

Eating stressed food may hurt you

Author links poor treatment of plants, animals to human ills

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Inside Bay Area

Article Last Updated:09/10/2007 07:35:03 AM PDT

Is stress edible?

Is that chicken raised in a tiny cage passing on its stress to you? How about that farm-raised fish in a crowded pool? Or the pesticide-laden apple sitting in cold storage, being trucked hundreds of miles?

The answer is yes, according to Dr. Joon Yun, a health-care investor and Palo Alto think-tank founder.

His new book, "Low-Stress Food," suggests that the way food is processed, cultivated, shipped and stored is a source of chronic stress for those who eat it.

"Like people, plants and animals produce stress hormones," said Yun, a principal at Palo Alto Investors and manager of health investments. "Our bodies absorb this secondhand stress in the same way they absorb vitamins and minerals." Yun, a Menlo Park resident, believes wild fish are better for your health than farm-raised fish.

He thinks that as soon as a piece of fruit is picked, it gets stressed about its lack of nutrients, and that stress gets transferred to you.

That all-American steak dinner? "Don't have a stressed-out cow," he says. "That well-manicured slab may conceal a tortured upbringing" such as an early castration without the use of an anesthetic, or being fattened up with an unhealthy growth hormone before getting slaughtered.

Yun argues that animals are stressed from being raised in cooped-up, often filthy conditions, and believes that stress "can't help but be embedded in humans."

He believes it is critical for people to begin a dialogue on how food impacts their mental and physical well-being.

What does he think you should eat to cut your stress?

That wild salmon swimming freely in rivers and oceans; fruit off the tree or vine, or from local farmers; grass-fed beef, and eggs laid by cage-free chickens. Also, sardines, broccoli, strawberries, cauliflower, and fresh beans and peas.

The book pushes the importance of foods that are in-season, local, organic and unprocessed.

Yun suggests there's a connection between food and stress that may go deeper than we think. He finds it curious that diet and stress cause the same diseases — diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, heart disease, depression and cancer.

"There's no doubt we're doing some things with the food system that weren't done 50 years ago," said Yun, who published his book as part of the work of the think tank he founded, the Palo Alto Institute.

For example, years ago chickens came to market after 112 days and weighed 21/2 pounds, Yun noted. Now they take half that long to raise and weigh 5 1/2 pounds.

Cary Cole, a Woodside resident and chief executive of a medical device company, said he recently halted his colon cancer partly by eating low-stress foods.

"Food provides the nutrients we need to live," said Cole, who cut out processed food, eats organic fruits and vegetables, and very little meat, but makes sure it's grass-fed when he does.

"I wondered what I could do to stack the deck to beat cancer, and changing my diet has helped, making me more even-keeled and balanced."

Yun suggests growing your own food and shopping at farmer's markets, where the produce and fruit come from local farms.

He thinks it's good to get to know local farmers, and find out how they're growing things.

Local is important, he said, given the environmental concerns of transporting food for thousands of miles.

"It's about making enlightened choices for yourself," said Yun, urging people to ask restaurateurs how that fish they serve is raised. "It doesn't have to be a moral thing, but doing what's best for yourself."

The book also lists sources for low-stress food (including restaurants, markets and farmers who grow it), and is available at Amazon.com for \$11. There's also a Web site, <http://www.low-stressfood.org>, where there's a growing list of local low-stress food sources.

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