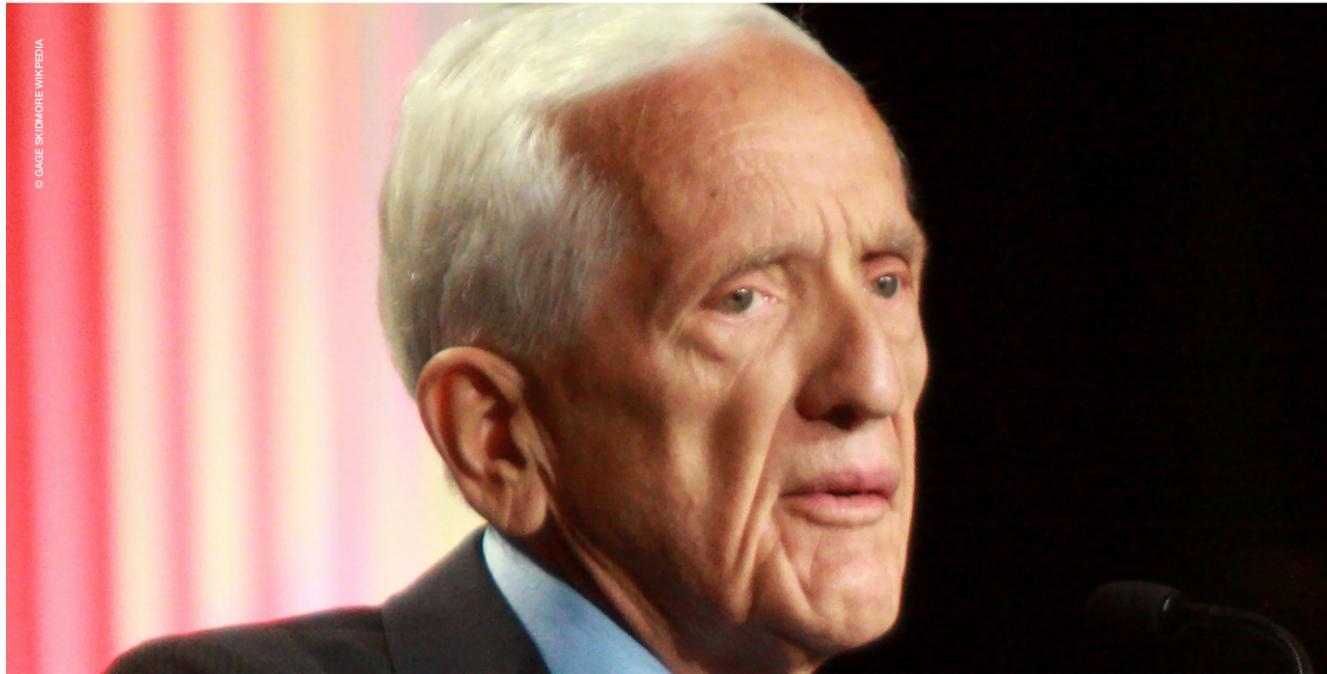


‘Nutrition is the most powerful discipline of all’

Dr Thomas Colin Campbell | Text: Jacques Geluk



Meet T. Colin Campbell, PhD (1934), who has been dedicated to the science of human health for more than six decades now. “We must recognise nutrition as a cornerstone of our healthcare system, not a footnote.” This quote pretty much says it all. I found it on the website of the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies, which he founded to provide education about the whole food plant based lifestyle he recommends. Dr Campbell’s primary focus is on the association between diet and disease, particularly cancer. He is largely known for the ‘China Project’, one of the most comprehensive studies of health and nutrition ever conducted, and recognised by The New York Times as the ‘Grand Prix of epidemiology’.

“I grew up at a dairy farm, ate dairy, and was the first in the family to go to college. I studied pre-veterinary medicine at Pennsylvania State University. After obtaining my bachelor’s degree, I received a telegram from a professor at Cornell University, offering me a scholarship and research opportunity too good to turn down. I completed my education in nutrition, biochemistry and toxicology there on the topic of food and health. My dissertation was about figuring out ways to advance the course of eating more animal protein. At that time, 63 years ago, I had never heard of the words vegetarian or vegan. In the beginning of my career I was on the opposite site of the fence in many different ways”, Dr Campbell says. He had his first faculty position in 1965. “At the time, our university and the US State Department were involved in organising a national programme for feeding mal-

nourished children in the Philippines, which I coordinated. I was really interested in how we could help those children, and the objective was to make sure they got enough animal protein. Then I saw something that was rather peculiar. This is totally anecdotal, but I got the impression that the children of the few richer Filipino families who consumed the most protein seemed to be at higher risk for liver cancer. I didn’t think too much about it, until around the same time a research study in India showed a very similar effect in laboratory animals. Initiated by the most potent liver carcinogen known, all those animals consuming higher (‘normal’) dietary animal protein got liver cancer, while animals fed lower dietary protein did not get the disease. Researchers in India did not even believe their own results. Initially I was more interested in using dietary protein to modify cancer development in order to better understand how cancer works, but then I started my research, which was funded by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) for many years, to find out whether it was possible that liver cancer might be promoted by higher consumption of animal protein.” Dr Colin Campbell explains how he entered his research from the opposite point of view, but soon wanted to explore this question in as much depth as he could and with an open mind.

“I learned through science, and published all this research in the very best journals, so I could get the best possible critique. And it turned out I learned a lot.” Dr Campbell’s principal focus as a researcher and teacher was on nutrition and cancer, but he also became quite interested in national policy development. “So I spent quite a bit of time working on national expert panels and learning how they developed. I noticed that policy making was very much the realm of politicians more than of scientists, and government officials and politicians unfortunately were the people who set the guidelines and informed the public. They didn’t adhere to the science very much, on the

contrary, they twisted and distorted it in various ways, which I found upsetting.”

THE ‘CHINA PROJECT’

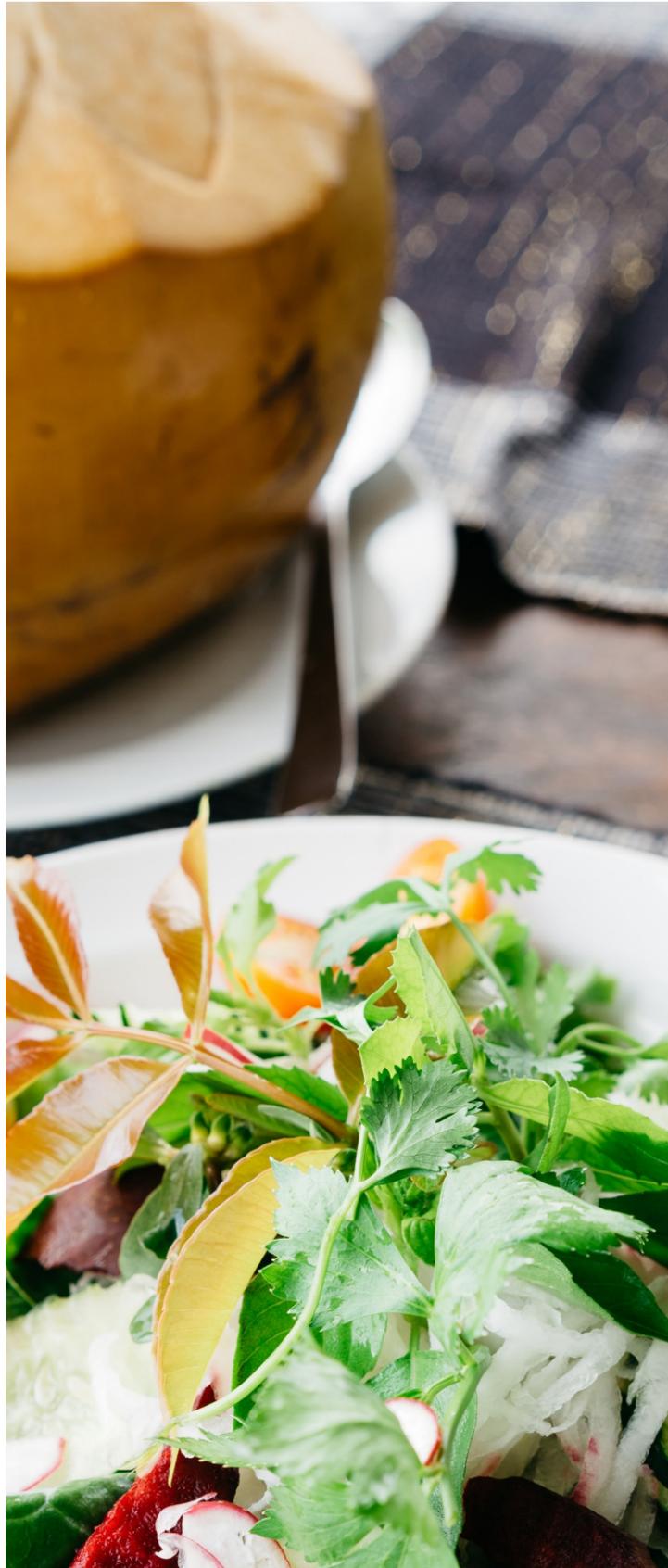
Dr T. Colin Campbell was one of the directors of the ‘China Project’, a 20-year study conducted by the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine, Cornell University, and the University of Oxford, England, “which had sent a brilliant epidemiologist.” It looked at mortality rates from cancer and other chronic diseases from 1973-75 in 65 rural counties in China, and correlated the data with dietary surveys and blood work in the eighties. The study concluded that countries with a high consumption of animal-based foods were more likely to have had higher death rates from ‘Western’ foods, while the opposite was true for countries where people ate more plant based foods. “I officially got the grant, the money, in 1983. We continued for about fourteen years. It was the most comprehensive study that ever had been done, and included 6,500 families (11,000 people) in 130 villages who had spent most of their lives living in the same place. We assumed – which turned out to be correct – that most of the food consumed in a rural area was locally produced. In other words, there was a very stable population on the one hand, and also a very stable dietary pattern on the other.” It was a perfect epidemiological study as far as characteristics were concerned. The team got results, but standing alone they were not sufficient to make really firm proclamations. “What those results did make significant was the fact that my team and I had already done a lot of research in the laboratory, where we had seen some pretty remarkable things that were hard to believe in some ways. I wanted to see whether or not the information we collected in China was consistent with what we found in the laboratory. It was! Eventually, I got access to a total of about four dozen different kinds of disease, including heart disease, diabetes, and several cancers, that could be affected by a wrong dietary pattern. We had

lots of information about what people died of, but also kept in mind that we were working in regions of China where not very much animal protein was consumed, especially compared to western countries. I found a significant association between markers of western food and the emergence of western diseases. That told me that as soon as people begin to consume more animal food, the risk of disease begins to rise significantly. Exciting, because that was actually what I had been learning in the laboratory as well. The whole story began to come together in a really nice way.”

‘Certain forces in society basically control all dietary information’

NO VEGETARIAN BACKGROUND

“As you know, I didn’t have a vegetarian background, nor did my wife whom I married in 1964. But when I was learning about this stuff I would tell my wife. That’s why we started changing our diet around 1980, but by 1990 when I was seeing the convincing results from the ‘China Study’, we became a 100 percent vegan. By that time I was completely sure that the science clearly shows that as soon as we start eating animal based foods, we immediately begin to decrease the consumption of plant foods.” This imbalance of course (at least) doubles the risk of disease, but still



Dr Campbell was hounded and not taken seriously by a number of his scientific peers. That's why his wife suggested he should write a book. Although he was reluctant at first, he finally decided to write 'The China Study' in 2001, together with his son Thomas, who is a physician now himself. The book was published in 2005 and became a worldwide bestseller. "Against my expectations, it had a tremendous effect. Millions of copies have been sold all over the world and the book has been translated into 48 languages. No other health related book has been translated in so many different languages. I also wrote a couple of cookbooks and a book called 'Whole.'" Were his readers immediately convinced by the results of the study or inspired by Mr Bill Clinton and other famous followers of Dr Campbell? "For me it was and is in some ways a lifetime journey. I was becoming convinced personally by all the scientific information I encountered, but the majority of people obviously were. So I thought it would be a good idea to bring this to the attention of the larger public. My background in policy development became significant to me, as I began to understand that certain forces in society basically control all dietary information. Not always intentional or mischievous, but still..." says Dr Campbell, who is now finishing a new book explaining this phenomena. "The fact that Bill Clinton and some other celebrities came on television to tell about the book really worked too. In 1990 when the China project monograph (not the book) was published, that document (900 pages) was rather inaccessible and had yet to be analysed. However, The New York Times had a cover story on it that certainly got people sort of interested, but not necessarily convinced, and I was getting a lot of pushback from colleagues and institutions. They did not want to hear this and went to such great lengths that they destroyed my career."

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Since the first publication of the book things have changed for the better. A revised and expanded edition of the most comprehensive study of nutrition ever conducted and the startling implications for diet, weight loss, and long-term health, has been published in 2017, and may be even more convincing. "There were also three major documentary movies. One was made in Britain, and actually shown in Parliament, the second one was called 'Four summer nights' and viewed by up to 20 million people. The third movie, 'PlantPure Nation', was directed by my son Nelson." This documentary tells the story of three people on a quest to spread the message of one of the most important health breakthroughs of all time. This film also details the weight of scientific evidence presented earlier in 'The China Study' and the popular documentary film 'Forks over Knives, that a whole food plant based diet could prevent and

even reverse some of the most deadly health conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and even some forms of cancer. "Those three films have catalysed a lot of interest, and I can say now that I can't begin to accept invitations from people who want to hear about this. There is so much interest. On the other hand, professionals like scientists and researchers are still extremely reluctant to accept this information and they are the ones advising national policy development panels. While writing a book now about the history of cancer and the way we look at it, it has become apparent to me that there is not a single medical school in the United States, which is mostly true in Europe too, that even teaches nutrition. Not one, which is really incredible. Nutrition can be a cornerstone of our healthcare and an alternative to chemotherapy, and radiation. It is the most powerful discipline of all!"

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD OPEN UP

According to T. Colin Campbell it is time for governments to stop listening to the corporations and industry all the time. "They should open up and no longer try to repress information about scientifically proven health benefits of whole food plant based nutrition." There is still a long way to go. "The Dietary Guidelines is a truly significant document in the United States. The government actually works hard to support corporate instead of public interests. I have tried to advise politicians that if they want to help reducing healthcare cost for example, they should start opening up and discuss opportunities for spreading this kind of information to the public. I have given many lectures in medical schools recently, Understandably those audiences used to be a little bit sceptical, but now I get standing ovations when I introduce the benefits of a plant based lifestyle. That's hopeful, because doctors seem

For decades Dr T. Colin Campbell, PhD has been at the forefront of nutrition education and research. Dr Campbell is the coauthor of the bestselling book 'The China Study' and his legacy, the 'China Project', is one of the most comprehensive studies of health and nutrition ever conducted. Dr Campbell is founder and president of the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies.



'There is not a single medical school that even teaches nutrition'

to be the fastest learners. They are really upset when they realise that they weren't taught nutrition when they were in medical school." This said, most of them are still under the repressive influence of the pharmaceutical industry. "They still are, and that is why I think the government has some role to play. It has an opportunity to withhold funding from medical schools unless those institutions agree to make nutrition (including plant based foods) part of their educational program. I can bring a very scientific, quite irrefutable and very convincing argument to that discussion. Let people try a whole food plant based diet for a couple of weeks, and see what happens. The

results will be remarkable for almost every single person that is new to this kind of diet. Their blood pressure comes down, their diabetes reverses, and the risk of heart failure diminishes, and so forth. It is something the modern world needs to know, but in reality we could have known this for a long, long time. Hippocrates, Pythagoras and some others were aware of much of this information, which regrettably went lost in western civilisation through history." 85-year old T. Colin Powell is living proof a plant based lifestyle and diet work. "I don't use any drugs, neither do my wife, our five grown children, our eleven grandchildren, and their spouses. There are 22 of us, we all eat this way now, and we are all healthy."

ONLINE COURSE

The T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies has partnered with online education provider eCornell to offer a revolutionary program to help people understand the importance of diet and nutrition for their lives. In a few short weeks they can arm themselves with the knowledge they need to improve their overall health, learn new skills, and even inspire a career change. "In our online, video-based courses, you'll learn from over 20+ leading experts on topics that include the science behind a plant-based diet, the role nutrition plays in chronic disease, the impact of food production on the environment (which we will emphasise in a new course, which was introduced in September 2019), and how government and industry can affect dietary choices. Our mission is to promote optimal nutrition through science-based education, advocacy, and research. By empowering individuals and health professionals, we aim to improve personal, public, and environmental health."