

The Ancestral Wisdom That Supported Better Health in the Past

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October 21, 2026

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Our ancestors maintained better metabolic health naturally through their lifestyle, which included nutrient-dense whole foods, physical activity, and living in harmony with nature
- › Traditional diets emphasized whole-animal consumption, including organ meats and bone broths. They also incorporated saturated fats and seasonal fruits and vegetables
- › Daily physical activity was inherent in historical lifestyles through manual labor and outdoor work. This resulted in higher metabolic rates compared to today's sedentary patterns
- › Past generations had minimal exposure to environmental toxins, synthetic chemicals, and other pollutants that are now common in food, water, and everyday products
- › Natural light and rest patterns followed the sun's cycles, which supported proper melatonin production and sleep cycles. There were no disruptions from blue light and electromagnetic fields

The way humans live today is drastically different from how people thrived for most of history. Our ancestors didn't need to obsess over health or fitness; it was a byproduct of living in harmony with nature. There was no need to count calories, track steps, or rely on supplements because their environment naturally provided everything their bodies needed to function optimally.

Over time, industrialization, technological advancements, and modern conveniences have drastically reshaped the way people eat, move, and live. This shift has fueled an epidemic of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune disorders, and obesity. Despite having easier access to health information and medical advancements, many struggle with low cellular energy, poor metabolism, and declining well-being.

The key difference lies in the stark contrast between ancestral diets and movement patterns and the modern lifestyle that actively works against cellular health. By looking to your ancestral roots and embracing the core principles that sustained human vitality for generations, you can help restore proper cellular function and reclaim true health in a world that has largely abandoned these essential practices.

What Started the Decline in Nutrient-Dense Diets?

For nearly 99% of human history, survival was dependent on hunting, gathering, and consuming whole, nutrient-dense foods. It wasn't until about 12,000 years ago that agriculture and animal domestication began reshaping diets,¹ and even then, food remained unprocessed and rich in essential nutrients.

- **The rise of industrialized food production** — With industrialization, food production shifted dramatically from traditional methods. This introduced refined sugars, seed oils, fortified grains, and mass-produced convenience foods.
- **Modern diets lost their nutritional foundation** — Industrialized food production has stripped meals of their original nutritional value and replaced nutrient-dense staples with calorie-rich but micronutrient-poor substitutes.
- **The mismatch between biology and diet** — Despite your biological need for the same essential nutrients, the modern diet bears little resemblance to the diverse, traditional whole-food-based diets that once sustained human health.

Are People Eating the Wrong Fats and Animal Parts Today?

Ancestral diets were built on a deep respect for whole-animal consumption, ensuring that no part of an animal went to waste while maximizing nutrient intake. Unlike today, where people commonly eat lean cuts like chicken breasts, ribeye steaks, and tenderloins, past generations valued organ meats, marrow, and collagen-rich connective tissues. These cuts provided a wider range of amino acids, vitamins, and minerals, which made meals far more nutritionally complete.²

- **Organ meats were central to traditional cooking** — Historical cookbooks and records from the 1700s to the early 1900s, such as “The Lady’s Assistant for Regulating and Supplying the Table” from 1787, highlight the widespread use of organ meats in cooking, as seen in the images below.³

C O N T E N T S.			
Ox Feet fried	Page 136	Veal Olives	Page 143
Skirts and Kidneys	ibid.	Veal Olives à-la-mode	149
		Fried Veal, with Lemon	ibid.
<i>Veal.</i>		To dress cold Veal	ibid.
Directions to choose Veal	136	Cold Veal hashed	150
Different Pieces of Veal	ibid.	Minced Veal	ibid.
Boiled Veal			
Roast Veal			
Breast of Veal			
Ditto stewed with Pease	138	To boil Veal like Sturgeon	151
Neck of Veal stewed with Celery	ibid.	To pot Veal	ibid.
The Knuckle stewed white	ibid.	Marbled Veal	ibid.
Ditto stewed brown	ibid.	Veal in Jelly	ibid.
Ditto hashed white	ibid.	Veal Ham	152

C O N T E N T S.			
<i>Bills of Fare.</i>		To stew a Rump of Beef	P. 122
FAMILY Dinners of five Dishes	Page 1	To stew Beef Gobbets	ibid.
Five Dishes and Family Dinners		A Leg of Beef stewed	123
Dishes			ibid.
Seven Dishes and a remove	17	Beef à-la-daube	ibid.
Family Dinners of nine Dishes	20	A-la-royale	ibid.
Nine Dishes and a Remove	24	Tremblant and Ecarlate	125
Family Dinners of eleven Dishes	28	Rump au Ragout	ibid.
Eleven Dishes and a Remove	31	A Round of Beef forced	126
		To force the Inside of a Sir-loin	ibid.

Images provided courtesy of Ashley Armstrong

- **Bone broths supported gut, joint, and skin health** — Bones were also simmered into broths and soups, which provided collagen and amino acids.^{4,5} Today, these have been largely abandoned in favor of boneless, skinless, fat-free cuts that offer far less nutrition.

- **Saturated fat was once embraced, not feared** — Ancestral diets also included ample amounts of saturated fat, which was not feared but recognized as an essential part of a well-rounded diet. The vilification of saturated fat in the 20th century stemmed from the flawed Diet-Heart Hypothesis by Ancel Keys, which inaccurately linked it to heart disease.
- **Seed oils replaced animal fats, but with consequences** — This led to the widespread replacement of animal fats with high-PUF (polyunsaturated fats) vegetable oils.⁶
- **Debunking the Diet-Heart Hypothesis** — Mounting research has challenged Keys' claim. For example, a 2016 re-evaluation of the Diet-Heart Hypothesis found that while replacing saturated fats with vegetable oils lowered cholesterol, it did not reduce the risk of heart disease or overall mortality.⁷

In reality, higher consumption of these oils is associated with an increased risk of Type 2 diabetes.⁸ Explore the full impact of seed oils on your metabolic health in [“Linoleic Acid — The Most Destructive Ingredient in Your Diet.”](#)

Carbohydrates, Grains, and Vegetables in Ancestral Diets

Beyond proteins and fats, carbohydrates were a consistent part of the ancestral diet, a direct contradiction to modern trends that demonize them. However, unlike today's highly refined, nutrient-depleted carb sources, past generations relied on whole, unprocessed carbohydrates such as root vegetables, properly prepared grains, and seasonal fruits.⁹

- **Carbohydrates were eaten year-round for steady energy** — Carbohydrates were often preserved in the form of jams, jellies, and dried fruits to ensure a steady supply of energy regardless of the season.¹⁰ Winter diets included potatoes, apples, and fermented vegetables, while summer brought fresh berries, melons, and other fruits.

- **Ancestral diets maintained macronutrient balance** — Unlike modern low-carb diet trends that promote extreme restriction, ancestral diets maintained a balance of macronutrients that supported metabolic health.¹¹
- **Whole grains were soaked or fermented for digestibility** — Whole grains were a dietary staple, soaked or fermented to improve digestibility and nutrient absorption. They were vastly different from the genetically modified, pesticide-laden varieties that are available today.
- **Traditional baking relied on clean, heritage grains** — Bread and baked goods were made from non-GMO flours without the addition of synthetic vitamins and minerals, which preserves the integrity of the original ingredients.
- **Vegetables were cooked, not eaten raw** — Vegetables were another important component of ancestral diets, but unlike the modern trend of raw, fiber-heavy salads, vintage cookbooks consistently showcase recipes that emphasize roasting, steaming, and stewing vegetables. Traditional food preparation methods improved digestibility and reduced antinutrients that interfere with nutrient absorption.¹²
- **Sugar was used, but in traditional forms** — Sugar, also vilified in modern diet culture, was a regular part of ancestral eating. However, it came in the form of minimally processed cane or beet sugar, honey, and fruit-based desserts rather than artificial sweeteners or high-fructose corn syrup.
- **Desserts were homemade with nutrient-dense ingredients** — Desserts, such as fruit pies, rice puddings, and custards, were made with whole ingredients like pasture-raised butter, low-PUF eggs, and full-fat dairy, without the industrial additives found in today's processed sweets.¹³

To learn more about how modern agriculture has altered the food supply, read [“Understanding Glyphosate's Growing Presence in Agriculture and Its Effects on Human Health.”](#)

Meal Structure and the Absence of Processed Foods

Rather than following restrictive eating patterns, ancestral diets followed a simple, structured approach — three nourishing meals per day. They viewed regular nourishment as essential for maintaining energy and health. Eating enough food was considered a marker of good health, and extreme calorie restriction was not part of their dietary philosophy.

- **Three meals a day provided consistent nourishment** — Many cookbooks featured meal plans, often referred to as “Bill of Fares,” outlining three daily meals. Below is an example from “The Queen of the Household,” published in 1896.
- **Industrially processed foods were absent** — Perhaps the most significant contrast between ancestral diets and modern eating habits is the complete absence of industrially processed foods. Everything was made from scratch using whole ingredients, with no reliance on packaged convenience foods.
- **Cooking was a daily practice rooted in tradition** — Food preparation was not seen as a chore but as a daily rhythm embedded in family life and cultural tradition. Meals were prepared with care, using methods passed down through generations.
- **Modern diets have abandoned balance and real food** — The modern diet has strayed far from the nutrient-dense, balanced approach that sustained our ancestors for generations, and this has led to the explosion of metabolic dysfunction, obesity, and chronic disease.
- **Restoring ancestral principles is essential for health** — Without a return to traditional dietary principles built on real food, balanced meals, and nutrient-dense ingredients, these health problems will likely continue to worsen.

How Outdoor Physical Activity Shaped Health in the Past

Previous generations maintained significantly higher levels of physical activity compared to modern society. While structured exercise programs attempt to compensate for lost movement, they rarely replicate the natural, sustained activity levels of past populations.

- **Resting metabolic rate has declined since the 1800s** — According to an article published in Current Biology,¹⁴ Americans' resting metabolic rate (RMR) — the total number of calories burned when your body is at rest — has declined by approximately 6% since 1820. This decline translates to roughly 27 fewer minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day.
- **Lower body temperatures reflect reduced metabolic activity** — The study suggests that body temperature, which is directly linked to metabolic rate, has steadily declined over the past two centuries. This serves as a physiological marker of reduction in activity. As physical exertion reduced, metabolism became less efficient, which contributed to the rise of obesity, insulin resistance, and other metabolic disorders.¹⁵
- **Occupational shifts drove the loss of daily exertion** — Much of this decline is a result of changes in occupational demands. In the 19th century, most jobs required sustained physical effort, with farming, manufacturing, and construction involving prolonged manual labor.
- **Work-related energy expenditure dropped sharply** — Historical data reconstructed from U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that the average metabolic equivalent of work — measured in METs, a unit representing energy expenditure relative to RMR — has declined by about 25% since 1870.¹⁶ Early industrial workers, for example, frequently performed energy-intensive tasks, whereas modern jobs often involved prolonged sitting with little physical exertion.
- **Sedentary lifestyles disrupt metabolic health** — The widespread transition to office-based employment and reliance on labor-saving devices has significantly altered how energy is used, shifting populations toward more sedentary patterns that

negatively affect metabolic health.

- **Loss of outdoor exposure weakened immune resilience** — Beyond the loss of movement, this transition has also cut people off from the immune-boosting and anti-inflammatory benefits of exposure to nature.¹⁷ Time spent outdoors has been associated with lower inflammation and better immune regulation.
- **Green spaces activate key immune pathways** — Without regular interaction with nature, you miss out on key biological stimuli that once conditioned the body for resilience. For instance, research shows that spending time in green environments like forests increases natural killer (NK) cell activity, reduces inflammatory cytokines, and even improves lung function in those with asthma.¹⁸
- **Outdoor activity supported optimal vitamin D levels** — Daily outdoor activity allowed past generations to naturally produce adequate vitamin D, an important nutrient for bone strength, immune function, and metabolic health.¹⁹ In contrast, modern lifestyles that keep people indoors have led to widespread vitamin D deficiency.²⁰

To learn more about the benefits of outdoor movement, read [“Whether You Count Steps or Time Your Walk, What Matters Is Getting Outdoors.”](#)

Did Minimal Toxin Exposure Helped Our Ancestors Thrive?

Past generations thrived because their bodies weren't constantly fighting off an onslaught of synthetic compounds. Their health was supported by clean air, pure water, and real food. The steady accumulation of environmental toxins has altered human biology and burdened your body with stressors it was never designed to handle.

- **Food, water, and air were free from synthetic pollutants** — Historically, food was free from synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and chemical preservatives. Water sources were not laced with pharmaceutical residues, chlorine byproducts, or

microplastics. Air pollution did not include the modern toxic mix of vehicle emissions, industrial waste, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from everyday household products.

- **Plastics and chemical disruptors are a modern burden** — Plastics, heavy metals, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), such as bisphenol A (BPA), phthalates, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and dioxins, are modern inventions that have become unavoidable.

Their widespread presence has been linked to metabolic disorders, reproductive issues, and neurodevelopmental abnormalities.²¹ Even infants are now exposed to chemical contaminants from birth.^{22,23}

- **Fortification created hidden health problems** — One of the greatest public health deceptions has been the so-called fortification of food with iodine, iron, and fluoride under the guise of disease prevention. Instead of addressing nutrient depletion caused by industrialized agriculture and environmental degradation, these interventions have introduced new health burdens.
- **How iodine, iron, and fluoride additives backfired** — Iodine, carelessly added to salt, has contributed to autoimmune thyroid disorders and metabolic dysfunction.²⁴ Meanwhile, the indiscriminate addition of iron to processed foods has been associated with iron overload.²⁵ Fluoride, falsely promoted as essential for dental health, has been linked to neurotoxicity and thyroid dysfunction.^{26,27}
- **Chemical treatments accelerate health decline** — The modern approach of treating toxic overload with more chemicals and medical band-aids only accelerated our health decline. The solution is not more fortification or synthetic interventions, but rather the removal of unnecessary toxins from our food, water, and air.

How Natural Light and Rest Patterns Restore Health

Before artificial lighting, people's sleep patterns were governed by the natural cycles of the sun. Exposure to natural light, particularly in the morning, signals the brain to suppress melatonin production and increase cortisol, which promotes wakefulness.²⁸ As daylight fades, melatonin levels rise, preparing your body for sleep. This cycle ensures that energy is used efficiently during the day and that cellular repair, detoxification, and regeneration occur during the night.²⁹

- **Evening environments supported deep rest** — Before electricity, people relied on fire, candles, and oil lamps for illumination, all of which emitted warm, red-toned light that did not interfere with melatonin production. The absence of artificial distractions also encouraged relaxation, storytelling, and social bonding, which reduced stress and prepared the nervous system for deep sleep.
- **Daily sunlight exposure included near-infrared light** — Natural sunlight contains a full spectrum of wavelengths, including near-infrared (NIR) light. Regular exposure to NIR during daylight hours helped stimulate mitochondrial function and supported melatonin production inside the cells. Mitochondrial melatonin plays a key role in reducing oxidative stress and enhancing the body's repair processes during sleep.
- **Blue light disrupts your circadian rhythm** — Modern living has introduced technologies like artificial lighting, especially the blue light emitted from screens, which delays melatonin release and disrupts your body's internal clock. Instead of winding down with the setting sun, you remain artificially stimulated late into the night, which leads to poor sleep quality, disrupted hormone balance, and metabolic dysfunction.³⁰
- **Electromagnetic fields (EMFs) are a modern threat to restorative sleep** — EMFs are another major disruptor of natural rest patterns that previous generations never had to contend with. Wi-Fi routers, smartphones, and other electronic devices now flood the environment with EMFs, which interfere with your body's natural electrical signaling.

- **EMF exposure weakens mitochondrial function** — Research suggests that exposure to EMFs may suppress melatonin production, disrupt deep sleep cycles, and increase oxidative stress. Over time, this constant exposure has been linked to weakened mitochondrial function, inflammation, and reduced capacity for repair during sleep.³¹

For a deeper look at how light influences your biology and strategies to safely optimize your sun exposure, check out [“The Power of Light, Mitochondria and Circadian Rhythms.”](#)

Reclaiming the Quality of Health That Was Once Normal

Our ancestors thrived because their daily lives naturally aligned with biological needs. Whole, unprocessed foods fueled metabolism, daily movement maintained strength, time in nature built resilience, and sleep followed the natural rhythm of light and darkness.

- **Modern life has dismantled foundational health habits** — Modern conveniences have made daily life easier, but at the cost of the very foundations that sustained human vitality for generations. Diets are now dominated by ultraprocessed foods, movement has been replaced by sedentary habits, and environmental toxins infiltrate every aspect of daily life. These shifts have sabotaged cellular health and fueled an epidemic of chronic disease.
- **Reversing decline starts with removing modern disruptors** — To reclaim health, you must eliminate harmful influences that didn't exist for past generations and restore the conditions that allow your body to function optimally.
- **Ancestral wisdom supports optimal health** — By understanding what worked for our ancestors, you can adopt habits that support mitochondrial health and metabolic efficiency instead of relying on a system designed to suppress symptoms rather than prevent illness.

The goal isn't to return to the past but to apply time-tested principles in a way that fits today's world. By making small but meaningful adjustments, you can help restore your body's energy production and rebuild the strength and resilience that used to be the norm.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Ancestral Wisdom and Modern Living

Q: What made ancestral lifestyles so healthy?

A: Because they lived in sync with nature. Their diets were nutrient-rich, they moved throughout the day, and they got plenty of sun and sleep. These habits supported mitochondrial health, immune function, and metabolic resilience without the need for supplements or medical interventions.

Q: How has the modern diet changed our health?

A: Industrial food production replaced nutrient-dense animal fats, organ meats, and properly prepared carbs with processed snacks, seed oils, and artificial additives. These changes disrupted hormone balance, damaged gut health, and contributed to today's chronic disease epidemic.

Q: Are modern sedentary lifestyles really that harmful?

A: Yes. Physical activity once came naturally through daily tasks like farming or walking. Today's sedentary routines, combined with constant screen use and indoor living, reduce metabolic rate, weaken mitochondria, and increase the risk of obesity and chronic illness.

Q: How do environmental toxins affect our health compared to the past?

A: Past generations weren't exposed to plastics, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, or EMFs. Today, these hidden stressors overload your body, disrupt hormones, and weaken cellular energy production.

Q: What's the first step to restoring health using ancestral principles?

A: Start by removing modern disruptors, like seed oils and processed foods from your diet, or artificial light at night. Then rebuild your habits around real food, consistent movement, time in nature, and natural sleep patterns. These foundational changes support energy production, hormone balance, and metabolic health.

This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare provider before making changes to your health regimen.

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