

# We are still cave men, claims top scientist

A top behavioural scientist has made waves in the diet business, saying that we should eat and live more like our genetic ancestors.

Do you want to be fit and healthy? Then you should live and eat like the cave men and women who inhabited Earth 40,000 years ago. So says Arthur de Vany, Emeritus Professor in economics and behavioural science at the University of California, who has done just that for the last 28 years and claims he enjoys perfect health.

His personal condition is acknowledged by others: he's 63 years old but after tests, a research institute said he had the biological body of a man of 32. So something's working.

De Vany believes we'll only understand how to be healthy, when we understand how we were formed. Most scientists believe our genetic make-up developed over millions of years, and for most of those we were hunter-gatherers.

In fact, it is reckoned a thousand generations of humans lived as hunter gatherers; 500 generations as farmers while only ten generations have lived in the industrial age.

So why were they healthy and lean while we are obese and chronically ill? The answer lies in how our genes interact with our surroundings.

Our genes developed in a world where food was scarce and occasional, and so the brain always told the body to eat.

Now food is all around us, but our body is still telling us to eat, believing we're hunters in danger of starvation. We're living in bodies designed for another age.

We can't change our 'cave genetics', but we can change our lifestyles. Our exercise should therefore replicate that of our ancestors, involving the short bursts of intense activity and struggle necessary for those who had to chase and kill to survive.

Our diet should be pre-agricultural: high in the protein of meat, eggs and fish; include fresh fruit and highly-colored vegetables, while avoiding bread, pasta, potatoes, sugar and rice, which all come from a later age.

### **Work out**

How seriously should we take these cave man theories? Does the key to our health really lie in lives lived millions of years ago?

Many agree with the Professor that our genetic make-up is unhelpful in the industrial west, where food is abundant, and exercise limited.

Others will be more skeptical. New diets always appear in January, just in time for New Year resolutions after Christmas excess. Is this just another one of many diets, each claiming ultimate authority?

## YOU DECIDE

1. What do you think of the diet industry? We've never had so many diet books and magazines; yet we've never had such levels of obesity. Do diets always fail?
2. Should schools take the human body more seriously, by providing more opportunities for a wide range of exercises? Or is this something the pupils should organize for themselves?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Draw up a list of the things you like to eat. Then draw up a list of the things you think you should be eating to be healthy. How similar are your two lists?
2. Do some background research on genes and then write a short piece called 'Do our genes make us who we are?'

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"We're couch potatoes eating our way to disaster"

What do you think?

## Q & A

### **So according to this professor, we're still cave men and women?**

He says our genes are the same as theirs, yes.

### **And what are genes?**

Genes are like the body's instruction manual. The genetic code, found in each cell, determines all our physical characteristics. De Vany and his supporters think they define many of our instinctive reactions and desires.

### **So why haven't genes changed with the times?**

Scientists say that genes evolve very slowly, while modern life changes very fast. It takes time – a lot of time – for the genes to catch up, and in the meantime, it's making us unhealthy, eating too much of the wrong things, simply because we can.

### **But why make it complicated? Isn't food just food?**

No, Vany is pretty clear on that. 'Just because you can eat it,' he says, 'doesn't mean it's food. Doughnuts, biscuits, cakes, sweets, ice cream and so on.' For him, it's only food if it helps us towards health.

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