

America's Health Care System Needs Correctives: Also Animal Care

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The report by the Commonwealth Fund, *U.S. Health Care from a Global Perspective, 2022: Accelerating Spending, Worsening Outcomes*, is a clarion call for reforms and correctives.

The U.S. spends nearly 18 percent of GDP on health care, yet Americans die younger and are less healthy than residents of other high-income countries. ([U.S. Health Care from a Global Perspective, 2022 | Commonwealth Fund](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/2022/04/u-s-health-care-from-a-global-perspective-2022)). Not only does the U.S. have the lowest life expectancy among high-income countries, but it also has the highest rates of avoidable deaths. Part of this problem is that now, for the first time in nearly 30 years, the FDA is [changing its requirements](#) to label food as “healthy,” with cholesterol, saturated fat and other concerns in mind. A group of 50 organizations is [urging the U.S. government](#) to disclose any “potential financial conflicts of interest” amongst those involved in creating the next dietary guidelines.

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food” harkens back to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. This quote, though thousands of years old, acknowledges the importance of healthy eating and how the nutrients in various foods have healing properties. Few medical and veterinary colleges provide adequate courses in nutrition, nutraceuticals and nutrigenomics. But this may soon change as research has opened the door to provide a better understanding of how nutrition influences the gut microbiome; the diverse population of bacteria that play a vital role in our physical and mental health, immune system defenses and longevity. Eating lots of ultra-processed foods — such as junk food, fizzy drinks, frozen meals and packaged cold meats — [increases your risk of dying from cancer](#).

A UK study of more than 197,000 people showed that a 10% increase in consumption of ultra-processed foods led to a 2% increased risk of being diagnosed with cancer and a 6% increased risk of dying from cancer. Ultra-processed foods typically contain artificial flavours, salt, sweeteners, fat and preservatives to make them longer lasting, more affordable and tastier. These foods are often marketed as healthy — but they are far from it. Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2023.101840> (31 January).

“There are at least 50 chemicals, probably many more, that literally make us fatter,” says environmental-health scientist Leonardo Trasande. He is among those researching ‘obesogens’ — [chemicals, such as fungicides and flame retardants, that seem to make animals — or their descendants — gain fat](#). The term was coined by cell biologist Bruce Blumberg, who discovered in 2006 that tributyltin chloride promoted fat formation in mice. His advice? “Do not eat packaged processed food. It’s full of obesogens. Buy fresh ingredients and make a meal.” Reference: [Are everyday chemicals contributing to global obesity? | Feature | Chemistry World](#)

I have long questioned what I see as an unhealthy alliance between various government regulatory agencies responsible for public health and nutrition-education, their sins of omission and commission ultimately benefiting the agribusiness food and pharmaceutical industries, as per my 1997 book *Eating*

With Conscience: The Bioethics of Food. All veterinarians going in to companion animal practice should, prior to graduation, have read *Canine Nutrigenomics* by W. Jean Dodds DVM and Deana R. Laverdure. (2015, Dogwise Publishing).

Finding nutritious alternatives to animal products and embracing a plant-based diet is good for the animals, good for the planet and best for our health. For those looking to change their own diets, see Veda Stram's *What to Eat When You Don't Eat Animals: menus and ideas to inspire people who want to eat as if life is precious* <https://www.all-creatures.org/what-to-eat.html>