



## Forks Over Knives Discussion Guide

Director: Lee Fulkerson

Year: 2011

Time: 90 min

**You might know this director from:**

The Crash of Flight 191 (2004)

The Color of War (2003)

## FILM SUMMARY

FORKS OVER KNIVES is a revelatory film about how we can reclaim our health by eating a more plant-based diet. Director Lee Fulkerson presents the studies of two pioneering researchers, Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn. Their research was conducted separately, but both reveal how the animal-based, processed-foods diet of affluent countries typically produces high rates of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Their studies also reveal how societies eating less meat and processed foods generally suffer lower rates of these diseases. Ultimately, Dr. Campbell and Dr. Esselstyn offer a powerful solution for combating the health epidemics of our day: eat a plant-based, whole foods diet and reject an animal-based one. They claim that, in most cases, nutrition can help prevent illness, as well as control or reverse the damages of many degenerative diseases.

Taking up the challenge of testing this claim, filmmaker Lee Fulkerson adopts a plant-based, whole foods diet for six months. Most daringly, he and a few others refrain from taking their medications for cholesterol, diabetes, and hypertension in order to treat their illnesses solely with nutrition. The results are remarkable and inspiring.

FORKS OVER KNIVES will enlighten and empower you, showing how you can take charge of your own health. Even if this film doesn't change your diet entirely, you might begin to think differently about what you eat from now on.

## FILM THEMES

**FORKS OVER KNIVES** raises ethical and medical questions about our dietary choices and their long-term effect on both human and environmental health.

### **DISEASES OF AFFLUENCE**

Fulkerson makes a direct connection between middle class lifestyles and the increasing number of life-threatening diseases in the U.S. Many believe that technological advancements have made this lifestyle possible and more likely. Sedentary office-based work leads to a less physically active work force. 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. The film also shows how quickly diet can affect the health of a community over a matter of a few generations.

### **MEAT CONSUMPTION AND GLOBAL WARMING**

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the high consumption of and demand for meat contributes 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. 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 that 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. For 2015, WHO estimates the losses for these same countries will be between 3 to 7 times higher than those of 2005. These losses in national income are calculated from the impact of deaths from chronic disease on labor supplies and savings.

### **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. Each year, billions of U.S. dollars are spent fighting degenerative diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Those in the film who took a preventative approach by switching to a plant-based, whole foods diet experienced almost miraculous benefits in just a matter of months. If anything, this film empowers viewers to take change of their own health.

**“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.
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. Just google “Meatless Monday.”
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. Go to [ForksOverKnives.com](http://ForksOverKnives.com) for more information.
4. Consider the film’s passionate plea 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 encourage you along the way.