the importance of protein in the diets of pregnant women. Adequate protein is necessary for the formation of tissues (including the baby and placenta), hormones, increased blood volume, and milk during lactation. Some of the books suggest good whole sources of protein such as eggs, red meat, poultry, fish, cheese and milk. However, many of the books recommend consuming these foods without their naturally occurring fat component, as in skim milk, egg whites, skinless chicken breasts and extra lean meat. Many of the books recommend limiting meat consumption, preferring vegetarian sources of protein. Many also say that it is possible to obtain all the necessary protein from vegetable sources such as legumes, whole grains and soy foods.

VEGETARIAN DIETS

All of the healthy cultures studied by Dr. Price ate some animal foods; in some of them (such as the Eskimo and Masai) animal foods comprised almost 100 percent of their diets. None of the healthy traditional societies he studied were vegetarian, yet most of the modern books would have us believe that we would all be healthier if we eliminated animal foods from our diets. No, thanks; I tried that for several years, and I feel healthier now that I have reintroduced animal foods into my diet.

SOY

Only one of the books I reviewed gave any sort of warning against soy foods, noting that recent controversy questions its “safety during pregnancy.”⁴ The rest encouraged the use of soy foods such as tofu, soy nuts, soymilk, TVP, cooked soybeans, soy powder, soy flour, etc. They recommend soy as a protein source because it is low in saturated fat and cholesterol, without mention of the tremendous amount of phytoestrogens the baby will be receiving through its mother’s diet. One author even claimed that tofu may be the perfect food!² The pregnancy and childcare magazines are even worse, especially any of the ones that focus on “natural” or “alternative” health. They have ads for all kinds of soy foods, promoting soymilk, and soy yogurt as healthy foods for growing children.

SUPPLEMENTS

Most of the books advised obtaining vitamins and minerals from food sources, using dietary supplements only as a safeguard. But I had a hard time believing the stupidity of some of the statements I read. For example, one author says to turn first to food for your nutrient needs, and only to supplements as a last resort, and yet in the next sentence she seems to see no contradiction in recommending consuming “fortified” foods.² The author doesn’t seem to be aware of the fact that “fortified” just means that while processing the food manufacturers have added a synthetic vitamin or mineral supplement. That is not the same as getting your nutrition from the food itself. Drinking “calcium fortified” orange juice is the same thing as drinking a glass of orange juice and taking a calcium tablet!

SOME GOOD

Not all of the nutritional advice in these books is bad. To their credit, these authors do encourage the use of dark green leafy vegetables, whole grains, fruits, nuts, colorful vegetables, and fish, and warn against trans fatty acids. Many of them also caution against over-the-counter medications, smoking, drinking alcohol or caffeinated beverages, and exposure to toxins. The sad fact is that the average modern woman would improve her diet if she followed the recommendations in these books, simply because she would cut back on the refined sugar, white flour and hydrogenated vegetable oils and eat more vegetables. But nowhere in their recipes or meal plans did I find any substantial source of the fat-soluble vitamins that Dr. Price found to be so essential to good health. Their meals did not include organ meats, dairy or animal fats, fatty fish, fish eggs, or whole eggs.

HEART ATTACKS FOR PREGNANCY BOOK AUTHORS

My pregnancy diet would likely give most of these authors a heart attack. I eat two or more whole eggs a day. All of my milk is whole, raw and often fermented. I have meat (beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, fish, shellfish or liver) two or more times per day, always consumed with the fat. I use lard when I cook, and I eat some of the beef and fish raw. I eat only a small

amount of grains, usually one slice of sprouted whole grain bread, piled high with raw butter and raw cheese. I try to get at least two tablespoons of coconut oil a day, in addition to the two tablespoons or more of raw butter, and the one-tablespoon of cod liver oil. The rest of my diet is composed of fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Hardly a fitting diet for the USDA food pyramid! But I challenge anyone to find one traditional society that produced healthy robust children on such diets as recommended in these books.

Sidebars

THE BOOKS I REVIEWED

1. *The Complete Book of Pregnancy and Childbirth* by Sheila Kitzinger, Knopf, 2003.
2. *Nutrition for a Healthy Pregnancy* by Elizabeth Somer, MA, RD, Owl Books, 2002.
3. *Nine Months and a Day: A Pregnancy, Labor and Delivery Companion* by Linda Hughey Holt, MD, FACOG and Adrienne B. Lieberman, Harvard Common Press, 2000.
4. *The Everything Pregnancy Nutrition Book* by Kimberly A. Tessmer, RD, LD, Adams Media Corporation, 2005.
5. *Mothering Magazine's Having a Baby, Naturally* by Peggy O'Mara (editor of Parenting magazine) and others, Atria 2003.
6. *The Gift of Health* by Karin B Michels, ScD, MSc, MPH and Kristine Napier, MPH, RD, LD, Pocket, 2001.
7. *Listening to Your Baby* by Jay Gordon, MD, Perigee Books, 2002.
8. *Before Your Pregnancy* by Amy Ogle, MS, RD and Lisa Mazzullo, MD, Ballentine, 2002.
9. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth* by Michele Isaacs Glicksman, MD with Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, Alpha, 1999.
10. *What to Expect When You're Expecting* by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E Murkoff & Sandee E Hathaway, BSN, Workman Publishing Company, 2002.

A good project for Weston A. Price members would be to pick one of these books and place a critique of the diet section on Amazon. Start with Number 10, which is ranked 108. The others are showing lackluster sales, but all have five-star reviews. This would be an excellent way to make expectant mothers aware of our teachings.

Our Recommended Diet for Pregnant and Nursing Mothers

1 tablespoon cod liver oil daily,

(mixed with water or a little fresh juice)

2 8-ounce glasses whole milk daily, preferably raw and from pasture-fed cows

4 tablespoons butter daily, preferably from pasture-fed cows

2 or more eggs daily, preferably from pastured chickens

Additional egg yolks daily, added to smoothies, salad dressings, scrambled eggs, etc.

3-4 ounces fresh liver, once or twice per week

Fresh seafood, 2-4 times per week, particularly wild salmon, shellfish and fish eggs

Fresh beef or lamb daily, always consumed with the fat

Oily fish or lard daily, for vitamin D

2 tablespoons coconut oil or 1/2 cup coconut milk daily, used in cooking or smoothies, etc.

Lacto-fermented condiments and beverages

Bone broths used in soups, stews and sauces

Soaked whole grains

Fresh vegetables and fruits, preferably organic

AVOID

Trans fatty acids (e.g., hydrogenated oils)

Soft drinks

Junk foods

Caffeine

Commercial fried foods

Alcohol

Sugar and high fructose corn syrup

Cigarettes

White flour

Drugs (even prescription drugs)

Soy foods

Synthetic vitamins (in multi-vitamins for pregnant women)

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Lisa Bianco-Davis lives in Eugene, Oregon with her husband, son and dog. She is a professional sign maker by trade, and has been a Weston A. Price Foundation Chapter Leader since 2007. She organizes local chapter events, teaches occasional cooking classes, and is co-creator of the Kraut Pounder. See krautpounder.com and eugenewestonaprice.org for more info.

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