

FLETCHERISM: THE ART OF CHEWING

Dear Dr. Meinig:

Not too long ago I learned about a clinic in Europe that feeds its patients only dried white bread. They are instructed to chew and chew until the bread becomes liquid before swallowing. They are not allowed liquid of any kind. The only moist<sup>e</sup><sub>n</sub>er is from the person's saliva.

This seems like a preposterous way to run a clinic or hospital, but they claim patients are cured of all sorts of illnesses under this regime. I thought you might have some knowledge of this clinic and health system. If so, it should make for an interesting column. B.I.

Dear B.I.:

The idea for this treatment of illness grew out of the pronouncements of Horace Fletcher in the beginning years of the 1900<sup>s</sup>. Born in 1849, Fletcher became a very wealthy importer of oriental curios, and was able to retire at age 35. He had a reputation for amazing feats of strength; was tops in wrestling, running, jumping, and won gymnastic competitions, could lift weights of pig iron that the strongest sailors were unable to budge. Yet in his forties, his hair had turned white, his short 5 foot 7 inch stature carried 217 pounds of weight, he was tired, and an insurance company

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turned him down as a poor risk.

The embarrassment and humiliation he felt at these turns of events led to a pursuit of books on nutrition. He became imbued with the work of a Venetian nobleman who had solved a similar personal <sup>health</sup> problem<sup>s</sup> some 400 years before. He also was completely taken by Sylvester Graham who advocated well-chewed food, and of Gladstone's idea that since we have 32 teeth, each bite of food should be chewed 32 times.

Adopting these thorough chewing practices, he found his hunger satisfied with much less food. In a few months he lost 65 pounds. His new-found health so enthused him that he became a self-proclaimed nutritionist. His new career as a nutritionist, carried out by lectures in many parts of the world, were <sup>presented</sup> without charge. During World War I, he went to Belgium to teach refugees how to make the most of their scant rations. All in all, he developed a great following.

Fletcherizing became popular with many in all walks of life. There is no question that thorough chewing permits the extraction of more nutrients from food. We now know that the enzymes ptyalin and maltase in the saliva begins starch digestion and that one molecule of starch is converted to 300 to 500 molecules of glucose by its action. Hurried gulping and swallowing of food along with washing it down with beverages, prevents this enzyme action from taking place. Chewing food until it becomes liquid is enhanced by

an increased production of saliva, thus adding more of these digestive enzymes and more release of nutrients.

The European clinic you mention and its adoption of this method is no doubt a result of the work of Horace Fletcher. It should be pointed out that although it results in health improvement for many, its long-term effects are probably poor. Fletcher's brother almost died after three months on his program and his children were far from healthy. He himself died from what was termed a lack of roughage (fiber) in his diet.

From time to time, I have pointed out that no matter how bizarre a diet might be, if it includes the stopping of junk foods and beverages, it will result at least for a time in improved health. I'm sure the patients in the European clinic living on white bread are achieving their <sup>better</sup> ~~health~~ health, partly from the increased mastication but mainly from eliminating the harmful foods they formerly consumed rather than the improved digestion of the white bread. It has been demonstrated that two-thirds of the mineral and vitamin content of white bread has been lost in the milling process. Gaylord Houser many years ago pioneered his nutrition work with the statement, "the whiter the bread, the quicker you're dead." Dr. Weston Price's study of 14 races of primitives graphically demonstrated that white flour and sugar quickly destroyed the health of native populations.

All in all most of us could benefit a great deal by using our saliva to moisten what we eat and by chewing food until it is liquified. Then if we would also eliminate white bread and the other junk foods and beverages the resulting improvements in VIM, VIGOR AND VITALITY would be astonishing.