

## Episode 046: A Critical Review of the What the Health Documentary

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T. Episode number 46.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast. Giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life work living and now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey's what's up guys? Welcome back to the TD Fitness podcast. This is episode number 46 and this one is what I'm calling a critical review of the What the Health documentary, okay. So if you're not already familiar with this documentary, What the Health is 2017 documentary that critiques meat and dairy consumption as part of a healthy diet. So it advocates for a plant-based or even a vegan diet. It was released on Netflix, I believe, and is still available on Netflix. You can pay for it there. It is also available on YouTube, there are several uploads where people have put it on YouTube, so I've linked to that in the show notes.

But the reason I wanted to talk about this in this episode, I've had a number of people either just in conversation with friends and acquaintances, people that I work with, even people that I train have talked to me about this. So it's a pretty popular documentary. It's got a fairly large following. The experience with it kind of runs the gamut. There's some people like, "Man, that What the Health documentary, that was really eye-opening. I have changed the way I eat and I feel a lot better, I've lost weight." Then there are others that kind of look at the documentary like, "What? This doesn't really make sense. I don't believe what I'm hearing here."

So let me start by saying that I like the fact, and I like just about anything that raises awareness. Because when something raises awareness, it causes you to question things that you may not have questioned before. So I like that. I like the fact that people are challenging some long-held beliefs about health, wellness, fitness, and nutrition. Okay, there are some, there are actually a lot of eye-opening facts in the What the Health documentary. The one that comes immediately to mind, to me, is the fact that meat, the dairy, the pharmaceutical industries, all fund ... Well, I won't say they all fund, but many of the organizations that we consider impartial, unbiased health organizations are funded by the meat industry, the dairy industry, or the pharmaceutical industry. So what we think may be a completely unbiased, objective proponent of health and fitness could be swayed or their opinions could be tainted because of the fact they received funding by some of these big industries. So that's one thing that comes to mind.

I will say, though, that the good data in the What the Health documentary, and there is some good data there, the bad part is that it's tainted by exaggerations and the use of what I will call dramatic effects in interviews, that in my mind, appear to be completely one-sided. Because, again, the argument is and the goal is to get you to eat a plant-based diet. Which is not a bad goal, but I feel that the way the documentary goes about this, in several instances throughout the documentary, it's just a little bit too dramatic and it's a little bit over the top. So I will discuss a few of these things, then give you some advice on what you need to know and what you can do with information like this.

So let me start by talking about some things that take away from the broader message. So these are some of the negatives with What the Health documentary. The first is that these

TDFit046 (Completed 08/10/18)

cold calls to receptionists and secretaries and those who answer ... Whoever answers 1-800 number at whatever, name your organization, they're probably not the best people to ask about the policy of the organization and why certain recipes are on a website. For example, they call the Susan G. Komen organization, the breast cancer proponents, or I should say, those who are proponents in fighting breast cancer.

The question right off the bat is, "Hey, why don't you have a warning about dairy on your website?" And then he goes on to say that the health organization rep couldn't answer my question. And he's pretty frustrated with that. Well, I mean, you just cold called a big organization, a rather big organization, and expected to get a very detailed answer about something on the website based on a report or some research that you have read. Now, which could have been good research, it could have been bad research, but needless to say, the other side of that argument wasn't presented.

The example that I use or that I think of, I've been in the military for 21 years now and if I was manning a Department of Defense hotline, I'm not sure I could answer random questions about the Defense website and what it does and doesn't say. Or what it relays regarding a certain DoD stance on a very specific item that I'm not necessarily tracking or familiar with. So it's kind of akin to that. I mean, I don't understand how you can expect somebody right off the bat to answer a question like that.

I'll say too, the document makes a point of stating the World Health Organization classified processed meat as a Group 1 carcinogen and classified red meat as Group 2 carcinogen. Now, when you hear that, that sounds rather alarming. So when something is carcinogenic, it that means it has the potential to cause cancer. So just to give you some perspective, and the documentary lays this out, tobacco smoking and asbestos are also classified as carcinogenic to humans, Group 1 carcinogens. So the implication is that eating processed meat is on par with smoking or asbestos. And that is not true.

In fact, according to the World Health Organization website, yes, processed meat has been classified in the same category as causes of cancer like tobacco smoking and asbestos, but that does not mean they are all equally dangerous. I mean, these classifications are meant to describe the strength of the scientific evidence, if you will, about something being a cause of cancer, rather than assessing the level of risk. And that is straight from the World Health Organization website. So again, eating meat is not the same as smoking. Got to clear the air and get that out right off the bat.

The documentary also points out that studies show that carbohydrates are not related to diabetes. Okay, that's a pretty broad, sweeping term. What type of carbohydrates is the first question that I would ask, because all carbohydrates are not created equal. Some carbs raise your blood sugar higher than others. In fact, the National Institute of Health says that keeping your blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible may help you stay healthy longer and prevent or delay diabetes problems. So that is from the National Institute of Health.

See, our bodies store carbs in the form of glycogen. We have room for that storage and we store those carbs as glycogen so that they can later be tapped into for energy. Now your body can't turn carbs into fat unless you're really overdoing it, right? That's what the documentary says. Well, the body can actually store carbs, sugars, as fat. I believe that to be a fact. I mean all the research I've seen, all the studies I've seen are very clear on that. So the documentary contradicts that. I'll just point that out. Once carbs enter the body, they either get used as fuel, stored as glycogen, or stored as fat. That's just the way it is. In their simplest forms carbs are broken down as sugar in the body, through the pancreas, produces

and releases insulin to kind of push the sugar in the form of glucose into the cells to be stored and used later for energy.

What's not stored ... What is not used is stored. So we only have room for a certain amount of storage and the rest is stored as fat, because that's the most efficient way for the body to store excess. So again, the documentary says your bodies can't turn carbs into fat, unless you're really overdoing it. So what does overdoing it actually mean? I mean, that's debatable, but I would say given the obesity rates of the US population, I think overdoing it is actually a pretty normal occurrence. That's all I'll say on that.

Another point that the documentary made, studies show that eating one serving of processed meat a day increases your chance of diabetes by 51%. Again, something that sounds very alarming. And it could be true, I could not find objective data that supported or contradicted this. But, if it is true, then what was the original percentage? I mean, if it increased your chance of diabetes by 51%, was it already an extremely low percentage? Like did it go from 1% to 2%, for example? So, if processed meat is less healthy, we have to remember though that that's not all we're eating. Simple carbs can also be bad if that's all you're eating, but mixed or consumed with fiber, then those simple carbs can help with exercise recovery and they can help be part of a balanced overall meal. So if processed meat increases that chance of diabetes, a logical question is, does eating a salad lower your chance of diabetes? And is-

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:11:04]

... is does eating salad lower your chance of diabetes? And is it that the processed meat is actually increasing the percentage or is it some other dietary or health factor that those who eat processed meat generally practice as well? So, these are all the types of questions that we have to ask when we hear these broad sweeping statements like eating one serving of processed meat a day increases your chance of diabetes by 51%.

Now, a couple other things that stood out to me and I have to address, and really, the first one talks about correlation and causation. So as we think about the last example about processed meat, it's easy to say that eating processed meat can increase or increases your chance of diabetes, but it's harder to prove that because there could be other things that those who eat processed meat practice as well or other things that they eat as well, and that could actually be the cause of diabetes. So again, correlation and causation are two different things. Just because two things tend to happen at the same time does not mean that one is necessarily the cause of the other, all right?

Eggs and cholesterol. So they jump on the egg-beating bandwagon, if you will, in the What the Health documentary. They say that eggs contain cholesterol and saturated fat. That is a true statement, okay? No denying it. They also say that one egg, eating one egg a day is just as bad as smoking five cigarettes a day when it comes to life expectancy. Really? Okay. No, not really. There is a lot of conflicting information with this one, and that is a pretty bold statement to say that eating one egg a day is like smoking five cigarettes a day. Come on. All right. You can check out a couple of the references in the resources section of the show notes for more on this one because I made sure to link to that. But I mean, statements like that just detract from the credibility of the overall credibility of the documentary, okay?

Poultry. Poultry is a leading cause of dietary fat. This is another assertion that the documentary made. But, it's also the most consumed meat on the planet, okay? That's a fact. Maybe the fact is not because it's poultry, but because we eat the most of it, that could be

the reason why it's a leading cause of dietary fat. In fact, eating poultry is number four on the top five lists have consumed all consumed foods, meats and other things in the world, with pasta, rice, pizza, surprisingly, those things coming in ahead of it.

So, the argument is that meat is bad for you, but much of that argument has to do with the way the meat is processed. The documentary goes into great depths and goes to great lengths to try to explain this. I'll tell you that when I was growing up, we had chickens. We had a chicken coop. So, my question is, is chicken from your own farm or those chickens that you raise yourself, are they also bad for you or is it just the chicken that's injected with the sodium and highly processed that they talk about in the documentary? So, is the issue the meat or what we do to the meat in production? Just a question, right? Something I think could have been made clearer.

Now the documentary, What the Health documentary, points out that milk has saturated fat and cholesterol. That's a true statement. There's also some positives here though because it has protein and calcium. The documentary says that countries with the highest dairy consumption had the highest rates of osteoporosis, to imply that ... In fact, I think they go ahead and clearly say that drinking milk is bad for you or drinking milk causes osteoporosis, and that's just preposterous, right? It doesn't make sense at all. So again, I go back to the correlation and causation argument. Again, when you hear these things, you have to question some of it.

Now, don't get me wrong, I am not the type of person to easily dismiss a whole lot. I question a lot of things, but that's exactly what I'm asking you to do, too, is to question. Because when you hear these things, it's very easy to jump on a bandwagon and think that, "Oh, that's the quick fix I've been looking for." I'm here to tell you there's not a quick fix. There are healthy habits that are practiced consistently over time that leads to a healthy lifestyle and healthy living.

So, the final thing, the final negative I'll say that I have about the documentary, the interview with a doctor that says the government is telling people of color to eat foods that are bad for them and that it's a form of institutionalized racism that is ... I don't even know if that's worth me addressing because that is just one of the craziest things I've ever heard. So, again, broad sweeping statements like that and statements out of left field just, again, tend to detract from the credibility of this program.

So, let me talk about some of the things now that I generally agree with. The first is that the waste from the production, food production industry, that waste that is seeping into communities and it looks like studies show that there's link to cancers and diseases because of it, that segment is eyeopening. I don't know all of the research behind it. All I can do is, you know, watch some of the testimonials that they presented there and try to read up on it as much as I can. But, I think that's something that bears further discussion and further study because if you're doing things as an industry that are harming others just to make money, then obviously that's something that needs to be addressed.

I also agree that a focus on prevention through proper diet, and when you strip away all the extraneous stuff, that's really what they're talking about. If you focus on your diet, then focusing on a proper diet is better than reacting to disease and illness with medication. In fact, just a few episodes ago in episode number 42, I talked about that. That one was called Before You Take that Pill Give Healthy Habits a Try. I am a strong believer in that prevention is a much better approach than trying to react to these things and prevention comes in the form of, again, healthy habits. That's where it can all start.

I talked in the beginning about how the funding by the meat, dairy, pharmaceutical industries to organizations that are supposed health components, and even government organizations, how those organizations and entities can be swayed by ... or at least there could be the possibility of a conflict of interest because they take money from these industries, okay? Just like the dairy association funded a set of fund ... a study on saturated fats to take the limelight off of dairy, off of the negative effects of dairy. That was one of the examples they use in the documentary. It makes you wonder. One of the first questions I asked was, "Okay, who was it that funded this documentary?" So, I went and researched it, and this one's a legit. It was essentially crowdfunded. So, they did a from a ground ... funding from the ground up, which was a good thing.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning of the episode, I've gotten several questions on the documentary. Some of the people that I work with have actually gone to a plant-based diet. I will say that I am definitely not against this. In fact, most days of the week my diet does not include a lot of meat at all, and a lot of days there's no meat. It's not that I do that intentionally. It's just that I'm trying to replace some of those more calorie-dense foods with ones that are nutrient-dense. This is one that I've talked about and this is a concept that I've talked about in the past in several episodes. It's one of the things we go into in the FitLife program. When I tried to make the majority of what I eat more nutrient-dense versus calorie-dense, then I just tend to eat more of more vegetables, more fruits, more salads and things like that, and I don't need a lot of meat with that.

So in fact, there were periods when I realized I haven't had much meat at all in days. That's not a bad thing necessarily. I'm not against eating meat. I do like to eat meat, but I just don't eat it regularly or all too often. I have witnessed positive benefits, such as feeling better and even some weight loss in some of those who I've coached. Now, I can't say that that is the only reason for those individuals feeling better or losing weight because you know that I am also a strong proponent of the mindset and the belief behind what you're doing on your path to living healthier. That has a lot to do with it, and we under estimate that component so often.

But, my advice here is centered more around spotting the one-sided arguments and identifying things that just seem completely untrue. You have to take an objective look at these things because it's your health that we're talking about. No one is going to care more about your health than you are, so you have to take an approach that ensures that you get not only the right information, but implement the right information and get rid of all of the stuff that's just crazy talk. You might remember, if you've seen the documentary, you might remember the meeting with the Diabetes Association guy. He talks about the study supporting what the documentary is proposing. Yes, there are studies supporting what-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:22:04]

Yes, there are studies supporting what the documentary is proposing, but there are also studies ... and this is what the Diabetes Association representative had to say, there are also studies showing that lean protein and good fats are part of a healthy diet.

For almost every factor, every study that I can show you on why you shouldn't eat this, you could probably find another one that says why you should eat this from a health standpoint. The point is that there is so much data from all sides, and I know that that's a frustration. It's a frustration for me definitely, so I can only assume that it's gotta be a major frustration for you too.

In fact, Ashley Koff, who is the registered dietitian over at Better Nutrition that we partner with, she calls this "info-besity," and I think that's a great term. She's done talks on it and podcasts and so forth. So, what's a person to do, right? You have all this data, much of it conflicting. You don't know what to believe.

I mean, I think back to when my wife and I were expecting our first child, and the doctor told my wife that she needed to gain more weight. And she was ... believe me, we ... One of the things to understand with this is that yes, doctors are highly trained, highly educated, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're experts on diet or prenatal fitness or prenatal nutrition. And my wife and I both happened to be post- and prenatal certified, so we knew a little bit something about this.

But the doctor or nurse was telling my wife that she should and could eat whatever she wanted when she was pregnant as long as she gained weight. And the quote was, "Whether it's a bag of M&Ms or a bag of broccoli, it doesn't matter." And that is just ridiculous. And then she essentially told my wife to go paleo. This was while she was expecting, probably four or five months pregnant. So, that just doesn't make any sense at all.

The point from that example is that doctors have opinions and stances, just like everyone else. Doctors are regular people. Other individuals that you might view to be in an authoritative role when it comes to a representative from the National Institute of Health or the World Health Organization or any of these organizations, even government organizations, that are centered around providing healthy advice and healthy living ... They're all human. And just because they have an advanced degree doesn't mean that they aren't biased.

As a personal trainer and health coach, my opinion and my beliefs and what I tell you is informed by a number of things. Number one, the study and research that I've done, the experience that I've had, and the training that I've done. But even then, it's still tainted because I'm human. And everybody's view is going to be tainted a little bit.

So, what we have to do is decipher what is truth, what's reality, and what's not. More education doesn't automatically make you completely objective. Opinions and advice from health professionals, just like ours, are formed by our education, our exposures, and our experiences. So, just remember that.

It sounds like what I'm telling you is that there is no right answer. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that there could be multiple right answers. There also could be multiple wrong answers. And, oh by the way, those right answers are probably different for each and every individual. Of course, there are some things that apply to everyone. Yeah, you shouldn't smoke a pack of cigarettes every day. Pretty cut and dry, okay?

But what you put in your body and how your body responds to your diet is very, very personalized, okay? And that's where the expertise of a registered dietitian comes in because they can help you through that and walk you through that.

I mentioned already, I've gotten to the point where I kind of question everything. I remember when I first started TD Fitness, and I believed naively that if I stuck to just government recommendations, then that's gotta be fine. I'm not going to be like these other folks, these other trainers, that jump on the bandwagons of these fad diets and so forth. Nope. I'm going to stick to what the government puts out. I thought that that would be the most objective advice.



That turned out not to be true, and it goes back to what I was just saying about how everyone's opinion and stance is tainted in some way. We just don't know how much. But the truth is that we're all human, we all have biases, we all have beliefs, we all have opinions, and one of the ways to find a more objective lens is to stick to the type of research that is peer-reviewed, that is systematically reviewed, and don't just jump on the first thing you hear. Always look for the counter-argument. Always. And at least, that will give you an idea of what the other side thinks.

So, the big issue, as I kind of wrap things up here ... The big issue that I have with the "What the Health" documentary is that this documentary and others like it that only present a single side of the story, they really make us feel like we've been the butt of a joke, like, "How did all this go on and I didn't know about it? I feel betrayed." And that strikes a nerve in people. That makes you upset. It makes you want to change things and gets you fired up.

And I feel like the documentary plays on that a little bit, and that's not cool. It makes us feel like we have no control, but I disagree. I disagree that we don't have control. We are ... Now, make no mistake, we are certainly the product. What's being sold to us is not the product; we are the product. The people that are buying things, so we're the product. I'm not so naïve as to think that companies have our health as their top priority. Food companies in industry want our money, okay? Let's just be real about that.

But if we live our lives thinking that there's nothing we can do except avoid all meat and dairy for example, that's a pretty tall order for some people and that may not be for everyone. I know a lot of healthy vegetarians and vegans. I also know a lot of healthy individuals that eat meat and drink milk.

So, at the beginning of every podcast, we state: "We're giving you ways to live a healthy life without giving up the things that make life worth living." So, I want you to just reflect on that for a second because yes, we want to be healthy while we're here. We want to be healthy in order to live longer, but we also want to live life, all right?

So, if you enjoy a steak sometimes, that's living life. If you like to drink milk, that's living life, right? If that's what you want to do, it's okay because I disagree with one of the points in the documentary that said there's no such thing as moderation. Well, if everything was that black and white and that cut and dry, then we would be in a world of hurt. So, I'll leave it there. All right?

My takeaway, my message to you, is that I want you to live a healthy lifestyle but enjoy life as well. And I don't believe it's any single thing. It's not simply cutting out carbs or cutting out all fats or all meats or all dairy. Healthy living is a combination of things, and disease can also be a combination of things. So, be aware of the sweeping statements of approaches that completely cut things out, all right? Let's do that, let's use a little bit of common sense, and I think that will serve us a lot better.

So, that's all I have for you in this episode. Just a reminder, the show notes can be found at [TDFitness.net/046](http://TDFitness.net/046). As always, I want to thank you guys for tuning in. Have a blessed one. Coach T out.

Why did I create the Fit Life program? I wanted to provide something that wasn't just for weight loss, not just for feeling better, not even just for better health. I wanted a more complete solution, and I also wanted to make it sustainable. It's not just about starting something or sticking with it for a month or two. Healthy living, which includes fitness, nutrition, and a healthy mindset, is about practicing healthy habits consistently. Not all the

TDFit046 (Completed 08/10/18)

time, because no one is perfect, but practicing those healthy habits more than you are right now. That's how change begins, and that's how healthy living continues. Find out more at [FitLifeProgram.com](http://FitLifeProgram.com) or [TDFitness.net/fitlife](http://TDFitness.net/fitlife).

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [00:31:32]