



You do what you eat

Marco Visscher, *Ode Magazine*, issue 26

Summary by Richard England

At a Wisconsin High school for developmentally challenged students, widespread disruptive behaviors all but disappeared after the principal banished junk food from the cafeteria and replaced it with more nutritious fare. Mere anecdote perhaps? In a recent article *Ode magazine's* Marco Visscher summarizes some of the latest research on the connection between diet and behavior. While some recent studies have been tainted by problematic methodology, Visscher focuses on the unimpeachable work of Oxford physiologist Bernard Gesch. In a 2002 study in a British prison, more than two hundred volunteers were divided into two groups, with one group being given nutritional supplements, and the other receiving a placebo. In the double blind study prisoners who were given supplements had a marked reduction in disciplinary infractions and violent behavior, while there was no change in those given the placebo. It is well known that feeding children sugar is a recipe for bad behavior. Gesch's work suggests that diet has more subtle, long-term effects on behavior in adults as well.

Visscher argues that Gesch's work could help policy makers find an effective – and inexpensive – way of stemming violence in prisons, schools and society at large, by turning their attention to diet and good nutrition. He also asserts that the connection between food and behavior is a new reason to be concerned about the long-term effects of artificial fertilizers, which lower the levels of minerals in our food.

Gesch's research is being considered by the Dutch Ministry of Justice which is setting up similar studies in 14 prisons. Despite initial disbelief about the claims that nutrition and behavior were linked, the "hard science" of the British study commanded their respect as a “rational approach.”

In an interview, Gesch is quoted as follows:

“Most criminal-justice systems assume that criminal behavior is entirely a matter of free will. But how exactly can you exercise free will without involving your brain? How exactly can the brain function without an adequate nutrient supply?... I think nutrition may actually be one of the most straightforward factors to change antisocial behavior. And we know that it's not only highly effective, it's also cheap and humane... Few scientists are not convinced that diet is fundamental for the development of the human brain. Is it plausible that in the last 50 years we could have made spectacular changes to the human diet without any implications for the brain? I don't think so. Now, evidence is mounting that putting poor fuel into the brain significantly affects social behavior. We need to know more about the composition of the right nutrients. It could be the recipe for peace.”

See the [full text](#) of this fascinating article at:

www.odemagazine.com/article.php?aID=4143

We may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine-gun.

George Orwell

Spicy Beet Greens

1	large onion, diced (about 1 1/2 cups)
1 tbsp	olive oil
2 lbs	beet greens (or other greens such as kale, spinach, or mustard greens)
2 tsp	vinegar
1/4 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes (or more to taste)
-	salt and ground black pepper to taste

Sauté the onion in the oil in a large skillet or saucepan on low heat for about 10 minutes, until translucent. While the onion sautés, thoroughly rinse the beet greens. Remove any large stems and chop coarsely.

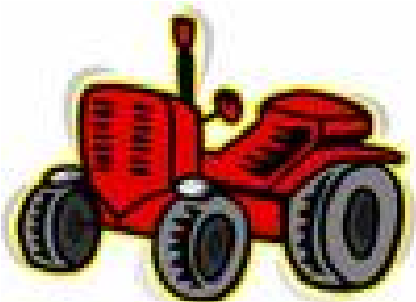
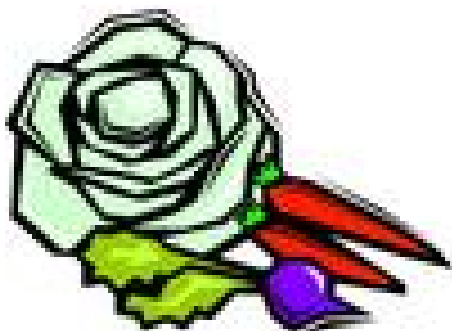
Add the moist beet greens to the onion and cook, covered, for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until leaves are wilted but still bright green. Stir in the vinegar and red pepper flakes. Add salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately or at room temperature.

Serves 4.

Variations:

- Replace the vinegar and crushed red pepper flakes with Tabasco or other hot pepper sauce to taste.
- Add a cup of canned crushed tomatoes and/or 2 cups of cooked potato cubes.
- Omit the vinegar and add up to 1/2 cup of prepared sauerkraut.
- Add about 2 cups of cooked field peas or lima beans.
- Top with chopped black olives and chopped hard-boiled eggs.

Adapted from *The Moosewood Restaurant Cooks at Home*, 1994.



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