

## HEALTH

# Going against the grain

Outside the mainstream is a group that touts vegetables and fruits over our daily bread

By Ross Werland  
Tribune staff reporter

**T**hough most nutrition experts would agree that there is something fundamentally very wrong with the way we eat, a small segment of that group has singled out as a villain what the mainstream food culture touts as one of the good guys.

## Grain.

It's so deeply a part of our lives that even our religions rely on it for their timeless messages and ceremonial munchies.

The man turning over the tables in this temple is Loren Cordain, a professor of health and exercise science at Colorado State University in Ft. Collins. He has studied diet via fossils and determined that people have never evolved to eat bread, cereal, pasta, cake, pie, cream puffs or whatever else many of us might call the greatest gastronomical inventions of mankind, no matter how good they smell.

A large portion of his message, he points out, has caught

on with main-line nutrition. His list: reducing saturated fats; reducing trans fats; increasing omega-3 fats; increasing monounsaturated fats found in nuts, olive oil and avocados; reducing salt; reducing refined sugars; reducing refined grains; reducing processed foods; increasing fresh fruits, vegetables, lean meats and seafood.

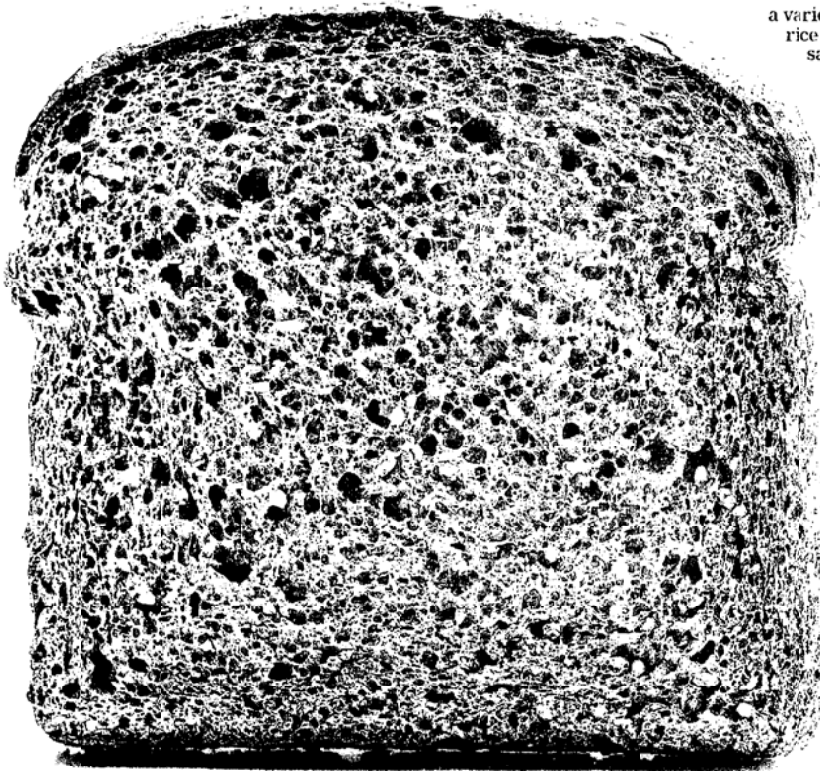
These "are pretty much mainstream, and you would be hard pressed to find any nutritionist anywhere who wouldn't agree with these points," he said. "What most nutritionists object to is when I take it a step further and suggest that all grains, refined or whole, should be severely cut or eliminated and replaced with fresh fruits and vegetables.

"From a nutrient-density perspective, we have made direct comparisons showing that whole grains cannot hold a candle to fruits and vegetables when it comes to all vitamins and minerals on an energy-comparison basis."

On her own, certified nutrition specialist Bonnie Minsky reached the same conclusions when she suspected that her own children's allergies and the behavioral problems of teenage students she counseled were rooted in the foods they ate.

"A lot of these things are not really allergies, they're intolerances," she said. In other words, people aren't meant to tolerate the foods, so their bodies react poorly whether through obesity or diabetes or even poor behavior.

In her Northbrook practice, Nutritional Con-



Loren Cordain, a leading proponent of a pre-agriculture diet, says vegetables are nutritional powerhouses compared with grains.

cepts, wheat in particular, has drawn her attention.

"If you're going to do a whole grain, people are programmed to think it's wheat," she said. "Every client who comes in to see me, when I tell that I don't recommend whole wheat, they're in shock."

Citing wheat gluten as one of the most common food allergens in this country, she said, "Isn't it fascinating that there is no fruit or vegetable out there that is considered a common allergen other than soy but that's only because they put it in everything."

If someone is determined to consume grains,

a variety such as brown, or whole, rice is superior to wheat, she said.

Tucson nutritionist Melissa Diane Smith, author of "Going Against the Grain," also lines up against grain and wheat in particular. "There's no doubt that bones were stronger and healthier when our ancestors ate meat and vegetables than when they ate a lot of gluten grains," she wrote.

Among the beefs with refined grains is their radical action within the body. They are broken down quickly into blood sugar, causing it to spike much more rapidly than it would with whole grain or especially vegetables. Vegetables deliver their carbohydrate load much more slowly, in tempo with the body. With refined grain, the resulting rise, then plunge in blood sugar can lead to hunger pangs or over time, insulin resistance and diabetes, according to Smith.

Further, Smith said in agreement with Cordain, fruits and vegetables, as whole, unrefined foods, deliver much greater nutrition than even whole grains.

Nevertheless, from the federal government through the ranks of dietitians and even the Harvard School of Public Health, whole grain remains a strong recommendation, though refined grain has fallen from favor, even if it's still reportedly 95 percent of the grain consumed worldwide.

Jennifer K. Nelson, a registered dietitian at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., responded this way: "Each person is a unique human being and is subjected to different genetics and risk factors. To answer this question [of excluding grain] is not an easy thing to do. What we do know is that people who are healthiest are people who eat a wide variety of foods. Those who have less variety are less healthy."

So her point is that excluding grains, particularly whole varieties, serves to limit the diet and possibly deny the body nutrients.

Nevertheless, the pro-vegetable group insists that even whole grains don't compare in nutrient content. Yet studies showing benefit in whole grain are released fairly regularly.

The question is, whole grain versus what? From their own observations, the anti-grain group insists their side will win any head-to-head faceoff.

As for the rest of us, they say, just try substituting vegetables and fruits and watch the "swelling" go down.