

Food nutrition history



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The history of food and nutrition dates back as far as the beginning of recorded history. In the era of hunters and gathers, people knew that they had to eat in order to survive. The teachings and techniques that were used to obtain food at that time came from trial and error. It was up to the people to figure out which foods were suitable and which could possibly cause illness or even death. The importance of food, specific dietary patterns and disease prevention were observed in the Indian Ayurvedic tradition, dating back to 2500 BCE (1). Looking beyond the medieval era, western science and medicine developed ways of thinking about food and health between 600 BCE and 300 CE (1). Societies throughout each era have looked at diet and nutrition as a means of healthy living and survival.

Through the Renaissance and up to the eighteenth century, teaching noted that diet and nutrition were an integral part of having a fulfilled life (1). Many documents from ancient and historical times have evidence that inventions for food processing were becoming existent and new foods were being discovered. In this time, food was mostly produced and consumed entirely within the local area. A family's nourishment was provided by the food that was grown and prepared within the family and exchanged with nearby neighbors. Cooking and preservation techniques at this time were not necessarily safe but were evolving.

During the industrial revolution, the introduction of railroads and wagon roads made the transfer of goods possible at greater distances. This shift began to affect the foods that people had access to and what they ate (2). The science of nutrition began to emerge in the early to mid nineteenth century. During this time, both Europe and the US were influenced by their

governments to increase the yield of food from plant crops and animal herds (1). Food production held a very important role in nourishing the soldiers who were fighting in the war. Safe food was soon found to be the key for survival of troops, especially those who had been wounded and needed proper nourishment to fight illness and infection.

Dietetics as a profession can be linked back to the evolution of home economics (3). The early evolution of food and nutrition science was explored to feed soldiers in battle and to also to provide necessary nutrition to those who were preparing to become young soldiers. Nutrition and appropriate food choices were demonstrated to young families to ensure healthy individuals. World War I brought food shortages. Those who were knowledgeable in dietetics encouraged others to plant gardens and learn how to develop recipes for home and hospital use. Both world wars observed the creation of dietetics as a profession (3).

Many important people deserve credit in the history of Dietetics. Far more than five people contributed to its development. Dietetics is largely applied by the use of chemistry, it is necessary to recognize Antoine Lavoisier, who is known as the Father of Chemistry. Lavoisier was born into an upper class, Paris family in 1743. He was able to obtain a law degree at the College Mazarin, though he never practiced law. He had more interest in mathematics and science and gained membership into the Academy of Sciences at the age of 25 (4). Lavoisier had many contributions, to include the assistance in establishing the metric system, to naming 33 elements of periodic table. He died at the age of 51 from literally loosing his head, as he was found guilty of conspiracy against the people of France.

Wilbur Olin Atwater, an American chemist, was born May 3, 1844 in Johnsbury, New York. Atwater is known for his studies in human nutrition and metabolism. He pursued an undergraduate degree at Wesleyan University in Connecticut and later went on to obtain his PhD from Yale University's Sheffield Scientific School in agricultural chemistry (5). Atwater invented a device called the respiration calorimeter that measured human metabolism balance by analyzing the heat produced and metabolic rate by a person performing certain activities. This new invention aided many new studies in dietary evolution and food analysis (1, 2, 5).

Energy and protein sources were studied and measured to determine that certain foods provide different amounts of nutrients and energy than other. The fat, protein, and carbohydrates of all different kinds of foods were observed and soon there was an awareness of the food calorie. Atwater continued to lead research teams on discovering nutrient requirements, food composition and consumption, and consumer economics (6). Throughout his discoveries, Atwater determined that Americans eat more unhealthful foods than desired and do not exercise enough.

Florence Nightingale, born 1820 in Tuscany into an upper class family, need be mentioned as a contributor to Dietetics as she was the one who acknowledged the need for safe and nutritious food for soldiers during the Crimean War (7). She was actually a pioneer nurse in her time and was determined to improve the living conditions at the camp hospitals and made an effort to clean and organize facilities where patients were cared for. Her contributions helped spread awareness of the necessity for clean, safe, and nutritious foods.

There is a long history of health and nutrition and the involvement and contribution of many people and their discoveries has made great progress. Most of the progress has been made in the last 100 years, as new technologies have been a great asset to nutritional health and implementation. Scientific advances, social and economic factors, and military conflicts are contributors to the advancement of the dietetic profession as well. The most important contribution would have to be the determination and dedication by early dietitians who knew that there was a difference to be made and that they were the ones who would be able to make that difference.

The understanding and importance of good eating habits was not common not known to most of society, or perhaps just not understood. Scientific experiments were documented and scholarly journals written, but they were for almost impossible to understand by anyone who was not in the dietetic profession. Alice Blood was the one who would be able to put all of the difficult works into something that could be understood by large public audience. She translated science-based nutrition information into easy-to-read pamphlets in an effort to educate people on good nutrition.

Alice Blood obtained a bachelor's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a PHD in biochemistry from Yale. She also held the title of director at the School of Household Economics at Simmons College in Massachusetts (8).

Many changes came about in 1917 for the dietetics profession and many women contributed to these changes. A new organization, the American

Dietetic Association [ADA], was born in the fall of 1917 when more than 100 women organized a meeting in Cleveland to discuss multiple issues within dietetics. Lulu Graves, a dietician in Cleveland, held a strong position that dietitians play an important role of the medical team and that when nutrition services are offered to patients, money is saved (8).

This is a time when dietitians had the primary role of feeding the wounded and sick in hospitals. The doctors were the ones who could prescribe special diets for treatments and dietitians were like the physician's assistants. At this point, doctors were primarily male and all dietitians were female. Only three states allowed women to vote and women were not allowed to travel unaccompanied by a man (8). Graves stressed the importance of scientific training for dietitians and knew that the future of dietetics would be assured.

Lulu Graves was elected the first president of the ADA (9). At the first meeting, many issues were discussed especially concerning food conservation and global food needs. This was an important for the Association to come together, as World War I was still in mission. The annual meeting to follow had greater attendance and included more states involvement.

By the sixth annual meeting, which was held in Indianapolis in 1923, insulin was presented as the new treatment for diabetes (9). Insulin was discovered and isolated at the University of Toronto in 1921-1922 by Dr. Frederick Banting (10). Insulin is a hormone that is produced in the pancreas and is necessary to keep glucose levels in the blood at a safe and functional level.

This was a major event in dietetic history, as the diagnosis and treatment of type 1 and type 2 diabetes continues to be at high demand.

Food technology was on the rise going into the 1930's. Refrigerators, toasters, canned goods, frozen vegetables, sliced bread and many other developments were introduced. These new preparation and storage methods provided more convenience for keeping food on hand.

Obesity became a health concern, which was the topic of discussion towards the end of the 30's. Soon to follow would be the opening of the first McDonald's and Dairy Queen in the early 1940's (9). If what was known then about the negative health affects Americans would experience from frequenting fast food chains, one has to wonder if there would be any earlier changes in the way food is processed and produced for these places.

Martha Lewis Nelson was a pioneer in exploring total education of dietitians (8). The original dietetic program was a four-year course at a University with a major in food and nutrition, with a six-month dietetic internship. In 1942, Lewis was the director of Medical Dietetics at Ohio State University and she redesigned the internship program, making it possible to earn a Master of Science degree along with the internship (8). Many institutions today use this curriculum to develop education programs for dietetics.

In 1966, nutrition and diet therapy services were included in comprehensive medical care programs. Clare Forbes, a Massachusetts delegate to the ADA's House of Delegates, was the force behind this movement (8). Forbes is credited for developing future state legislative programs and guiding the development of the ADA's mission statement (8).

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Twenty-six years ago, in 1982, the ADA's capacity to reach the public on food nutrition, and health concerns was forever changed. A new resource center, National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics, was funded through a capital fund program (9). National Nutrition Month is one of the outreach programs that are very active today. The purpose of National Nutrition Month is to help make people aware of necessity of a healthy lifestyle and diet. Many more factors go into health other than just what a person eats. Diet and exercise go hand in hand.

If it were not for the good old girls Alice Blood, Lulu Graves, Martha Lewis Nelson, and Claire Forbes, the American Dietetic Association may not exist today. It is up to those in the profession to get the message out to the public about good health and nutrition so that money and lives can be saved in the long run.

Over the past 20 years, many new diet fads have been introduced. Some of these diets have proven to be effective and safe while others are effective and unsafe. Most often the results are temporary, as the people get bored with the same food or routine and then end up failing. Reading nutrition labels and ingredient lists on foods has become more popular in the past couple of years, as people now have a better idea of what they are looking for. There are multiple commercials, newspaper articles, and health magazines that give health alerts to new findings in the food that people eat.

With all of the sources in which nutrition facts and health information can be found, Americans are far more educated now than they ever have been before. The image is to get into shape and live healthier lifestyles. The

advancements in medical technology have expanded the role of the dietetic professional on so many levels. Special diets, mechanically altered foods, and diagnosis of new disease conditions have forced nutritional professionals to test and experiment with new ways of feeding patients and ensuring that they are receiving appropriate nutrition.

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