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**The Vegan Documentary The Game Changers on Netflix is causing quite a stir!**

The film documents the explosive rise of plant-based eating in professional sports. Featuring some of the world's top athletes plant-based athletes including Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton and top-ranked tennis player Novak Djokovic and Arnold Schwarzenegger the film seeks to 'expose outdated myths about food that not only affect human performance but the health of the entire global population'.

This documentary has been praised by viewers for an ‘eye-opening’ look at plant-based diets. Arnie explains: ‘I ate a lot of meat. They show those commercials selling that idea that real men eat meat. But you’ve got to understand that’s marketing. That’s not based on reality.’ Lewis, who also sat down for the film, adds: ‘We all wanna look great, have more energy.’

Doctors have also praised the programme as ‘a big eye-opener’. Dr. Andrew Little from Doctors For Nutrition said: ‘Do yourself a favour and watch this documentary. It’s absolutely amazing. It presents the facts of a plant-based diet in a really nice, logical order and hits on everything the public needs to know about.’

Many professionals however have taken issue with these so-called facts, arguing that only one side of the argument is presented using controversial sources and questionable studies. The film will no doubt continue to create controversy.

**The Statistics**

We cannot however deny the statistics that the demand for meat free food in the UK increased by 987% in 2017 and going vegan was the biggest food trend in 2018. The number of vegans in Great Britain quadrupled between 2014 and 2018. Almost half of UK vegans made the change in 2018, which shows veganism has been growing exponentially with young people that are leading the way.

From my perspective I see many young people wanting to go plant based but sadly not always getting it right and becoming unwell. It is easy to become deficient in key nutrients that are essential to both physical and mental health including iron deficient anaemia, B12 deficiency and more.

**Why Education Matters**

Educating children on the importance of good nutrition is knowledge learned for life. Keeping adolescents healthy is a valuable investment and good health in adolescence is central to wellbeing and the bedrock for good health in later life. Investing in young people’s health provides huge dividends for their current wellbeing and their future health. Getting it right at this age also reduces long-term costs to the health system. The consequences of poor health in adolescence last a lifetime.

“An adolescent who is healthy is the best foundation for a healthy adult life, which will in turn influence future generations’ health’. The Lancet, Editorial, 28 April, 2012

Schools are in a unique position to equip children and young people with the skills and knowledge they need to maintain lifelong healthy and sustainable eating habits.

The Soil Association have warned that "we need greater emphasis on early intervention" to truly turn the tide on diet-related ill health.

**The poor state of children's diets**

So why do we continue to ignore the fundamental issue of nutrition when it comes to children's brains and behaviour? We have ample evidence that the typical modern, western-type diet is detrimental to physical health - as evidenced by the epidemics of childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes. The brain is part of the body - and a priority, it is more than likely that any diet that is bad for the body will also be bad for the brain. We already know that children's and teen’s diets in the UK are far from optimal, at the levels of both "macronutrients" (protein, fat, carbohydrate and dietary fibre) and "micronutrients" (vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids). Soft drinks, sweets, confectionery, crisps, biscuits, cakes, ice cream and other highly processed foods have literally displaced fruits and vegetables, severely distorting the balance of children's diets compared with official recommendations. Most children consume far too little dietary fibre - reflecting their low intake of fruit, vegetables and whole grains.

Fibre is essential to support the "good bacteria" needed for both digestive and immune system health (while the sugary foods and drinks they do consume encourage the growth of "bad bacteria" and yeasts). Poor gut health leads to many more problems than just unpleasant gastrointestinal symptoms. It compromises digestion (and therefore the absorption of essential nutrients), and also impairs immune system functioning. It can also affect brains and behaviour, because the gut, brain and immune system share many of the same chemical signaling molecules. The gut flora are widely recognised by medical science as an extraordinarily complex ecosystem that affects every aspect of our health and wellbeing - including our mental wellbeing).

* 1 in 10 children deficient in iron, Zinc, Vitamin A and Vit D
* 25% of teenage girls fail to consume the minimum daily calcium requirement
* Iron 46% of girls had low iron intakes in UK
* 22% of children aged 11-18 years show low levels of Vit D
* In Boys and girls aged 11-18 years only 10% of boys and 7% of girls in this age group met the “5-a-day” recommendation
* 17% of British secondary school children report daily consumption of food high in fat, salt or sugar and low in nutritional value

**To conclude**

Adolescence is associated with a number of important nutritional issues. At the same time this period provides an important window of opportunity for interventions that promote the principles of a healthy eating lifestyle - with potential to radically change the chronic disease landscape among adults across the world.

Empowerment is a central element of the health promotion paradigm. Generally, schools are considered as one of the most significant social institutions where the development of knowledge and skills which promote health and prevent diseases can be addressed. It also provides a wealth of opportunities to improve nutrition, not to mention interaction with parents and other community members.

In my opinion going entirely plant based needs a lot of education, planning, time and cooking ability. I have no doubt at all that a predominantly plant eg 80% plant based diet is the ideal anti-inflammatory, high antioxidant, nutrient diet our bodies thrive on and can help prevent many degenerative diseases.

We’d love the opportunity to work with your school, we provide whole day Wellbeing Events or one-off workshops including;

* *Brain Fuel – Eating for Success, the role of diet and mental health*
* *Vibrant Energy All Day Long*
* *Boosting Immunity*
* *Sports Nutrition*
* *Signs and Symptoms of Nutrient Deficiencies*
* *Food Addictions (sugar, salt and fat) and how to get rid of them*
* *Removing Obstacles to a Healthy Lifestyle*

***“Ultimately there is a positive impact for the whole school environment from classroom through to examination results”***