### Audio Transcript – Meet the Meatfluencers

Note: Episodes of Outside/In are made as pieces of audio, and some context and nuance may be lost on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors

**Jerry Brazie: When I was 19 years old, I broke my back. I fell off of a second-story forklift and had a garbage dumpster fall on me.**

Ben Brock Johnson: Meet Jerry Brazie, whose story is crazy.

**Jerry: I mean, I couldn't walk out of a hospital to the parking lot without sitting down halfway because the damage to the nerves in the base of my spine was so, you know, terrible, and, I mean, I just lived with this pain.**

Dean Russell: No one would ever describe Jerry's life as easy.

**Jerry: I've had 17 procedures on my back since then. Been addicted to opioids three different times.**

Ben: But today, at least, Jerry has a sort of nonchalant charm about everything that's happened to him, all of which he shares on TikTok.

**[Jerry (**[**@jerrybrazie4**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40jerrybrazie4/video/7227258401225559339)**): What's up, everybody? Check this out. It has been one year ago pretty much last week...]**

Ben: Jerry describes himself as an entrepreneur and self-made millionaire. It seems like Jerry's lived enough good and bad stuff for about three life stories.

Dean: It's true. Aside from the thing with the forklift and the dumpster falling on him, aside from the addiction, the 17 back procedures, there is the big thing.

Ben: Oh, oh, there's a bigger thing?

Dean: Yes, there is a bigger thing. More than a decade ago, Jerry was diagnosed with something called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetic condition that makes it hard for the heart to pump blood.

**Jerry: ...and all of a sudden, you know, my heart's racing, and I can't breathe. And so, they put me on drugs at that point. That was at 38 years old.**

Ben: At the time, Jerry says he wasn't doing great at taking care of himself, either. He didn't exercise. He ate mostly fast food and processed food. He needed 19 pills a day to regulate his heart and pain. And he says all of this took a very visible toll on his weight, which kept going up and up and up.

**Jerry: ...until I found myself in November of '21 at 303 pounds.**

Dean: November of 2021. That's when Jerry's life changed again because one day, after flying home to Tennessee from a work trip, his chest started to hurt.

**Jerry: I drove myself over to the hospital because I was having a bunch of mini heart attacks, and somehow, I had lost four pints of blood inexplicably.**

Ben: At 52, he was admitted for what felt like maybe the last time.

**Jerry: Laying in that hospital was kind of an eye-opener for me. And I just said, I got to get back; I, I'm either going to live, or I'm going to die. Because I'm dying. There has to be a better way.**

**Ben: How'd you hear about the carnivore diet? How did that idea come into your world?**

**Jerry: I was listening to a Joe Rogan podcast, a doctor named — Oh, his name escapes me, I'm sorry.**

**[**[**Joe Rogan**](https://open.spotify.com/episode/2auwtVto0sG7OcZ0hs3aOP)**: So many people were like, Have you checked out what this guy's doing? He's eating nothing but meat, and he's a doctor, and he's super healthy.]**

**Jerry: I popped my phone open and started doing the research. And obviously, the opportunities there to do your own research and hear people's own testimonies are limitless.**

Ben: The carnivore diet. If you look at a photo of Jerry a few years ago and you look at him today, it's insane. We're talking Pillsbury dough boy to Viking warlord. And as a perfect dad-bod specimen, I'm not here to fat shame. I'm just saying it is night and day.

Dean: Jerry credits the carnivore diet for his health 180. He says he was mostly using Twitter and YouTube to learn about it. Then, he moved to TikTok, where the carnivore diet is big.

Ben: You've probably heard of its predecessors: paleo, keto, Atkins. Diets that advocate for limiting carbs and processed foods.

Dean: But the carnivore diet is different. It's a get-back-to-our-roots philosophy that literally rejects plants. No veggies. No grains. Just animals.

Ben: But as Jerry points out, some people do get some food diversity within their carnivore diet regimen. Some.

**Ben: Wait, sorry, sorry. Just to be clear, those are literally the only things that they eat?**

**Jerry: Beef, butter — beef, butter, bacon, and eggs.**

**Ben: Whoa.**

**Dean: Wow.**

**Jerry: Yeah, 30-to-40 days on that, and you won't believe how good you can feel.**

Ben: He's right. I don't believe it! But just like butter, this new carnivore diet is popular.

Dean: The other thing that sets this diet apart? It's a lifestyle created and shaped by social media.

**[**[**@cooperhealth**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40cooperhealth/video/7237979485730114862?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet&t=1702413300181)**: I tried the carnivore diet for 45 days.]**

**[**[**@ketocoachlorenz**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40ketocoachlorenz/video/7294685915316784389?q=carnivore%20diet%20two%20months&t=1704913366962)**: This is my second month on the carnivore diet.]**

**[**[**@delightedtomeatyou**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40delightedtomeatyou/video/7277651399578750254?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet&t=1702413300181)**: I've been on a carnivore diet for a year and a half.]**

**[**[**@steakandbuttergal**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40steakandbuttergal/video/7188613982297754926?lang=en)**: After four years of the carnivore diet, do I ever get tired of eating steak every day? The answer is no.]**

Dean: Jerry's trip to the E.R. was two years ago. Since then, he's been eating carnivore. Sausage and 10 eggs in the morning. Two pounds of steak at night. He's lost about 100 pounds, cut back on medication, and, despite what you might think, he says his heart is stronger.

**Jerry: My cardiologists think I'm crazy. But they can't argue with me.**

Ben: And, like the many, many, many people who have gone carnivore, Jerry says his experience has not only improved his health, it has altered his view of the entire medical and scientific community.

**Jerry: I believe, and so do so many other people — and my proof is in the experience of me for the last 22 months — is that everything we've been told about what we eat is wrong.**

Dean: I'm Dean Ribeye Russell.

Ben: I'm Ben Beef-Butter-Bacon-and-Eggs Johnson. And you're listening to *Endless Thread*.

Dean: Coming to you from WBUR, Boston's NPR butcher shoppe. With two Ps. Because we're classy.

Ben: Today's episode: Where's the Beef?

**[**[**Wendy's commercial**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ixjx8rPAYY0)**: Where's the beef?]**

Ben: It's everywhere.

Dean: How social media gave birth to the carnivore diet, meatfluencers…

Ben: ...and fast-spreading ideas about how ancient humans survived…and thrived.

Dean: And what that means for all of us.

Ben: For our purposes today the carnivore diet, as we're calling it, is a bit of a catch-all for [meatposting](https://heated.world/p/stop-meatposting), meatfluencing, lion diet, and a smorgasbord of red-meat-consumption ideas that has exploded online. The idea of an all-meat diet dates — at least in the Western world — to the 1850s, when a German author [wrote about his year living on only meat and dairy](https://books.google.ch/books/about/The_Philosophy_of_the_Stomach_Or_an_Excl.html?id=CG_HmgEACAAJ&redir_esc=y). But the carnivore club didn't really get going until more recently, around the same time as TikTok.

Dean: Search "carnivore diet" or "carnivore" or "MeatTok" on TikTok, and you will find thousands upon thousands of posts.

**[**[**@coachcarnivorecam**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40coachcarnivorecam/video/7274283848404372769?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet&t=1704730300586)**: Beef, butter, bacon, and eggs.]**

**[**[**@steakandbuttergal**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40steakandbuttergal/video/7276575840115232046?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20butter&t=1704913730833)**: Butter truly makes everything better. Sometimes I even eat it as a midday snack.]**

**[**[**@shawnbakermd**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40shawnbakermd/video/7206471026354654510?q=carnivore%20diet%20bison%20fat%20goat%20fat%20lard&t=1704913425213)**: ...bison fat, goat fat, pork fat, aka lard...]**

**[**[**@liverking**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40liverking?lang=en)**: I got liver with breakfast, lunch, and dinner because liver is king.]**

**[**[**@paulylong**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulylong)**: This is how I eat a testicle from start to finish.]**

Ben: Sounds nuts, but some of these folks have millions of followers.

Dean: People who say that what you were told as a kid...

Ben: Eat your veggies!

Dean: ...that's bologna and probably why you feel like manure.

Ben: But an all-meat diet will be your cure.

**[**[**@carnivoreray**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40carnivoreray/video/7278299957646331182?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20weight&t=1704231230170)**: I lost 43 pounds in 44 days.]**

**[Mikhaila Peterson via** [**@carnivorenutrition**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40carnivorenutrition/video/7260288949749435653?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure&t=1704229960059)**: You can heal gut damage.]**

**[**[**@lionsdenketo**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40lionsdenketo/video/7261099092300893467?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure&t=1704229960059)**: Get rid of eczema forever...]**

**[**[**@thebenazadi**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40thebenazadi/video/7154094867088510251?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure&t=1704229960059)**: ...brain fog goes away...]**

**[Jordan Peterson via** [**@carnivorelifestyle**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40carnivorelifestyle/video/7191588407137602821?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure&t=1704229960059)**: I had some autoimmune conditions that seem to have gone away.]**

**[via** [**@ashleyfreeman\_**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40ashleyfreeman_/video/7226875682150714666?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure%20cancer&t=1704231548152)**: It's actually gonna probably help you get over cancer...]**

**[**[**@jdcarnivore**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40jdcarnivore/video/7062356747356294447?lang=en&q=carnivore%20diet%20cure&t=1704229960059)**: The doctor said my stomach was the most beautiful one that he has ever seen. And I'm telling you, it certainly is because of this diet.]**

Ben: A lot of so-called latest health crazes originate with a singular health nut, or at least someone who sees the light and comes down from the mountain and brings us the gospel about what to gobble.

Dean: The Atkins diet had Dr. Robert Atkins, a cardiologist. The carnivore diet has this guy.

**[**[**Dr. Paul Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rvelXwG_Tk)**: My name is Paul Saladino. I'm a double-board certified medical doctor. I'm going to show you what I eat in a day...]**

Dean: Dr. Paul Saladino, formerly known as CarnivoreMD: 1.8 million followers on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/paulsaladinomd/?hl=en); 500,000 on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/%40Paulsaladinomd); another 500,000 on his latest [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2?lang=en) account.

Ben: The first one was banned. We are not sure why.

**[Saladino (**[**@paulsaladinomd2**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2?lang=en)**): Day in and day out, I focus on meat and organs. This is grass-fed ground beef, raw heart, raw liver, bone marrow, desiccated testicle, and desiccated brain like Whole Package from Heart & Soil Supplements...]**

Dean: Dr. Paul Saladino did not invent the carnivore diet. He's more like an apostle. But the reason he caught our attention was because he's a doctor.

Ben: A handsome, tan, often shirtless doctor — he should be on one of those shows — with a healthy, surfer vibe. He got his medical degree from the University of Arizona and is licensed in the state of California.

Dean: Now, he's in Costa Rica, where he Tiks his Toks from a beautiful, tree-top bungalow.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2?lang=en)**: And yes, this is where I live.]**

Ben: Meat. Trees. Surf-tanned pectorals. He's livin' the dream!

Dean: Someone's dream.

[youtube url="https://youtu.be/6rvelXwG\_Tk?si=j1icnhOFT7AuQP5q" /]

Ben: Carnivore dieters online vary by race, age, gender, but the biggest influencers tend to be [muscular](https://www.tiktok.com/%40liverking?lang=en), [middle-aged](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5apkKkeZQXRSDbqSalG8CQ) [white guys](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzoRyR_nlesKZuOlEjWRXQQ). And they often seem to be pointed at an audience of fellow men. Saladino is no exception.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Gyi0l-T84ik)**: If you eat testicle, you will be getting bioactive testosterone.]**

Ben: And the diet, by the way, does have connections to the men's rights online community. We're gonna get back to that. And we should say it's not all that.

Dean: Saladino stands out because of his credentials. He says his journey into the carnivorous world began by training in functional medicine. A practice that studies the "root causes of disease." He saw it as an alternative to the conventional medicine he learned in school.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7160368816034286891?lang=en)**: We have knee-jerk reactions. You got eczema; I know the drug for you. You got psoriasis; I know the drug. You got Hashimoto's thyroiditis or autoimmune thyroiditis; I got the drugs for you. But we never think, Wait a minute, why do you have eczema? Why do you have depression? Why does anyone have anxiety, right? And that is where, that's, that's where I think I went left when a lot of my colleagues went right.]**

Ben: The idea? Conventional medicine reacts. Functional medicine prevents. And not by prescribing drugs. And let's pause for just a second to say this makes sense to me. I agree! A ton of the healthcare industry today seems to be about telling people what to do, knowing they won't do it, and eventually just prescribing them drugs.

Dean: Saladino, however, is prescribing meat and other animal-based products. He doesn't shy from technical talk. He embraces it.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2?lang=en)**: Butter is full of good fatty acids for humans, like stearic acid...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7185231546868174123?lang=en)**: Heart, the organ gifted to warriors. Coenzyme Q10, riboflavin...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40carnivorenutrition/video/7278244134773771521?lang=en&q=saladino%20carnivore%20diet%20nutrients&t=1704233112200)**: ...B12, vitamin K2, choline, carnosine, carnitine, anserine, taurine...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.facebook.com/carnivoreMD/videos/ive-been-getting-tons-of-questions-at-heart-soil-you-can-email-me-with-s-at-drpa/3274804345950286/)**: ... alpha-linolenic acid, linoleic, excuse me, alpha-linolenic acid...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7158514811482049838?lang=en)**: ...bioavailable vitamin A, biotin, riboflavin, folate, list is long.]**

Ben: Saladino isn't the only TikTok doc in the carnivore club. There's [Dr. Shawn Baker](https://www.tiktok.com/%40shawnbakermd) and [Dr. Anthony](https://www.tiktok.com/%40anthonychaffeemd) [Chaffee](https://www.tiktok.com/%40plantfreemd), but Saladino is the most prominent Meat MD.

Dean: And it's his use of scientific language that I found most fascinating. Here's a guy who's undercutting the anti-meat scientific establishment with, he says, science.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7288877021390769450?lang=en)**: I believe Western medicine is lying to you — that you've been misled by fallacies parroted by your doctor...]**

Ben: What is the sciency philosophy that the carnivore diet is founded on? Well, there's a lot to take in. We're going to carve it into three main tenets.

Dean: Carnivore Credo Number One: Evolution.

Ben: Eat like a caveman!

**[**[**Saladino**](https://youtu.be/lHSY1l9odik?si=RKg4PCzT20woyw9u)**: Throughout human evolution, we have probably been scavengers first and then pack hunters, with animals as our primary food, using plant foods only in times of starvation...]**

Dean: The theory? Around the same time that humans started hunting with tools, our ancestors evolved... rapidly.

Ben: Instead of eating the bulky, low-quality plant diet of other apes, we began feasting on calorie-dense meat and marrow. Our guts shrank, and, most importantly, our brains exploded...in size.

Dean: Conclusion...

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ce6qIzgFxB7/)**: Animal foods are what your ancestors have always sought.]**

Dean: ... meat made humans smart, so eating meat makes you smart, too.

Ben: Carnivore Credo Number Two: Eat like a hunter-gatherer...

Dean: ...hold the gatherer!

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7189322528526208302?lang=en)**: If you visit hunter-gatherer tribes, who are our best representation of where we come from as humans, their preferences for foods are crystal clear. They are hunters first and foremost. Meat and organs are their most prized foods. They don't care about vegetables.]**

Ben: Before agriculture, we were hunter-gatherers. And some of us are still hunter-gatherers, often said to be living in secluded groups, comparatively apart from the globalized world.

Dean: A few years back, the Paleo diet's founder, evolutionary nutritionist Loren Cordain, said that [73 percent of living hunter-gatherer groups](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10702160/) get more than half their calories from meat.

Ben: These groups of individuals also have [lower rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, even acne](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/evolution-of-diet/). The people who are today living like our ancestors? They are healthy.

Dean: Conclusion: Meat keeps you healthy.

Dean: Carnivore Credo Number Three: Plants are poison.

Ben: Oh man, 8-year-old me would agree.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7095091561851096363?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20poison&t=1703016442201)**: You sometimes ask me, Which vegetables are OK to eat? My answer is no. Why would you eat plant leaves and stems and roots and seeds? They put defense chemicals in those parts of plants.]**

Dean: Saladino says that because plants cannot run away from predators, they evolved defenses that slowly poison anyone bold enough to eat them.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7095091561851096363?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20poison&t=1703016442201)**: Things like oxalates, lectins, saponins, digestive enzyme inhibitors like tannins. These are going to mess up your digestion and your hormones, generally make you feel horrible, and they're going to make you fart a lot, too.]**

Dean: He's even gone far enough to link [broccoli](https://www.paulsaladinomd.co/bullshit) with thyroid problems and [spinach smoothies](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7215689099640933674?lang=en&q=paul%20saladino%20spinach&t=1704916789753) with kidney failure.

[tiktok url="https://www.tiktok.com/@paulsaladinomd2/video/7215689099640933674?lang=en&q=paul%20saladino%20spinach&t=1704916789753" /]

Ben: Technically, the carnivore diet is no plants. But Saladino says fruit is OK in moderation. This newer version of his diet, an offshoot of the carnivore diet, is what he calls an "animal-based diet," and it allows for some fruit.

Dean: In any case, some people on MeatTok and MeatStagram seem to lump fruit in with veggies, anyway. They're all bad.

**[**[**@garybrecka.shorts**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40garybrecka.shorts/video/7299964553633271083?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20bad%20for%20you&t=1704917038614)**: A lot of vegetables are poison.]**

**[**[**@tonysayers**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40tonysayers/video/7164023056833219845?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20bad%20for%20you&t=1704917038614)**: Most vegetables are highly toxic.]**

**[Dr. Anthony Chaffee via** [**@thehardyarnspodcast**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40thehardyarnspodcast/video/7195529668999564546?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20poison&t=1703016442201)**: Brussels sprouts had 136 known carcinogens.]**

**[**[**@theclovisculture**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40theclovisculture/video/7138558985053113646?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20bad%20for%20you&t=1704917038614)**: Peppers and tomatoes are ruining your gut health.]**

**[**[**@the.peytonjohnson**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40the.peytonjohnson/video/7222640072452033834?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20bad%20for%20you&t=1703017413759)**: Broccoli, it has this compound that's, like, really anti-thyroid. I don't remember what it's called.]**

Dean: Meanwhile, meat? It's a heart-healthy meal with all the nutrients you need.

Ben: Carnivorous conclusion:

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7095091561851096363?lang=en&q=veggies%20are%20poison&t=1703016442201)**: No to vegetables.]**

Ben: So, just to reiterate, here: The three credos of the carnivore's diet are: Meat made us smart...

Dean: ...meat makes us healthy...

Ben: ...and veggies are bad for us.

Dean: Saladino sells these ideas using words like oxalates and evolution, hormones and heart disease. Sciency words.

Ben: So we called up some scientists.

**Dr. Alice Lichtenstein: I don't really believe that.**

**Dr. Alyssa Crittenden: You don't become famous on social media if you say we evolved to be omnivores.**

**Dr. Amanda Henry: I see it as bad science being used to justify selling people something.**

Dean: Oh yeah, did we forget to mention the money?

Ben: Big bucks and bad science(?), in a minute.

**[SPONSOR BREAK]**

Ben: So, how does social media fuel an anti-establishment diet?

Dean: First, we have to look at those three carnivore credos a little closer.

**Lichtenstein: I think in the long term, it's probably not a good idea.**

Dean: [Alice Lichtenstein](https://nutrition.tufts.edu/profile/faculty/alice-lichtenstein) talks like a scientist. And by that, we don't mean that she uses a lot of jargon. We mean that she weighs her words carefully.

**Lichtenstein: And rarely would I be so definitive about a specific statement.**

Dean: Dr. Lichtenstein is a professor of nutrition science and policy at Tufts.

Ben: She's also a senior scientist and directs the Cardiovascular Nutrition Lab at the USDA. We talked to her about Credo Number Three: Veggies bad, meat good.

Dean: The hallway to her office is lined with laboratories and minus-80-degree freezers containing...

**Dean: Not a bunch of meat, I assume?**

**Lichtenstein: No, no, in that freezer, it's a bunch of, a lot of biological samples from studies that we've conducted, and these samples are archived.**

Ben: Alice says rejecting plant foods cuts out several key nutrients, like Vitamin C. Shocker. Also...

**Lichtenstein: It's very low in fiber. It's not clear how the meat is prepared, whether there's a lot of sodium. There's certainly a large amount of saturated fat relative to unsaturated fat. And we tend to think of unsaturated fat as good and as good for health outcomes, whereas saturated fat is not.**

Dean: Meatfluencers reject Dr. Lichtenstein's statement, which she is basing on the more than [400 peer-reviewed papers](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Lichtenstein+AH&sort=date) she's co-authored, plus scores of other studies. By contrast, we couldn't find any peer-reviewed studies by Paul Saladino. In fact, no controlled studies have been published confirming the advertised benefits of the carnivore diet.

Ben: These are two very different examples of the idea of doing your own research.

**Lichtenstein: Well, I think you just have to go to what the evidence base is.**

Ben: Science is a process, and not all studies are created equal. That's why Alice says consensus — the evidence base — is more reliable than cherry-picked data. For instance...

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7150344151924477227?lang=en)**: Let me tell you guys why I think kale is b\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. Look, it's a plant leaf; it's full of defense chemicals. Which chemicals? Long word. Isothiocyanates.]**

Dean: Saladino has beef with kale. And Brussels. And broccoli. On his [website](https://paulsaladinomd.co/), which misspells two of those veggies, he writes that they are "b\*\*\*\*\*\*\*" and can pose a "danger" to our thyroids, causing weakness or weight gain. Then, to prove his point, he [links](https://www.paulsaladinomd.co/bullshit) to one paper.

Ben: We contacted the paper's lead author, a biochemist named Peter Felker. He called Saladino, and I quote, a "doofus." The [paper](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26946249/#full-view-affiliation-1) says you would need to eat two pounds of raw Brussels a day for several months to notice any issues. And I'm sure you would because that sounds like torture.

Dean: Plus, he added, Veggies are good for you.

Ben: Yeah, I can't believe we have to say that out loud. But yeah.

Dean: We looked at other papers floating around MeatTok, MeatStagram, and the like. One [study](https://www.paulsaladinomd.co/resource/plants) was called out for [misreading](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.831470/full) [data](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.896500/full). Another was a [case](https://www.facebook.com/carnivoreMD/posts/as-foodlies-said-yesterday-this-is-just-science-do-with-it-what-you-will-this-is/2038336546293612/) [study](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29203127/) of one person. Another had ties [to](https://www.tiktok.com/%40santacruzmedicinals/video/7266951467284647211?q=humans%20evolved%20eating%20meat&t=1699546904841) [the](https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.bu.edu/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/role-of-red-meat-in-the-diet-nutrition-and-health-benefits/7EE0FE146D674BB59D882BEA17461F1B) [meat](https://www.contextbookshop.com/user_uploads/files/booksamples/Nutrition-and-Climate-Change-Major-Issues.pdf) [industry](https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/28481).

Ben: But in the bite-sized world of TikTok, who's gonna know?

**Dr. Alyssa Crittenden: If you pull from videos, and you pull from the internet, you get a very different sort of interpretation than if you were to go into the academic literature.**

Ben: What about Carnivore Credo Number Two? Meat is healthy; just ask today's hunter-gatherers.

Dean: For this, we called [Alyssa Crittenden](https://www.unlv.edu/people/alyssa-crittenden) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She's part biologist and part anthropologist.

**Crittenden: I have spent the last 20 years working in East Africa with a community of hunters and gatherers named the Hadza.**

Ben: Dr. Crittenden works with the Hadza, a community of about 1,000 people in Tanzania. And by works with them, we mean she's lived with them for months at a time. She's also done research with them in collaboration. The Hadza are famous. They're often referred to as the "last true hunter-gatherers."

**Crittenden: There's this romantic fallacy that still exists that we have communities of human beings who are, who are living in these far remote places untouched by humanity and are still sort of living entirely off the grid. And that is not the case.**

Dean: [Western](https://www.facebook.com/DrAnthonyGustin/videos/few-in-the-mainstream-media-understand-why-meat-is-better-for-the-climate-than-a/4728926180550493/) [MeatTokers](https://www.tiktok.com/%40liverking/video/7068328989072313647?lang=en) talk a lot about the Hadza.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaM1kIKWQWE)**: So, I went to visit the Hadza last year in Tanzania.]**

Ben: Including Paul "Kale is B\*\*\*\*\*\*\*" Saladino.

**[Saladino: ...the Hadza don't give a s\*\*\* about vegetables. They don't really eat vegetables. While we were there, they never ate a leaf. They never ate a seed. The men couldn't be bothered with roots...]**

Dean: Saladino hunted when he visited the Hadza. He ate meat and...

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJUdn8Yu_5A&t=2s)**: Baboon brains. Would you do it?]**

Ben: This is giving *Indiana Jones: Temple of Doom*, which, as we all know, was a documentary.

Dean: A very respectful documentary, yes. Alyssa says that if you look at the research collected by the Hadza community members, you'll see that meat is hugely important. But...

**Crittenden: I would never ever say that they don't give a s\*\*\* about plants. I would never say that. So, I know that's just patently false.**

Dean: The Hadza eat [baobab](https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/4914678#page=332) fruit and seeds; they eat [tubers](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23148), which are kind of like fibrous potatoes.

Ben: One reason Saladino may have seen more hunting is because he was only there for two weeks. He was more likely treated as a social media documentarian or tourist by the Hadza.

**Crittenden: I've had to hide with my Land Rover behind trees and in ditches when tourists come, and we're doing actual data collection. And they say, OK, be quiet now because we have to do some performative hunting.**

Ben: Not for nothing, a foraging lifestyle is more physically demanding than a TikTok carnivore's. And far less reliable than going to Trader Joe's.

Dean: But Alyssa also takes issue with Saladino's claim that modern hunter-gatherers are representative of our ancestors. The carnivore idea that they are living fossils.

**Crittenden: To point to them now and do that is not only harmful to the community and their own sovereignty, but it's also increasingly naive and exoticizing to assume that these communities are not globalizing just like everybody else.**

Dean: Speaking of ancestors, what about Carnivore Credo Number One?

Ben: Meat gave us Galaxy Brain...

Dean: ...a.k.a. big brain...

Ben: ...a [theory](https://books.google.com/books/about/Adventures_with_the_Missing_Link.html?id=ECMFAAAAMAAJ) from the early and mid-1900s, after anthropologists discovered the first fossils of human ancestors.

**Dr. Amanda Henry: Most of the methods that we had at the time for recovering information about past diets was biased towards meat. We could see meat more easily.**

Dean: [Amanda Henry](https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/amanda-henry#tab-1) is a paleoanthropologist at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She studies prehistoric diet trends.

Ben: And I would have talked to her all damn day.

**Henry: One of the main ways I study diet in the past is by looking for microscopic remnants that get stuck in calculus — or the plaque — on teeth.**

**Ben: Wow. So, in a way, you're like, you're like...**

**Henry: A dentist to the dead. Yep.**

Ben: Dr. Henry says that the myth of "man the hunter" is a common one. That's because, in the early days of anthropology, they focused on animal bones, which had cut marks from tools dating back 3 million years.

Dean: But bones stick around better than plants. It wasn't until new technologies rolled around that scientists got a better picture of diet.

Ben: And does that better picture say they mostly ate meat?

**Henry: Absolutely not. Even Neanderthals didn't eat meat all the time. And especially not even early modern humans.**

Dean: Hominins — that is, *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals, *Homo erectus*, and other early humans — hominin diets varied by region, species, and time. They ate different meats and plants, and it's not yet clear if they ate one more than the other.

Ben: Even today, different people vibe with different foods. Some people are lactose tolerant. Some have biomes that thrive on seaweed.

**Henry: To badly paraphrase *The Princess Bride*: There is no one optimal diet. Anybody who tells you different is selling something.**

Ben: Amanda, my ears love you.

Dean: You want to talk hard science to *Endless Thread*? You do it in movie quotes.

Ben: For real. But meatposters out here say there is an optimal diet.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHSY1l9odik&t=64s)**: We have a pretty clear anthropologic record showing that we ate more meat and that may have been the spark that improved our nutrition and led to increases in the size of our brains.]**

Dean: About this meat-brain theory. Amanda says…

**Henry: Don't make any single thing your explanation for anything in human evolution. We're way more complicated than that.**

Ben: Originally, scientists thought our brains started ballooning [1.8 million years ago](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.316.5831.1558). After scavenging and hunting began. More recently, the data has been reanalyzed. And it is less certain.

Dean: Amanda says new evidence suggests the brain gain may have come much [slower](https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/biological-sciences-articles/brain-size-of-human-ancestors-evolved-gradually-over-3-million-years). Accelerating [later](https://humanorigins.si.edu/human-characteristics/brains), about 800,000 to 400,000 years ago. And what else was going on then?

Ben: [Fire](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/evidence-of--fire-artificial-intelligence-180980319/)!

**Henry: You've hit on a topic that is fiercely contentious, I would say, in the field.**

**Ben: Seems like it. Some very scorched-earth arguments?**

**Henry: Oh. Yes, indeed.**

**Ben: Sorry.**

**Henry: People with burning passions everywhere.**

Dean: Some scientists believe [cooking with fire](https://www.science.org/content/article/raw-food-not-enough-feed-big-brains) gave us the energy we needed for bigger brains. It killed parasites in meat and made plants much easier to digest. There are other theories, too. Like, funny enough, [carbs](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/08/150806133148.htm).

Ben: And MeatTok hates carbs!

This isn't to say meat isn't important to our evolution. The point is that science isn't sure that it was the only thing — or even the main thing.

Dean: So, to base a diet on an incomplete theory...

**Henry: It makes me angry because I see it as a marketing ploy.**

Ben: Is this a marketing ploy?

Dean: We reached out several times and several ways to Dr. Paul Saladino while reporting this story. We never heard back...

Ben: ...until, just as we were getting ready to publish this episode, Paul Salad-ino, he did get back to us.

**Saladino: Yeah, I'm excited to talk to you guys. I know you're a little skeptical based on the emails I've seen, so it'll be a fun, it'll be a fun conversation. Yeah.**

Dean: Dr. Saladino spoke to us from his home in Costa Rica. And, while he is a medical doctor, he told us he is now a full-time content creator.

**Saladino: I make educational content for people based on health and nutrition and illness and try to, try to put good things out in the world.**

Ben: Good things that he said have stood up to scrutiny on social media.

**Saladino: I think that if people put ideas into the ether, and they're unfounded, there will be many people who will disagree with them and will provide ample evidence of why those things are not necessarily good ideas.**

Ben: From our perspective, that is a pretty aspirational view of how social media contributes to fact-based discussions. But, hey, he's got a right to be optimistic. So what of the ideas that are out there? We started by asking Saladino about how much meat and dairy constitutes a healthy diet...

Dean: ...and we pointed out that his advice goes directly against the USDA, American Heart Association, World Health Organization, Harvard School of Public Health, and many others recommending limited meat consumption.

**Dean: What do you say to those recommendations? Do you trust these institutions? How do you view that?**

**Saladino: Do you understand, Dean, what those recommendations are based on as a consumer? Or do you look at those as bastions of, quote, "truth" and accept their recommendations?**

**Ben: I think ultimately you can find it out pretty easily. I don't know that we, as consumers, necessarily always go down that rabbit hole, but I think that stuff is in public view. But it sounds like your answer is "no."**

**Saladino: Well, don't put words in my mouth.**

Ben: Saladino said "it's not about trusting" institutions. It's about "science."

**Saladino: Why would we trust anyone? Why wouldn't we think for ourselves?**

**Ben: Because I'm not a doctor, and I'm not a nutritionist, and I'm, you know, I can do my own research for sure, but, like, at the end of the day —**

**Saladino: So, who do you trust? Who do you trust?**

**Ben: I mean, usually, I trust somebody who knows a lot more than I do about a given specialized area of anything.**

Dean: According to Saladino, such institutions — like, say, Harvard — may sound like places to trust, but...

**Saladino: These are, these are plant-based, plant-influenced institutions.**

**Ben: That's a phrase I've never heard before.**

**Saladino: These are plant-influenced institutions. Absolutely.**

Ben: Saladino argues that he's not biased. He makes free content. And...

**Saladino: Maybe YouTube is putting ads there, but I don't have sponsors. Yeah, maybe YouTube revenue, maybe $4,000 a month from YouTube ads.**

**Ben: OK. All right.**

**Saladino: Something pretty meager, yeah.**

Ben: To which we said OK, maybe you're not a YouTube gajillionaire, but for a lot of people $4,000 a month is a good chunk of money.

Dean: A lot of people, including public radio producers. Anyway, Saladino says the majority of his income comes from his business, Heart & Soil, a dietary supplement company based in Texas.

Ben: Heart & Soil sells pills composed of dried animal organs. Saladino founded it a few years ago. He says that, as co-owner, maybe 80% or 90% of his income comes from Heart & Soil. But...

**Saladino: I don't even talk about it that much. I talk about it very rarely on my social media at all.**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7194522467325529387?lang=en)**: ...Heart and Soil Supplements...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rvelXwG_Tk&t=84s)**: ...Heart and Soil Supplements...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7120651767976561962?lang=en)**: ...Heart and Soil Supplements...]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6nVKf5ZZnk&t=348s)**: ...Heart and Soil...]**

Dean: Sometimes, Saladino fails to mention that [Heart & Soil Supplements](https://heartandsoil.co/) is his company.

Ben: The first supplement on the site is called [Whole Package](https://shop.heartandsoil.co/products/whole-package). It is designed to "reinforce your manhood." The ingredients are, of course, "Grass-fed & finished testicle," also "liver, and whole blood extract." It costs just a measly $68 a month.

Dean: Pocket change.

Ben: Pocket change, baby.

Dean: Its products are not FDA-approved and "not intended to ... treat, cure or prevent any disease." But Saladino told us the company has a couple hundred thousand clients.

Ben: Whoa. Which, you know, carry the one...70 bucks a month times 100,000 people. That's not bad! And this raised questions for us. Particularly, what is the difference Saladino sees between "plant-influenced" health organizations and himself — as someone who is telling you not to eat plants and then asking you to pay 68 bucks a month for a dietary supplement?

**Dean: You're providing advice to people online. You run a business, though, that benefits from the advice that you give people. How do you see a difference?**

**Saladino: Yeah, I think this is also kind of an underhanded association. We live in a capitalist society. In order to do this work, I spend, I spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year making free content for humans.**

Dean: This continued for a while, so we asked again...

**Ben: You yourself brought up the idea of, like, being skeptical of these organizations because of their funding, right?**

**Saladino: So I think that it'll be really interesting to let the audience decide whether your assertions are reasonable or completely — or I should say, you know, partially or potentially, you know — connected with underhanded, you know, intentions.**

Dean: Just about every major meatfluencer is selling something related to the diet. Steakandbuttergal sells meal plans. Santacruzmedicinals sells supplements. Shawn Baker sells carnivore community subscriptions. [The Liver King](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/12/06/liver-king-steroids-apology-ancestral-diet/), who was exposed for using steroids, sells supplements.

Ben: And actually, the Liver King co-owns Heart & Soil with Saladino. But Dr. Saladino isn't just some random salesman. He's got credentials, which he mentions a lot.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rvelXwG_Tk)**: I'm a double-board certified medical doctor.]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LAyyNaqOM0&t=368s)**: I'm a traditionally trained physician.]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQWK7DWCSag)**: ...classically trained medical doctor. I'm an M.D.]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYIt1EKUlng&t=5s)**: I used to do jiu-jitsu when I was in medical school.]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o3SxbY_AIo)**: ...where I went to medical school.]**

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpNOzNT1HSY)**: We're both doctors, and we're both just trying to help people...]**

Ben: And it's true, he is a doctor. He told us he's never practiced in a hospital. But he's studied functional medicine, which focuses on the "root causes of disease." Functional medicine, however, is not recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties and has been criticized for its "[lack of evidence](https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/aafp-functional-medicine-lacks-supporting-evidence-includes-harmful-and-dangerous-treatments/)" and treatments considered "[harmful and dangerous](https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/aafp-functional-medicine-lacks-supporting-evidence-includes-harmful-and-dangerous-treatments/)."

Dean: He is also double-board certified. One certification is in psychiatry. In 2020, a couple years after he began promoting the carnivore diet, he earned his other certification from the [National Board of Physician Nutrition Specialists](https://nbpns.org/curriculum-guide-for-physician-nutrition-specialists/curriculum-guide-table-of-contents/).

Ben: But Saladino's beliefs contradict that organization, which maintains that a healthy diet is generally high in veggies and low in red meat. So why seek credentials from an organization opposed to your beliefs?

**Saladino: And the reason I have that board exam on my credentials is because, essentially because I went on a show in 2019, *The Doctors Online*. And there's a doctor on there going, *I'm certified and, as a, a physician nutrition specialist*. And it's like, Well, guess what? I am, too. You know, like, just because you have a certification doesn't mean that someone should trust you or that you have the ability to pontificate in a way that's any more valid than anyone else. So, the certifications and a medical degree — these are essentially meaningless.**

Ben: So the credentials and certifications Saladino often references in his own videos are meaningless, according to him. Do your own research, he might say, and figure out what works for you.

Dean: Heart & Soil Supplements features several testimonials of people who figured it out on its site, including one from Saladino.

Ben: He's not just the founder. He's also a client!

Dean: It also features a testimonial from Dr. Joseph Mercola, a well-known [anti-vaxxer](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/24/technology/joseph-mercola-coronavirus-misinformation-online.html) with multiple warnings from the [FDA](https://www.fda.gov/inspections-compliance-enforcement-and-criminal-investigations/warning-letters/mercolacom-llc-607133-02182021) [for](https://web.archive.org/web/20140422230654/https%3A//www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/2011/ucm250701.htm) [false](https://web.archive.org/web/20140829062422/https%3A//www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/2005/ucm076069.htm) [advertising](https://web.archive.org/web/20160829201656/http%3A//www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/EnforcementActivitiesbyFDA/CyberLetters/ucm059189.gov). Saladino told us he was unaware of that.

Ben: This is where we should point something out about how meatposting is connected by the algorithms that drive our interneting to more problematic ideas and influencers. To say nothing of the "I'm just asking questions, man" approach Joe Rogan takes to ideas with very little basis in fact, Jordan Peterson — the infamous men's rights author and online persona, who has said that white privilege is a "Marxist lie" — was on the carnivore diet. And promoted it.

**[**[**Jordan Peterson**](https://youtu.be/yXDRr9wz57g)**: I eat a lot of meat and a lot of high-fat meat, and so I'm never hungry.]**

Ben: One could argue that in the Venn diagram of fake, hateful, democracy-threatening groups and ideas online, you really can start at "healthy diet" — *search* — and end up at "women are less than," "white privilege is not a thing," and "vaccines don't work."

Dean: Saladino has cast [doubt](https://podtail.com/en/podcast/fundamental-health-with-paul-saladino-md-1/controversial-thoughts-what-i-think-about-the-covi/) on COVID vaccines but men's rights are not mentioned in his content, as far as we could tell. He learned about the carnivore diet from the anti-feminist Jordan Peterson on Joe Rogan. So we asked him what he made of the indirect link between those two online communities: meat and men's rights.

**Dean: So what I was curious about is, as a major influence in this sector, what do you make of that? Does the association bother you?**

**Saladino: Thank you, Dean. This one's gonna go viral, man. Thank you. This is an amazing piece of content, dude. Thank you. This is gonna go viral. That's amazing.**

Ben: A problem we kept having with Paul: When we asked him for definitive answers to our questions, he' would react with his own questions or accuse us of trying to paint him into a corner. Even if he did eventually have a response, it wasn't a direct response to the question that had been asked.

Dean: Our interview with Dr. Saladino went for more than two hours. And it did get in the weeds. We asked him about some of the scientific papers he's cited to support his claims, like the [claim](https://www.paulsaladinomd.co/bullshit) that eating regular amounts of broccoli, kale, and Brussels can harm your thyroid.

Ben: A claim that is not actually in the [paper](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26946249/) he cites. The paper's author, you will remember, called Saladino a "doofus."

**Dean: Can you explain why the study that you use as evidence does not say the same thing that you are saying?**

**Saladino: That's an inaccurate statement, Dean...**

Ben: We asked him about telling his large following that spinach smoothies can cause [kidney failure](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7215689099640933674?lang=en&q=paul%20saladino%20spinach&t=1704916789753). A claim apparently [based](https://www.facebook.com/carnivoreMD/posts/as-foodlies-said-yesterday-this-is-just-science-do-with-it-what-you-will-this-is/2038336546293612/) on a [case study](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29203127/) of one person.

**Saladino: Does that make it invalid?**

Dean: We asked him about a paper he [cited](https://www.paulsaladinomd.co/resource/plants) with [questionable](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.896500/full) [data](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnut.2022.831470/full), and another he [publicized](https://twitter.com/paulsaladinomd/status/1717256740733886560) that was [funded](https://blog.whiteoakpastures.com/hubfs/WOP-LCA-Quantis-2019.pdf) by General Mills and a livestock company. It got repetitive.

**Saladino: I think that none of this is cut and dry. But, as I said repeatedly, what I'm doing is drawing attention to these issues that aren't really out there in the health zeitgeist.**

Ben: Dr. Saladino was just as unwilling to accept that he'd mischaracterized the Hadza hunter-gatherers — despite criticism from Dr. Alyssa Crittenden, who has spent 20 years in the field. Same thing about his theory that eating meat is what helped humans evolve — and that other theories, like fire, are without merit.

**Dean: Do you see how this could be misleading to suggest to the public that "eating nose to tail" is what increased our human brains?**

**Saladino: You guys are really good at, like, putting words in people's mouths. I don't know if the people you interview push back as much as I do. I hope they do. It's such a leading —**

**Dean: I'm not putting words in your — I'm quoting...**

Dean: Quote, "Eating nose to tail is what made us human!" Eating animals, quote, "[allowed our brains to grow](https://books.google.com/books?id=oo3oDwAAQBAJ&)."

This left us with one final searing question: Who cares?

Ben: Seriously, who cares? To each their own, right? As we heard, there is no one optimal diet, so maybe an animal-based diet is the right one for some people — people like Jerry Brazie, who was in some ways pretty hard to argue with because he doesn't seem that unreasonable.

**Jerry: No doctor ever said to me, Hey, fatso, you're dying. You're killing yourself. You better get serious. No one ever said that to me. No one ever scared that into me. They all said, Here's your medication.**

Ben: And ultimately, in some ways, it's the Jerrys I am worried about. People who discovered the carnivore diet on Rogan and then maybe make major life changes, including using their discovery to influence their own set of potential future Bacon-Butter-Steak-and-Egg eaters.

**Ben: Do you worry that what you are putting out into the world is something that works for you but also does not work for a majority of people?**

**Jerry: I'm betting my life that what I'm doing is correct. So, I don't take it lightly, right? I'm not being paid by anybody. If you watch my videos and you see what's happened over the last two years for me, this is all my experience, to your point, a hundred percent.**

Dean: In a recent [survey](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8684475/) of 2,000 carnivore dieters, most said that, like Jerry, they feel better. Maybe it's because of the meat. Maybe it's because they stopped eating processed food. Maybe it's because these are people recruited from communities like Facebook's [World Carnivore Tribe](https://www.facebook.com/groups/worldcarnivoretribe/). I don't know. Take the results with a grain of salt.

**Jerry: I add incredible amounts of salt.**

Dean: Admittedly, after watching dozens and dozens of carnivore TikToks and YouTube videos, they had me thinking maybe there's something to this. Because first-hand accounts are compelling, even if they aren't scientific data.

Ben: Whether those folks remain feeling healthy in the future, who knows? The diet hasn't been around long. Still, that's their reality for now. And it's their choice.

Dean: That's the thing that stands out in all of this: It's their choice because, as with most diets, it's about them. It's about the self. The me. It doesn't concern anyone else.

Except that how we all eat does affect all of us.

**[**[**ABC 10**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MymO5T7dT4c)**: We start tonight tracking extreme heat...]**

**[**[**KPHO**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0YCv5NX3u0)**: ...unprecedented heat wave...]**

**[**[**WION**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCDVmiVYulo)**: ...relentless wildfires...]**

**[**[**CNN**](https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/09/12/exp-libya-flooding-derna-newton-pkg-cnni-091212aseg1-world.cnn)**: ...major flooding...]**

**[**[**FOX Weather**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdtiFDEzAyI)**: ...powerful storm surge...]**

**[**[**KCRA 3**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hEOD6TUl44)**: ...an above-average hurricane season this year.]**

Ben: Last year was the [hottest year on record](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/09/climate/a-new-era-in-global-heat.html#:~:text=It's%20confirmed%3A%202023%20was%20the,By%20far.). Partly because of El Niño. But mostly because of our rapidly destabilizing climate. In 2023, there were hundreds of [climate-related](https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2023-review-climate-disasters-claimed-12000-lives-globally-2023#:~:text=In%20around%20240%20such%20climate,the%20devastating%20death%20toll%20in) [disasters](https://www.emdat.be/) globally.

**[**[**FOX 26**](https://youtu.be/M-0-VQzKmdA)**: The death toll is now over 100 in Maui...]**

**[**[**Al Jazeera English**](https://youtu.be/zK1m7fUlT6k)**: ...more than 200 people have been confirmed dead after Cyclone Mocha...]**

**[**[**WION**](https://youtu.be/HqRlGpBX7_M)**: ...death toll from Cyclone Freddy in Malawi has crossed 400...]**

**[**[**FOX 5**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNXTYImC9sQ)**: ...first more than 5,000 people are believed dead due to flooding in Libya...]**

**[**[**Al Jazeera English**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-RRTphkxlo)**: ...famine is at Somalia's door. Nearly 8 million people are going hungry.]**

Dean: The people most affected by the crisis are not the people who can afford to buy meat for every meal at the grocery store.

Ben: Remember the Hadza? The hunter-gatherers that MeatTokers love to talk about? The plants that the Hadza do eat are fewer and fewer because their environment is changing [because](https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/36422996/Msc_Naram_Dissertation-libre.pdf?1422428618=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DImpacts_of_Climate_Change_and_Other_Fact.pdf&Expires=1704897684&Signature=FoaPnoRS-Az2livY16NBADhYzOXx46AAS4DzI~GzCpZ~JmOJkmkyqtksvvWgYC~f2hK9uqSn~iVrO7kDqw3KRjHBIIjCepzbf53rZB-0O2wt8wJnEswD6UyERF8bKWGb2jpdmKBOXEnNzrsXYYLDECqJElYjzKO7VSSroaKluuMY~mX25mlCwCH42KRGUTecPVuZgMcklg7W2oBo10eeFmadw5jfyJdMCR7RDmsOSYH~1LYZ8alCOpEx3wxsAihMy1pQHsbH2bkC5YMbjbHwJn1yabJd8cnLdov721KucQT7A9wZzTvjwuwjmehe0mE~V0WVFvhUcAEO6eoHG8cr7A__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA) [of](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12110-020-09364-7) [climate](https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.360.6390.700?casa_token=c-McqIsxHg0AAAAA:sivA7cffdOny_nN0--KJiK_QxernKck-mjTYPFhrb_wTuPh1S7PcLbrOUOwZ_CB7YZlQQ3VWncBeR1ph) [change](https://www.smujo.id/td/article/view/12705).

Dean: We are not trying to say meatfluencers are responsible. That would be a ridiculous speculation, and we wouldn't want to do that. But global meat consumption is responsible for between 11% and 20% of greenhouse gas emissions. Gasses like carbon dioxide and methane. That's according [to](https://foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/GLEAMV3_Public/) (11.1%) [six](https://www.fao.org/3/i3437e/i3437e.pdf) (14.5%) [separate](https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaq0216) (15%) [peer](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full.pdf)-[reviewed](https://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e00.htm) (15.6%, 17.8%) [studies](https://www.fao.org/3/cb7033en/cb7033en.pdf) (19.6%). Scientists say there is no way to get to [net](https://www.leap.ox.ac.uk/meat-dairy-and-net-zero-emission-future) [zero](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-11-26/eat-less-meat-is-message-for-rich-world-in-food-s-first-net-zero-plan) without changing our eating habits.

Ben: Meat [requires](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-46590-1) more water, fertilizer, and, in particular, land than plants. If the whole world ate as much meat as an American — let alone a carnivore — we would literally need a [second](https://ourworldindata.org/agricultural-land-by-global-diets) [planet](https://revealnews.org/blog/the-world-wouldve-already-run-out-of-water-if-everyone-ate-like-americans/).

Dean: I used to eat meat, and I don't anymore.

Ben: And I was raised vegetarian. Now, I'm an omnivore. And that's fine. As the scientists we interviewed told us, there's no one optimal diet. But they also said that Americans, in general, should eat [less](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-much-meat-should-we-eat-180980616/) [meat](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/climate/what-if-we-all-ate-a-bit-less-meat.html) for the climate. Promoting an animal-based diet is, at best, irresponsible.

Dean: Paul Saladino has a different take.

**[**[**Saladino**](https://www.tiktok.com/%40paulsaladinomd2/video/7152924026887998766?lang=en)**: Look at how green this grass is and how healthy this field is as the cows are doing what they're doing. And we know that the methane that they burp is just part of the carbon cycle. It has no significant impact on climate change, guys.]**

Dean: We talked with Saladino for a while about the climate crises. And while he acknowledged that it is real, he also said things like this:

**Saladino: The plants are not without, quote unquote, "greenhouse-gas blood on their hands," either.**

[keyfigures]

### **More on Meat and Climate**

In our [interview](https://soundcloud.com/endlessthread-wbur/meat?si=b6b4a52aca704e6c8a2bdb0efb28cb01&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing#t=1%3A38%3A53) with Dr. Paul Saladino, he argued that "cows are a very small contributor in the United States to greenhouse gas emissions." We left this misleading statement out of the story to avoid making an already long episode longer. Still, meatfluencers repeat this argument often enough that we felt the need to address it here.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, livestock accounts for about [4.5%](https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/inventory-us-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-sinks-1990-2021) of the country's emissions, excluding imported meat and dairy. That is lower than the industry's global share (11% to 20%) because U.S. emissions in other sectors, such as transportation, are so high.

Using raw numbers, the U.S. livestock industry emitted 283.5 million metric tons of carbon-dioxide equivalent in 2021, more than the entire [Philippines](https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2023) population — combining every sector from transportation to energy to agriculture — produces in a year. More than Costa Rica, Saladino's adoptive country, has produced in 15 years.

Regarding cows, specifically, [United Nations](https://foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/GLEAMV3_Public/) data show per capita cattle emissions are twice as high in North America than in Africa and seven times higher compared to East Asia.

The findings highlight the climate costs of meat as well as a fundamental issue of diet and climate justice: inequality between nations. While experts say high-income countries with historically high emissions should consume less meat and dairy, many people in low- and middle-income countries will need greater access to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. But to argue that livestock emissions are not an issue in the United States is inaccurate.[/keyfigures]

Dean: Still, the real meatfluencers aren't Paul Saladino, or Jerry, or Joe Rogan. They are the corporations that make up the meat and dairy industry. An industry that gets [$38 billion a year](https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/news/removing-meat-subsidy-our-cognitive-dissonance-around-animal-agriculture) in federal subsidies. An industry that has spent hundreds of millions [lobbying against climate action](https://insideclimatenews.org/news/02042021/meat-dairy-lobby-climate-action) in the U.S.

Ben: The industry has a dedicated "[Digital Command Center](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/may/03/beef-industry-public-relations-messaging-machine)" to track meat mentions in the media and an online Master of Beef Advocacy program for training influencers. Like Big Oil and Big Sugar, it downplays science and backs greenwashing P.R. campaigns. In fact, the guy who invented public relations in the 1920s is the same guy who was paid to convince us that bacon and eggs make the [all-American breakfast](https://www.bonappetit.com/entertaining-style/pop-culture/article/watch-the-inventor-of-pr-explain-how-bacon-and-eggs-became-an-all-american-breakfast). (Sausage, too, by the way.)

Dean: Every scientist we interviewed brought up the climate crisis. And every scientist we interviewed saw social media meatfluencers not as people concerned about health, but as people stuck in a larger system, a cycle, creating divisions at a time when we desperately need the opposite.

Again, paleoanthropologist Amanda Henry:

**Henry: Food is identity. And you end up [with] people talking about food as a way of not only expressing themselves but of drawing ingroups and outgroups — and using it as a way to prove they're better than somebody else or judge other people as part of that group definition.**

Ben: And this idea really stuck with us. Because it's true, right? Food is so elemental for us. It's life. And most of us are trying to, as we like to say on social media, live our best lives.

Dean: And in our endless search for answers about how to live, we often look back through the mists of history. A species-level, get-back-to-our-roots nostalgia becomes our guide through the modern food industry. Through conflicting reports about what's good for you and what's not. Meatfluencers are capitalizing, literally, on that nostalgia.

Ben: But Dean, we are technically influencers, too. We're podcasters, man. I mean, we're no Joe Rogan. But, you know.

Dean: I don't even think I could even influence my cat, but OK.

Ben: So I want to push an idea based on little-to-no scientific evidence. Cool?

Dean: Oh, god.

Ben: I want to suggest the possibility that as we look back through the mists of history, when we sort through ideas of what made human brains and capabilities really take off — like the discovery and control of fire for cooking or hunting big game — we might be looking at the cave paintings with a group of hunters surrounding a woolly mammoth or whatever and focusing on the wrong thing: On the big pile of meat instead of the act of doing something together.

**Ben: Could it be a social change that we can't see that is actually the thing that blew our brains up?**

**Henry: There are a lot of people who agree with you on that point. They also want to evoke a social change, but it will forever be out of our grasp, let's say, to find evidence for it, unfortunately.**

Dean: Dr. Amanda Henry, as a dentist to the dead, says we might never know if a social change like cooperation is the thing that set us apart.

Ben: But what we do know is that good science is something we do together. It's an act of consensus. Not a single idea or silver bullet for your gullet. Good to remember this new year in case, while scrolling the internet, you find someone who wants to tell you about the miracle diet they've discovered and maybe sell you a subscription to pills full of desiccated testicles.

Dean: And add to cart.

*Endless Thread* is a production of WBUR in Boston. This episode was written and co-hosted by me, Dean Russell...

Ben: ...and written and written and rewritten. Poor, Dean Russell. Also me, Ben Brock Johnson. Mix and sound design by Emily Jankowski.

Dean: The rest of our team is Samata Joshi, Grace Tatter, Matt Reed, Paul Vaitkus, and our resident vegan, Amory Sivertson.

Ben: ...who was mysteriously missing from this episode.

Dean: So sorry, Amory.

Ben: By the way, our full interview with Dr. Paul Saladino, if you want to hear it, we are putting a link to the [full, unedited version](https://soundcloud.com/endlessthread-wbur/meat?si=b6b4a52aca704e6c8a2bdb0efb28cb01&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing) in our show notes. That's where you can find it and listen if you dare. *Endless Thread* is a show about the blurred lines between online communities and beef, butter, bacon, and eggs.

Dean: Mmm. The four food groups.

Ben: Delicious. Yes.

Dean: If you have an unsolved mystery or an untold history that you want us to tell, hit us up. Endless Thread at WBUR dot org.