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The Simple Eating Hack That Could Prevent Most Diseases Including Blindness

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola Fact Checked

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a leading cause of blindness in the U.S., is said to be a disease associated with aging, but Dr. Chris Knobbe believes it's mostly related to diet
- Nine years of extensive research and investigation have led Knobbe to conclude that AMD is driven by nutrient deficiencies and toxicity, caused by processed foods
- In 1900, the top four causes of death were infectious in nature; by 2010, this had all changed, with chronic diseases replacing infectious diseases as the top killers
- The four primary components that make up processed foods that are, in turn, contributing to chronic diseases like AMD are sugar, industrially processed seed oils, refined flour and trans fats; industrially processed seed oils are clearly the worst offender
- According to Knobbe, there were only 50 cases of AMD described across the globe between 1851 and 1930; this skyrocketed to an estimated 196 million cases in 2020
- Knobbe believes that by following an ancestral diet rich in grass fed meat and poultry, pastured dairy, wild-caught fish, vegetables, nuts and seeds, the majority of AMD cases would disappear

This article was previously published November 7, 2020, and has been updated with new information.

Dr. Chris Knobbe, an ophthalmologist, is the founder and president of the Cure AMD Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to the prevention of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

AMD, a leading cause of blindness in the U.S. — and the third leading cause of blindness globally (after cataracts and glaucoma)[1] — is said to be a disease associated with aging, but, in the presentation above, Knobbe asks, "Could age-related macular degeneration be a disease of processed food consumption?"

Nine years of research and investigation have led Knobbe to conclude that AMD is, indeed, being driven by nutrient deficiencies and toxicity caused by processed foods. This common denominator isn't linked only to AMD, however — it's also linked to chronic diseases of all kinds, including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

The root of the problem lies in mitochondrial dysfunction, which is caused by the excessive consumption of a Westernized diet, including toxic industrially processed seed oils (incorrectly called "vegetable oils"), refined flour, refined added sugars and trans fats.

Chronic Metabolic and Degenerative Disease 'Didn't Exist'

According to Knobbe, chronic metabolic and degenerative disease "clearly didn't exist 125 years ago," at least not nearly to the extent they do today, citing a study by Dr. David Jones and colleagues, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2012.[2] The study looked at the history of disease over the past 200 years, comparing the top 10 causes of death in the U.S. from 1900 to 2010.

In 1900, the top four causes of death were infectious in nature: pneumonia/influenza, tuberculosis, gastrointestinal infections and cardiac valvular disease. The latter is classified as heart disease, but, Knobbe says, "This wasn't coronary artery type heart disease. This was cardiac valvular disease driven by syphilis, endocarditis and rheumatic fever … It was infectious still."

By 2010, this had all changed, with chronic diseases replacing infectious diseases as the top killers. "Today, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, Alzheimer's disease, Type 2 diabetes, kidney disease, all chronic diseases account for seven of the top 10 causes of death." In reviewing the data, Knobbe found that diabetes of any type was rare in the 19th century, but it increased 25-fold in a period of 80 years.

He also cites data that found the obesity rate in the 19th century was 1.2%. By 1960, it had already risen to 13% — an 11-fold increase — and continued to climb steadily to this day. "Obesity is on target to be 50% of adults obese in the United States by 2030, half obese," Knobbe says. "So the increase looks something like … a 33-fold increase already in 115 years." He continues:

> *"Again, you have to ask, you know, what accounts for this … All right, well, let's go back to the dietary history now. So you're going to see Westernized disease correlate to modernized diets. That's the theme of this, essentially …*
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> *And I will submit to you that this has really been a global human experiment that began in 1866, it didn't begin in 1980, you know, with our low-fat, low saturated-fat dietary guidelines, it began in the 19th century and nobody gave informed consent of us. Not one of us knew what we were getting into and most of us still don't."*

Four Primary Processed Food Culprits

The four primary components that make up processed foods that are, in turn, contributing to chronic diseases like AMD are sugar, industrially processed seed oils, refined flour and trans fats. Knobbe says:

> *"… Sugar has been in the food supply for hundreds of years, but between 1822 and 1999 sugar increased 17-fold … Cotton seed oil, the world's first, highly polyunsaturated vegetable oil introduced right here in the good old US of A in 1866, the entire world, or at least 99.9-plus% of it had never seen a polyunsaturated vegetable oil, ever. All right, 1880 roller mill technology was introduced.*

> *And in the United States, it was introduced in Minneapolis … roller mill gives us refined white, wheat flour, which is a nutrient deficient food. And then fourth, 1911, Proctor and gamble introduced Crisco. That's trans fats, they're hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils … by 2009, our own USDA reports that those four foods make up 63% of the American diet, 63%. That's the recipe for disaster."*

As the consumption of processed foods rose, so too did chronic diseases. According to Knobbe, AMD was rare from 1851 to about 1930, but had reached epidemic proportions by the 1970s. As of 2020, 196 million people worldwide suffer from AMD.

"And what we always see is that the processed foods come first and then the AMD hits later," Knobbe says.

"It's always this way. There's a temporal relationship. It's at least 30 years of this consumption, probably closer to 50. You know, these are chronic … diseases that take a long time to develop, right? There's a dose response relationship … I believe if you look at all of our data, this becomes nearly a mathematical certainty that this relationship between food and macular degeneration exists."

Knobbe also cites the work of Weston A. Price, the dentist who wrote the classic book "Nutrition and Physical Degeneration." In the 1900s, Price did extensive research on the link between oral health and physical diseases.

He was one of the major nutritional pioneers of all time, and his research revealed native tribes that still ate their traditional diet had nearly perfect teeth and were almost 100% free of tooth decay. But when these tribal populations were introduced to refined sugar and white flour, their health, and their perfect teeth, rapidly deteriorated. In many ways, Knobbe is the 21st century equivalent of Price.

Diet-Related Macular Degeneration

Knobbe believes “age-related” macular degeneration should be called diet-related macular degeneration instead, and states that out of all the components in processed

foods polyunsaturated vegetable oils are the greatest contributor. Comparing them to “biological poisons,” Knobbe notes that industrially processed seed oils are not only nutrient deficient but also pro-oxidative and proinflammatory:

> *"… When vegetable oils are produced … oil seeds are crushed, heated, pressed. They go through about four or five heatings … then they go to a petroleum drive, hexane, solvent bath, right? And then it's steamed, degummed … then they go through a chemical process of being alkalinized, bleached and deodorized before they go into this bottle and we think they're healthy.*
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> *They're extraordinarily oxidized. They're toxic. Aldehydes in these, these are literally poison. These are extremely noxious agents, and … vegetable oils replaced animal fats."*

He cites the work of nutrition pioneer Elmer V. McCollum, who, in the early 20th century, fed rats diets enriched with either 5% cotton seed oil or 1.5% butterfat — "this is good butter," Knobbe points out. "It's coming from pasture-raised cattle grazing on grass, right? That's all they had back then."

Stark differences were observed among the rats, with the cottonseed oil group experiencing stunted growth, illness and shorter survival. The rats fed butterfat fared much better, growing to about twice the size of the other rats and living about twice as long. The fat-soluble vitamins A, D and K2 in the pastured butterfat were a likely factor in the marked health differences.

"We need them to maintain our health and prevent degenerative disease," Knobbe says. "There's absolutely no question in my mind — all the data supports this — that macular degeneration patients are vitamin A-, D- and K2-deficient."

Knobbe cites data from native populations around the globe, including the Maasai tribe in Eastern Africa, inhabitants of Papua New Guinea and Tokelau in the South Pacific, which had very different diets with one major similarity: "In general … they have no refined sugar, no refined wheat, no processed foods, no vegetable oils." They also have little or no macular degeneration.

Vegetable Oils Cause Mitochondrial Failure, Insulin Resistance

AMD is ultimately a disease process rooted in mitochondrial dysfunction and insulin resistance, and the catastrophic cascade of health declines are triggered by the long-term consumption of vegetable oils (omega-6) and other processed foods, Knobbe explains the complex process in his presentation:

> *"Here's what excess omega-6 does in a Westernized diet: induces nutrient deficiencies, causes a catastrophic lipid peroxidation cascade, is what this does … This damages … a phospholipid called cardio lipid in the mitochondrial membranes. And this leads to electron transport chain failure … which causes mitochondrial failure and dysfunction.*
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> *And this leads first to reactive oxygen species, which feeds back into this peroxidation cascades. So, you're filling up your fat cells and your mitochondrial membranes with omega-6, and these are going to peroxidize because of the fact that they are polyunsaturated.*
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> *All right, the next thing that happens is insulin resistance, which leads to metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. When the mitochondria fail, you get reduced fatty acid, beta oxidation, meaning you can't burn these fats properly for fuel.*
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> *So now you're … carb dependent and you're heading for obesity. So, you're feeling tired. You're gaining weight. Your mitochondria are failing to burn fat for fuel … this is a powerful mechanism for obesity.*
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> *So, the energy failure at the cellular level leads to nuclear mitochondrial DNA mutations, and this leads to cancers. Three weeks on a high-PUFA diet causes heart failure in rats — three weeks. And this also leads to apoptosis and necrosis. And of course, that's how you get disorders like AMD and Alzheimer's."*

Knobbe has also been studying the toxic aldehydes that result from omega-6 fats. When you consume an omega-6 fat, it first reacts with a hydroxyl radical or peroxide radical, producing a lipid hydroperoxide.

This lipid hydroperoxide then rapidly degenerates into toxic aldehydes, of which there are hundreds, which in turn lead to cytotoxicity, genotoxicity, mutagenicity carcinogenicity and more, along with being obesogenic, at very low doses.

Ancestral Diet Key to AMD Prevention

According to Knobbe, there were only 50 cases of dietary blindness described across the globe between 1851 and 1930, some of which were likely other diseases. This skyrocketed to an estimated 196 million cases in 2020.[3] Knobbe believes that by following an ancestral diet, rich in grass fed meat and poultry, pastured dairy, wild-caught fish, vegetables, nuts and seeds, the majority of AMD cases would disappear.

"Could modernized processed foods drive this disease? That's the question. I mean, is it as simple as this, you know, could this difference be due to diet and diet alone?" Knobbe asked. "I will submit to you that everything I have found so far indicates that it is, and I can't find anything that doesn't support this concept."

For more details, Knobbe discusses more of this eye-opening information in his book, "Ancestral Dietary Strategy to Prevent and Treat Macular Degeneration," as well as via his website, on CureAMD.org. As Knobbe says:

> *"Today, about 534 people will go blind due to AMD. They've already lost vision in their first eye. They'll lose vision in their second eye. And I think this is a travesty because I believe it's all preventable. So, our mission at Cure AMD foundation is to prevent and treat AMD through ancestral dietary strategy advocacy. And we need more scientific research in order to convince all of us and our peers."*

Single Most Important Strategy You Can Implement

It is vital that you reduce your intake of industrially processed seed oils as much as you can. This means eliminating all of the following oils:

Soy	Corn
Canola	Safflower
Sunflower	Peanut

Olive and avocado oil should also be on the list as over 80% of these are adulterated. But even if they weren't it simply isn't worth it to have high levels of olive oil as it is loaded with the omega-6 fat called linoleic acid.

It will also be important to avoid nearly all processed foods as it is the rare processed food that does not include these toxic oils. Nearly every fast food restaurant is also guilty of using high levels of these toxic fats. This is why it is so important to prepare as much of your food as you can in your home so you can know what you are eating.

Most health "experts," including many I have previously interviewed, simply do not understand how much more dangerous these oils are than sugar. These fats become embedded in your cell membranes and stay there for years wreaking havoc on your health.

This is one of the reasons why a high fat diet can be harmful. If it is loaded with these dangerous omega-6 fats it will make you metabolically unhealthy and radically increase your risk for nearly every chronic degenerative disease, like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and blindness.

Sources and References

- [1] World Health Organization, Priority Eye Diseases
- [2] N Engl J Med 2012; 366:2333-2338 DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp1113569
- [3] Asia Pac J Ophthalmol (Phila). Nov-Dec 2017;6(6):493-497. doi: 10.22608/APO.2017251. Epub 2017 Sep 14