Diet Review - The Blood Type Diet

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The following is a review of the Blood Type Diet popularized by the book Eat Right 4 Your Type by Peter D'Adamo, ND. with Catherine Whitney (1996) http://www.dadamo.com/

Overview

The premise behind the Blood Type Diet is that an individual's blood type dictates which foods can be properly digested and utilized by their cells. According to naturopath Peter D'Adamo's findings, each of the four distinct blood types (O, A, B, AB) possess antigens that require the consumption of very specific foods (and the elimination of others) in order to achieve optimal health. He surmises that since all foods contain lectins[1], proteins that can bind to blood cells, when an individual ingests a food containing a lectin that is incompatible with their blood type, it can cause the blood to agluttinate (clump up) leading to poor digestion and other health problems. On the contrary, if an individual eats only foods containing lectins that are compatible with their blood type, then their digestion and body processes will be optimized. Since there are four blood types, each with its own genetic ancestry, there are four specific diets and lifestyle choices that Dr. D'Adamo recommends:

> **Type O** – The Hunter – this type needs meat, but should avoid wheat, gluten and corn. Blood Type O does best with high-intensity exercises.
> **Type A** – The Cultivator – this blood type requires a vegetarian diet avoiding most dairy and wheat. Type A's require calming exercises like yoga or tai chi.
> **Type B** – The Nomad – B's can eat a fairly wide diet, but must avoid corn, lentils, peanuts and sesame seeds. Their ideal exercise is a mix of aerobic and relaxing activities.
> **Type AB** – The Enigma – this blood type present in just 2-5% of the population requires restricting many foods (essentially both the Type A & B restrictions) including meat, corn and wheat. They respond best to relaxing exercises.

Unlike traditional diets which emphasize weight loss, the blood type diet does not focus on calorie intake; however, according to D'Adamo most people who follow the diet do lose weight. In addition, since blood type supposedly also correlates with temperament, a suggested style of regular exercise is also recommended for each blood type with emphasis again on overall well-being as the outcome.

Nutritional Analysis

Each of the blood type diets is very specific and rather restrictive, making them difficult for the average person to follow every day while still getting enough variety to meet all of their

nutritional needs. In other words, it takes careful planning and a lot of effort to get the appropriate balance of nutrients on each of the four diets. For example, the Type A diet is vegetarian and low in dairy, which makes it difficult to obtain adequate iron, calcium and protein. Whereas, the Type O diet is high in meat and eliminates gluten, making it difficult to limit saturated fat and get adequate B-vitamins. D'Adamo addresses these limitations through suggested supplementation and in emphasizing particular foods, but for the average busy person, balancing all of those details on a daily basis would be very challenging.

Although difficult to follow, each of the blood type diets are based solely on unprocessed, whole foods which are widely-accepted as the best sources of nutrients. In addition, if the idea that blood type impacts an individual's ability to properly digest foods is correct, then by eating the more specific foods recommended, digestion and absorption is maximized therefore making the diets a more efficient means of getting nutrients even if they are somewhat restrictive. So, if followed correctly with nutritional supplements used as recommended, the diet does have the potential to be nutritionally complete. Furthermore, the diet's emphasis on proper digestion and overall well-being is much more positive than the typical weight loss approach making it worthwhile to try for the minimum two weeks as D'Adamo suggests.

Authenticity of Origin & Scientific Validity

The Blood Type Diet was a truly novel approach to nutrition when it was first released. Peter D'Adamo, ND wrote Eat Right 4 Your Blood Type in 1996. However, he had been studying the notion of blood type in relation to disease ever since 1982 when he completed his medical training to become a naturopath at Bastyr College. At that time, he decided to delve deeper into the topic which his father, James D'Adamo, a naturopath since 1957, had been observing for many years in his own practice. James D'Adamo had noted that Type A patients did not do well on high protein diets, while Type O patients flourished using such an approach. It was clear to both men that there could be a biological reason why some of the most popular diets didn't work for all people. Peter's research at the time uncovered studies noting a correlation between blood type and disease. Specifically he found that blood Type O predisposed people to peptic ulcer (a condition of too much stomach acid), while individuals with Type A were more likely to have stomach cancer and pernicious anemia, conditions associated with too little stomach acid. Peter used the associations between blood type and disease as the scientific basis for explaining the observations his father, and later himself, found in their own clinical practice.

While D'Adamo notes that he has undertaken lab experiments to determine which foods cause agglutination in the different blood types, aside from anecdotal evidence from patients, there is no mention of such investigations ever being conducted in controlled human studies. So, it is difficult to say with any accuracy if lectins do cause any real damage in the body.

Without having the results of any gold standard (double-blinded, randomized) studies on the outcomes of the diets themselves, it would be difficult to conclude with any certainty that the scientific basis behind the diets is accurate. Yet, at this point, there would be no strong reason to conduct such studies, as Dr. D'Adamo's followers largely support the diet for its results and therefore don't require further scientific proof of its efficacy.

Usefulness in Application

The Blood Type Diet is an inexpensive and non-invasive approach that, for the most part, is easy to undertake in comparison to other more drastic medical measures such as surgery or pharmaceuticals. Therefore, it is appropriate and useful for an individual who is suffering from poor digestion and ill health as a means of trying to heal. Yet, it is not an easy diet to follow, which makes it an unlikely choice for the average person who is just looking to lose weight. In addition, it appears to be a difficult diet to stick with on a long-term basis since for each of the blood types common staples of the American diet (i.e. wheat, tomatoes, potatoes, etc.) are eliminated. Since these foods are actually very nutritious, it is difficult to justify fully eradicating them. Likewise, since Dr. D'Adamo reports that only approximately 5% of ingested lectins actually make their way into the blood stream where they can damage blood cells, completely removing healthy foods just because of their lectins may not be warranted. It is implied however, that since the diet does focus on individuality, that the level to which it is followed is largely dictated by an individual's own outcomes.

In a lecture given by Peter D'Adamo[2], he noted that following the Blood Type Diet has become increasingly difficult given the genetic modification of foods. He pointed out that lectins are being spliced into different foods, making it essential that those following the Blood Type Diet only purchase organic foods that are GMO-free. This adds an additional level of complication and cost to the diet that could make it prohibitive for the average person. Finally, for a family in which members could have differing blood types, managing the different restrictions would be extremely challenging to juggle on a daily basis.

Discernable Outcomes

Dr. D'Adamo has many loyal followers around the world who swear by the Blood Type Diet. They site improved health, energy, and weight loss as their reasons for following the diet. There are also case studies reported in the book of individuals with diabetes gaining better blood sugar control and those with impaired immune function experiencing significant improvements. In the packed-room lecture previously mentioned, a participant shared that she had experienced lower cholesterol after following the diet. Numerous other members of the crowd shared that they too had success with digestive disorders by following the diet.

D'Adamo noted that just 20% of those that follow the diet are unhappy with the outcome. Remarkably that statistic holds across all four blood type diets even though some of those diets (depending on personal preference) are actually more restrictive than others. Although these figures appear to come from surveys taken by D'Adamo himself which can certainly be biased, if 80% of those who try the diet are happy with the results, than it would be fairly safe to conclude that the diet is at least worth trying for the recommended two weeks. Furthermore, it makes sense that health would be improved on these diets since they emphasize only whole, unprocessed foods that are rich in nutrients.

Conclusion

Dr. D'Adamo's assumption that the correct nutritional diet should be based on bio-individuality is a logical conclusion given the predominance of conflicting dietary evidence that implies the "one size fits all diet" simply doesn't work for entire populations. Although I was unable to find any scientific reviews related to diet and blood type, as Peter D'Adamo had concluded, there are numerous studies correlating blood types to disease (A PubMed search revealed 246 such studies). As a result, one can deduce that blood type, and perhaps other markers of an individuals' genetic code (as D'Adamo has explored in a more reason book, *The GenoType Diet*), may impact how food is digested and utilized. However, given the Blood Types Diet's sole reliance on logic and observation, there are many who refer to the Blood Type diet as quackery[3-5]. Without having the scientific studies behind it, it is difficult for most dietitians and medical professionals to suggest that people eliminate otherwise healthy foods from their diets.

Regardless, I personally feel that the logic is enough to warrant giving the Blood Type Diet a try. In my own experience, over the years I have come to follow a semi-vegetarian, gluten-free diet. I avoid tomatoes because they cause my arthritis to flair and I participate in daily yoga because I find it far more enjoyable than aerobic exercise. Much to my fascination, as someone with Type A blood, I had gravitated naturally toward much of what D'Adamo recommends. In addition, I have spoken to several individuals with Type O blood who state they couldn't possibly be a vegetarian because they feel they need meat – which is exactly what Dr. D'Adamo predicts of most people with Type O. You could certainly chalk this up to coincidence, but I feel it provides enough validity to be offered up as a potential solution for anyone who is troubled with poor digestion or low energy levels. I don't feel that following the diet 100% is possible for most people, but by even attempting its core suggestions of sticking to whole foods and getting regular physical activity, someone who is not already following such practices is likely to achieve health improvement.

1. lec·tin - any of a group of proteins especially of plants that are not antibodies and do not originate in an immune system but bind specifically to carbohydrate-containing

receptors on cell surfaces (as of red blood cells). Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary, © 2007 Merriam-Webster, Inc.

2. Lecture, Peter D'Adamo, ND and Ginger Nash, ND, 11/18/10, Knights of Columbus Hall, Hamden, CT. Sponsored by Thyme And Season Natural Food Market (recording may be made available in future at http://www.thymeandseasonnaturalmarket.com)

3. "Lectins in Edible Foods & ABO Reactions" http://www.owenfoundation.com/Health_Science/Lectins_in_Foods.html

4. The Eat Right for Your Blood Type Diet (WebMD.com Review) http://www.webmd.com/diet/eat-right-for-your-type

5. Book Review:Eat Right 4 Your Type (1996) http://www.quackwatch.com/04ConsumerEducation/NegativeBR/d'adamo.html

Further information can be obtained at http://www.dadamo.com/science.htm