



Forks Over Knives Discussion Guide

Director: Lee Fulkerson

Year: 2011

Time: 90 min

You might know this director from:

The Color of War (2003)

The Crash of Flight 191 (2004)

FILM SUMMARY

What has happened to us? Despite the most advanced medical technology in the world, we are sicker than ever by nearly every measure. Cases of diabetes are exploding, especially amongst our younger population. About half of us are taking at least one prescription drug. Major medical operations have become routine, driving health care costs to astronomical levels. Heart disease, cancer, and stroke are the leading causes of death, even though billions of U.S. dollars are spent each year to “battle” these very conditions. Millions suffer from a host of other degenerative diseases.

Could it be there’s a single solution to all of these problems? A solution so comprehensive, but so straight-forward that it must be taken seriously?

FORKS OVER KNIVES examines the profound claim that most, if not all, of the degenerative diseases that afflict us can be controlled, or even reversed, by rejecting animal-based and processed foods. The major storyline in the film traces the personal journeys of a pair of pioneering researchers, Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, who began conducting research separately. Both came to the conclusion that degenerative diseases were much rarer in areas without much animal-based foods. The filmmakers travel with the researchers who end up shattering their own core beliefs. The idea of food is put to the test.

FILM THEMES

The filmmaker of FORKS OVE KNIVES poses as an “everyman” who consumes a typical western diet of high fat, high sugar, and animal-based foods before he goes on a journey to discover the ramifications on his health. He makes the switch the plant-based, whole foods diet. The film raises ethical and medical questions about our dietary choices on our long-term health, and on the health of our planet.

DISEASES OF AFFLUENCE

Fulkerson makes a direct connection between middle-class lifestyles and the increasing number of life-threatening diseases, and many believe that technological advancements have made this lifestyle possible, or even necessary. Sedentary office-based work leads to a less physically active work force. Also, the rise of agribusiness has resulted in a huge increase of high fat, high sugar foods that are readily available and less expensive than whole foods. Such conditions occur in more affluent and developing countries.

MEAT CONSUMPTION AND GLOBAL WARMING

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the meats in our diets create more greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, etc. than either transportation or industry. Greenhouse gases trap solar energy, thereby warming the earth’s surface. In addition, Greenpeace Brazil released a report claiming that up to 80% of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest is due to an increase in raising cattle for human consumption. FORKS OVER KNIVES asks us to examine the environmental consequences of our food choices.

THE ECONOMIC BURDEN OF CHRONIC DISEASES

The World Health Organization (WHO) said that chronic diseases place a heavy economic burden on countries, and that this burden will increase if no action is taken to curb the epidemics. Nearly a decade ago, WHO estimated losses in national income from heart disease, stroke and diabetes would reach \$18 billion in China, \$11 billion in the Russian Federation, \$9 billion in India, and \$3 billion dollars in Brazil. These losses will accumulate over time. China for example will lose \$558 billion over the next 10 years in national income as a result of the health care costs and lost wages of those suffering from heart disease, stroke, and diabetes alone.

CHANGE OF DIET VS. POOR HEALTH

At its heart, FORKS OVER KNIVES is an impassioned plea, challenging people to rethink their lifestyles and make the switch to a plant-based, whole foods diet more commonly known as vegan. The film questions whether or not the fear of a surgeon’s knife, or the risk of developing an array of degenerative diseases plaguing western countries, is strong enough to motivate people to alter their eating habits and lifestyles.

“The distinctions between government, industry, science and medicine have become blurred. The distinctions between making a profit and promoting health have become blurred.”

Dr. Colin T. Campbell, *The China Study*

“The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent diseases with nutrition.”

Thomas Edison

FILM FACTS:

- FORKS OVER KNIVES producer Brian Wendel was motivated to make the film after reading *The China Study* in 2008. The book has sold over one million copies, as of 2013.
- FAO says that livestock production accounts for 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, a bigger share than that of transport.
- "Meatless Monday" is a movement encouraging people not to eat meat one day a week, in hopes of reducing the environmental footprint of livestock production. The Norwegian army is the latest group to commit to Meatless Monday.
- In 2013, PETA named Austin, Texas as the most vegan-friendly city in America.
- Former U.S. President Bill Clinton started eating a vegan diet to reverse heart disease. He's dropped more than 20 pounds and says he's healthier than ever. His dramatic dietary transformation took almost two decades and came about only after a pair of heart procedures and some advice from a trusted doctor.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. About 600,000 people die of heart disease in the U.S. every year – that's 1 in every 4 deaths.
- Diseases of the circulatory system and cancer are the leading causes of death in Europe. These diseases include those related to high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and smoking.
- The EU member states with the highest death rates from coronary heart disease were the Baltic nations of Slovakia and Hungary – with more than 200 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010. At the other end of the range, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain and Luxembourg had the lowest death rates from coronary heart disease – below 50 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010.
- Omega-3 is one of two essential fatty acids necessary for numerous body functions, such as controlling blood clotting and building cell membranes in the brain. It's good for your joints, skin, vision, brain, and heart. It helps lower bad cholesterol levels, is anti-aging, anti-inflammatory, and even boosts fertility. Since our bodies cannot make omega-3 fats, we must get them through food. Coldwater oily fish (salmon, herring, sardines, trout) offer the most available source. In a plant-based diet, omega-3s can be found in flax seeds, hemp seeds, chia seeds, walnuts, soybeans, grains, and leafy greens.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others a chance to learn about the benefits of a plant-based, whole foods diet and take charge of their health.
2. Join the [Meatless Monday movement](#) by refraining from eating meat on Mondays to lower livestock production. You can participate in the large, global movement online.
3. Sign up for the Forks Over Knives Newsletter to receive updates, recipes and exclusive content. And continue to support the filmmaker, Lee Fulkerson, as he documents the [PlantPure Revolution](#) taking place in smalltown North Carolina. Find out more on the [website](#).
4. Consider the film's passionate provocation that has challenged people to reconsider their eating habits and switch to a more plant-based diet. Decide if there are any changes you would like to make in your own life. Talk to others about your ideas. Try to build a support network who can cheer you along the way.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.