

6.3

FROM FORAGING TO FOOD SHOPPING

0:12–0:31 What kind of foods do you like and what kind of foods do you end up eating? Are there nutritional and biological factors that you think about when you make your decisions? And how do hunter/gatherers choose what to eat? It just so happens that a lot of the decisions we make about food extend far back into human pre-history.

0:31–1:22 Studies of current foraging societies clearly show that hunter/gatherers make choices about what to eat based on some very fundamental economic principles. When it comes to gathering food, humans like to maximize their gains and minimize their costs. Foods that are calorie-rich, come in large package sizes, and are easy to prepare are always top choices. For hunter/gatherers in most environ-

ments, that means that they're going to pursue the largest prey animals available to them. And they're going to choose their plant foods very carefully, going preferentially for tubers and large fruits.

If you're going to go through the effort to track, pursue, and raise your spear at an animal, better a mammoth than a mouse. And when it comes to plant foods, better to have materials that are very easy to prepare and consume than costly materials that require a lot of processing.

I don't see this as much different than how we make our own food choices. When we're tired and hungry, we often opt to go through the fast food drive-thru as opposed to making a meal. Or stop by the grocery store and pick up some calorie-rich food that requires very little preparation. Or we simply pick up the value pack.

But there are some resources hunter/gatherers will consistently go to great lengths to procure. And those are items that are high in fat and sugar. In most environments, fatty foods are in short supply. So items like bone marrow and oil-rich nuts and seeds are always favorite items. These foods require additional processing, but hunter/gatherers will go to those extra lengths — cracking open bones for marrow or shelling and husking seeds and nuts to get at those oil-rich foods — simply because they taste good.

1:22–2:25

FAT AND SUGAR

The same applies to sweet items like honey. When hunter/gatherers encounter bees and know that they can acquire sweet honey, they'll often drop everything they're doing to pursue that sweet resource.

2:25–3:25

FOOD CHOICES CAN LEAD TO EXTINCTIONS

Many of our current dietary health problems can be traced back to these same decisions our hunter/gatherer ancestors made thousands and thousands of years ago. They're simply exaggerated by the realities of modern food availability. When it comes to fat and sugars, economic decisions tend to fly out the window. I suspect that if we could transport a group of Paleolithic hunter/gatherers into a modern day grocery store, they'd head straight for the bacon and all of the candy and sugar. The leafy vegetables would be left to languish on the shelves.

Through time, these hunter/gatherer food choices have fueled human population growth and the migration into new landscapes. When hunter/gatherers enter new lands, they often prefer to pursue those top prey choice items first. We see a wake of extinction in the aftermath of human settling new landscapes. Whether it be mammoths in North America or moas in New Zealand, those top food choices are often the first to become extinct.

As an imbalance between supply and demand becomes apparent, we see hunter/gatherers including more and more items in their diet, often including small nuts and seeds and small prey animals that they previously would have overlooked. And this same trend continues today as our appetite for meat and calorie-rich grains pushes the development of new lands and decimates the habitats of other large animals. Think about your own food choices again. In what ways do you think it resembles or perhaps is different from the choices made by our foraging ancestors? What factors do you consider when grabbing a meal?

3:25–4:10

WHAT FACTORS DO YOU CONSIDER?