

The Ultimate Act of Intimacy

by Delisa Renideo

Don't worry, this isn't an x-rated article! But it is about intimacy in a form we all engage in daily.

What is this most intimate act? Eating!

What's so intimate about eating?

When we eat, we put a substance into our mouth which then actually becomes us. Our food literally becomes part of us, merging in its totality with us. What could be more intimate than that? Rather than unconsciously eating whatever we see, we might want to give some thought to whether we want to merge with the substance, the energy, and the implications of this food.

I often hear from those who take my Food for Life Nutrition and Cooking Classes that they have become much more aware of what they are eating. Since these classes focus on the nutritional aspects of our food, that's what most people become more aware of. That's wonderful, and a great start, but our consciousness can expand far beyond that.

Let's take a little trip in our minds to explore what else we are ingesting when we engage in the intimate act of eating.

Every plant we eat contains the energy of the sun, transformed by the plants into a form we can absorb into our cells. We are actually taking the sun into ourselves, so we have become intimate with the sun.

The soil is a web of life which supports the growth of plants, and this web of life is part

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of our own life. Without these microbes, the lifeless soil could not continue to produce food for us. The minerals of the earth are absorbed into the plants, which then become our bones and tissues. The oceans evaporate and provide the water that is essential for all life. The oceans are alive in us.



Many of us are aware that organic foods are healthier for us so that we don't ingest toxic herbicides, pesticides, and petroleum based fertilizers. But it doesn't end there. These same toxins are damaging the soil, the water, the air, and wildlife. So when we ingest foods grown with chemicals, we've also become intimate with the destruction of the ecosystem.

Now let's think about people. The people who work in the fields all have some sort of life, and their relationship with the food you eat may provide them with a good living, or it may be a sort of slave labor. When we purchase and consume this food, we are in relationship with these people, even though we don't know them. We are supporting the

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life they live. This goes for everyone in the supply chain who processes, transports, sells, or serves this food.

Those eating animals are ingesting the fear, suffering, and violence inherent in animal agriculture. Every glass of milk or slice of cheese contains the emotional pain of the forced separation of the cow from her newborn calf as well as the suffering of veal calves, which is a byproduct of the dairy industry.

You can continue this process to discover more ways that we are intimate with every part of this earth and all who call it home through the process of eating food.

Growing our own organic garden is one way to enrich our relationship with our food as we touch the soil with love, admire our brave young seedlings, and celebrate the diversity of microbes in the soil. We become much more aware of water and sunlight as we tend a garden. It's hard to take food for granted when we are part of every step in the process of sowing, nurturing, harvesting, and eating plants. It's too early to plant a garden now,

but not too early to begin planning it!

February is the month of hearts and flowers. As we send Valentine's to those we love, let's look further to consider all those with whom we are



intimate as a result of eating. By establishing a deeper relationship with the food we eat, by recognizing that we are connected to everything and everyone else through this food, we may find it easier to make choices about what we put on our plates that are good not only for us, but for the entire circle of life.

AVS

How I Turned My Life Around

Maggie Fitzgerald's Vegan Story

It's been almost 2 years since I began eating a plant-based diet and it has changed my life so much! I would never consider going back to my old diet.

Making the change was actually effortless for me, probably because I was ready. I'd been gaining weight and had reached the level where the BMI chart said I was obese. I knew this extra weight would lead to all sorts of health problems down the road. I'm a Nurse Practitioner and I see people every day that have gone down this road. I had become one of them. I didn't want that to be my story.

I'd also begun to gradually lose my taste for meat. My husband and I ate a lot of meat, but my perceptions were changing and I started thinking of meat as animal flesh and I just didn't want to stick my fork into this flesh and eat it. I'd never cared for dairy products and eggs, so turning away from animal products was easy for me.

About this time, my husband came home one day and said he thought we should start eating more healthfully. Then I saw a notice in the newspaper about a Food for Life class and knew I wanted to take it. That was April, 2009.

I learned so much in the class that I switched to a plant-based diet right away. I began to lose weight immediately. Within 6 months I had lost 45 pounds. I had

always been quite active, but the excess weight had made it hard to do some things, like running. With the weight coming off, I was able to become even more active than before, and I love it!

I read some books that reinforced my commitment to a vegan diet. John Robbins' book, [*Diet for a New America*](#), helped me understand the more far-reaching effects of my food choices and [*The China Study*](#), by T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D, underscored the health benefits of a plant-based diet. [*Becoming Vegan*](#), by Brenda Davis and Vesanto Melina, filled in the nutritional details of a vegan diet, so I felt confident about my choice.

My husband doesn't cook at all so he is very willing to eat anything I fix. He never complained about the food, but several months into our vegan diet, he told me my cooking was improving! As for me, I enjoy my food much, much more than I did prior to making the switch. I love all the colors that are just natural in plant-foods. The presentation is beautiful and the flavors are delicious.

Besides being lighter physically, I also feel lighter mentally. I sleep better and seem to need less sleep. I have tons of energy and don't go through the blood sugar highs and lows like I used to. I'm more mellow and react less than I did before. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, and



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maybe it has to do with not ingesting the violence and fear inherent in eating animals.

I have no trouble maintaining my ideal weight now, but I pay much closer attention to it than I used to as I never want to be overweight again. I weigh myself once a week and if it goes up more than a couple of pounds, I make a little adjustment in my diet, e.g. skipping wine with my dinner. I also input everything I eat and all my activities into a great website: livestrong.com, which keeps track of calories in and out.

Up to now, I've focused mostly on how this diet has helped me, but I want to begin

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incorporating it more into my medical practice, especially for those with diabetes.

My commitment to a vegan diet is firm and everyone knows that when they come to my house, they'll get a vegan meal. I'm not tempted to slip back into old ways when it's inconvenient to eat this way, and the only time it was really difficult was when I was traveling in Europe. We eat out about once a week here and find it is no problem.

I'm grateful to have discovered how to take care of my health and maintain my ideal weight. At 54 years old, I feel great and am excited about my future.

Note: Maggie Fitzgerald will be the speaker at our February 26th AVS potluck. Her presentation will be about heart health and a vegan diet.



Recipe of the Month: Sweet Potato Pudding

From the Cancer Survivor's Guide

This delicious, creamy pudding takes only minutes to prepare and is a great way to load up on healthful beta-carotene.

1/3 cup rolled oats
1/2 cup nondairy milk
1 cup cooked sweet potato
or yam (peeled or unpeeled*)
1 tablespoon maple syrup
1/4 teaspoon vanilla



Combine all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.

* If you have a powerful blender, such as a VitaMix, you can blend the yams with the skins on, increasing the fiber.

Film Night



**Saturday, February 12th,
7 PM** is our next AVS Film Night. It will be at Dayspring Enrichment Center in Wasilla.

The February film will focus on heart health. For more information, directions and a map to Dayspring click on [AVS Film Night](#).

Hope to see you there!



Keep Movin'

by Toni Truesdell

Studies have long reported the benefits of exercising to improve overall health and prevent disease. Today many older adults have taken this to heart and have traded in walkers and rocking chairs for barbells and treadmills.

The more obvious benefits of exercise are weight control, improved cardiovascular health, and slowing the rate of bone loss. Keeping the body in motion increases energy, flexibility and improves metabolism, enabling the body to use insulin more efficiently.

No matter how late in life you start, you will see benefits. In a landmark 1994 study from Tufts University, researchers found that even the most frail and elderly adults benefited from exercise.

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Experts report that regular exercise increases the density and size of brain capillaries, which increases blood flow and oxygen to the brain. This increases levels of brain chemicals that encourage the

growth of nerve cells and enhances memory. Studies have consistently shown that higher levels of physical activity delay brain aging.

Recent studies from the Centers for Disease Control show that even moderate physical activity can impart significant health benefits. About 30 minutes of exercise a day - even if you get in only 10 minutes at a time - can provide many of the same health benefits as far more strenuous activity.

Use common sense as you increase your physical activity. Start slowly and build up gradually. Consult with your physician and know your limitations. Many health clubs offer specialized senior fitness classes and some health insurers will pay for gym memberships.

You may prefer the discipline of a scheduled class or a fitness routine in the privacy of your own home. The choice is yours and so are the many benefits to your overall health and well-being. Remember, you are never too old to exercise but not exercising can make you old.

(Toni Faubion-Truesdell is a Certified Fitness Instructor. She teaches at AT&T Sports Center & Blue Mountain Wellness Studio.)



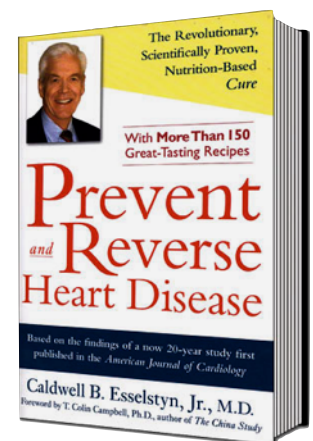
February Book of the Month: **PREVENT AND REVERSE HEART DISEASE** by Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., MD

"One of the most outstanding projects in health research of the past century. It's relevant, it's caring, it's innovative, it's extremely well executed and it's very, very useful."

--T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D., author of *The China Study*

"This powerful program will make you virtually heart-attack proof. Based on decades of research, Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn has shown not only how to prevent heart disease, but how to reverse it-even for people who have been affected for many years. I strongly recommend this important book."

--Neal D. Barnard, M.D., President, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine



Learn more about - [Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease](#) by Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D.

Celebrating Benji

Eleven years ago we made a trip to the Mat-Su Borough Animal Shelter to find a dog. I'd been wanting a "Benji-dog" for years, after watching the Benji movies. Sure enough -- among all the various husky and lab mixes, there was a cute little shaggy white dog huddling in the corner of his cage. He had Benji-dog written all over him, but I wondered if he had he been too traumatized to bond with us and become part of our family. In spite of his initial fear, he responded quickly to our love and became a treasured part of our family.

Benji was my buddy. He loved going on walks, riding on my kayak, snuggling on the couch, and eating. He was very happy to eat his home-made vegan food, and I was happy to avoid feeding him commercial pet foods. When he was excited about our coming home or about dinner time, he would run to get his fuzzy orange squeaky toy shaped like a bone. He squeaked it so much that

I hope that loving an animal will help more people open their hearts to homeless pets, animals in labs, in circuses, and the billions who are raised to be eaten.

the squeaker finally gave out. He still grabbed it to help him deal with his excitement, and he often slept with his chin on it.

We said good-bye to Benji this week. He had stopped eating and got very thin, but had a round

belly that was probably full of tumors. It became a struggle for him to climb the stairs and



painful for him to be picked up. We buried him with his orange squeaky toy and I sang Happy Birthday to him to celebrate his birth into a new life on the other side.

Knowing and loving a dog or cat enriches our lives and just may help us feel compassion for those dogs, cats, rabbits, mice, and other animals languishing in cages in laboratories. We know they all have personalities, feelings, and needs, just like those who share our lives. I hope that loving an animal will help more people open their hearts to homeless pets, animals in labs, in circuses, and the billions who are raised to be eaten. Although Benji was very special to me, every animal is just as special if we let ourselves see into their hearts.

HOW TO BECOME AN AVS MEMBER

To learn all of the great reasons to become a member or join online www.alaskaveg.org or contact Peggy Robinson at 907-373-1901 or her email fmlyrob@mtaonline.net.

The Alaska Vegetarian Society is under the umbrella of Rays of Hope, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation.

Alaska Vegetarian Society

Mission Statement:

To create a compassionate and sustainable world by inspiring and supporting reverence for all life and the adoption of a plant-based diet.

5010 W. Lakeside Drive
Wasilla, Alaska 99654
907-373-1526 www.AlaskaVeg.org

Upcoming Events



Saturday, February 12

Next AVS Film Night, 7:00 - 9:00p.m. Dayspring Enrichment Center. The film will be about heart health. Check the website for film title and more details.

Sunday, February 13

Finally someone, Cathy Holt, has stepped up to start a regular vegan potluck in Anchorage! Go to the website magicalbeans.webs.com for time & location.

Saturday, February 26

AVS Potluck Dinner, 6:00 - 8:30p.m. Palmer United Protestant Church. Children's program "AVS Sprouts" will resume. For details - [AVS Potluck](#)

Who to Call



Elaine Albertson: AVS Newsletter Editor.....746-4668
 Peggy Robinson: Treasurer and Membership....373-1901
 Toni Truesdell: Advertising Coordinator.....745-4404
 Delisa Renideo: AVS President.....373-1526
 Charlie Renideo: Bookstore and Website.....373-1526

Food for Life Nutrition & Cooking Classes

Anchorage

Cancer Prevention or Survival
Providence Family Medicine Ctr
1201 East 36th Avenue

Wednesdays, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
 February 23 - April 6, 2011

Diabetes Prevention & Reversal
Providence Cancer Center
3851 Piper Street, Building U2

Fridays, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
 February 25 - April 8, 2011

Wasilla

Diabetes Prevention & Reversal
Dayspring Enrichment Center
1625 Edlund Road

Thursdays, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
 February 24 - April 7, 2011

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED!

All classes meet weekly for 7 weeks.

Cost: \$90

**To register: Call Delisa or Charlie,
 907-373-1526**

or online: www.yestolife.info

For more information:

delisa@yestolife.info