

News Article : JAD030

## A DIVINE DIET

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In recent years Christian publishers have produced a considerable number of books on how Christians should eat. Among them are *The Maker's Diet* by Jordan Rubin, *The Divine Diet* by Carole Lewis, and *What Would Jesus Eat?* by Don Colbert.

One Christian author who has turned his passion for healthy food into a full-blown "ministry" is George Malkmus, founder of Hallelujah Acres, a for-profit business located in Shelby, North Carolina. Malkmus first published *God's Way to Ultimate Health* and *Why Christians Get Sick* in 1995. In *Why Christians Get Sick* Malkmus, a former pastor, laments the times that members of his congregation became ill. In 1976, at age 42, Malkmus himself was diagnosed with colon cancer. Rather than using standard medical treatment, Malkmus was inspired by the late evangelist Lestor Roloff to change to a diet of raw fruits and vegetables. In a 1998 article titled "Preaching Good Health" Malkmus told the *Shelby Star* that within one year his "baseball size tumor was gone."

Malkmus attributed the disappearance of his tumor partly to his new diet. The Winter-Spring 2003 edition of the Hallelujah Acres newsletter, *Back to the Garden*, states, "He was healed of not only colon cancer, but all physical problems, following his change to a natural diet and lifestyle in 1976."

It should be noted that Malkmus's diagnosis of cancer did not come from a cancer specialist. The *Shelby Star* article states that Malkmus "consulted nutritionists and chiropractors." The article quotes Malkmus as saying that he "never had any biopsies" and that he didn't know if the tumor was malignant.

**In the Beginning.** In 1986 Malkmus purchased a farm in Edison, Tennessee, where he launched Hallelujah Acres. In 1992 Hallelujah Acres opened a restaurant and health food store in Rogersville, Tennessee. Malkmus closed the restaurant in 1994 and began writing and speaking on health and diet issues. In 1997 Malkmus moved Hallelujah Acres to Shelby, North Carolina, where it is presently located. According to advertisements in the *Shelby Shopper*, Hallelujah Acres has more than two million clients.

Hallelujah Acres offers more than free advice on what to eat. It sells environmentally friendly cleaning products, juicing machines, books, videos, personal care products, and a host of health supplements. According to Hallelujah Acres, its message and products are promoted by over 5,700 "health ministers" worldwide. These ambassadors are required to be on the "Hallelujah Diet" for at least three months and to complete a four-day training session through Hallelujah Acres.

In January 2005 Hallelujah Acres opened the first of six planned Health Resource Centers. According to the *Shelby Star* article, it hopes to continue adding resource centers throughout the country at a rate of 10 per year. These centers will house a workout area, a reference library, a small kitchen for cooking demonstrations, and nutritional products.

**The Hallelujah Diet.** Followers of the Hallelujah Diet must make raw fruits and vegetables 85 percent of their diet. The remaining 15 percent can be cooked; however, only vegetables, pasta, and bread are acceptable choices.

Taboo to the Hallelujah Diet are canned vegetables, meat of any kind, dairy products, salt, sugar, white flour, and caffeine. Malkmus claims, "Eighteen years of research has revealed meat as it is produced today to be the single most dangerous food that we put into our body." In *The Hallelujah Health Tip* (#357),

a weekly electronic newsletter, he claims that animal products such as meat and dairy cause 90 percent of all sickness, including colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and adult-onset diabetes.

The Hallelujah Diet also includes three daily servings of a nutritional supplement powder made of organically grown barley and alfalfa. Though no longer used in the official Hallelujah Diet, the American Image Marketing product Barleygreen was described by Malkmus in *God's Way to Ultimate Health* as "the single, most important food I put into my body, and I always consume at least three tablespoons daily."

BarleyMax, a similar product created by Hallelujah Acres in 2002, replaced Barleygreen as Malkmus's supplement of choice. It is the one component of the Hallelujah Diet that cannot be grown in your garden. Neither BarleyMax nor Barleygreen were a part of the diet that allegedly cured Malkmus's cancer.

**Eat Your Veggies?** Some dietitians express concern with the Hallelujah Diet. Ellen Coleman, a registered dietitian, author of the book *Nutrition Quackery*, and a consultant to the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team, told the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, "Although a well-balanced vegetarian diet can be healthful, an extreme vegetarian diet such as the Hallelujah Diet may result in malnutrition, especially in children and adolescents."

A common criticism of the Hallelujah Diet is that it lacks vitamin B-12, which helps make DNA and produce blood cells. Malkmus now agrees. He recommends taking B-12 as a supplement to the Hallelujah Diet, and it is available to purchase through Hallelujah Acres.

There are some physicians who support a vegetarian diet. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine cites studies on its Web site showing that a vegan diet can reduce the risk of cancer, asthma, heart disease, and a host of other infirmities. The committee also believes that a growing child's nutritional needs can be "met within a vegetarian diet." A study done by Judy Driskell at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, however, found that in families eating a low fat diet, two-thirds of the preschoolers lacked the recommended levels of vitamin E.

On the other hand, eating foods that are low in fat, such as raw fruits and vegetables, does have its advantages, says the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA states on its Web site that it has "authorized several health claims on food labels relating low-fat diets high in some plant-derived foods with a possibly reduced risk of cancer."

**God's Word on Food.** Malkmus believes that Genesis 1:29 is a God-given prescription for the diet of humankind. In *God's Way to Ultimate Health* Malkmus writes, "The only nourishment God ever intended to enter these body temples of ours is raw fruits and vegetables. Period! That's it!!!"

God sanctioned meat eating in Genesis 9:3 to make humans weak as a punishment for their sins, says Malkmus in his 1999 video titled *How to Eliminate Sickness*. He believes that God purposely gave meat to humans to shorten their lives. Humans had "messed up" and God was going to wipe them out; but Noah found favor with God, so God "changed His mind" but decided not to let humans live so long. According to Malkmus, meat was the tool that God used to carry out this task.

In *Why Christians Get Sick* Malkmus writes, "Sickness and disease and physical problems are not normal! They are the penalty one pays for violating God's natural laws!" Malkmus thus believes that sickness and disease were not a result of spiritual disobedience in the garden of Eden. He believes that sickness came into the world after the flood when God gave man meat to eat. He does not explain why or how death was a part of the world before the flood.

In *God's Way to Ultimate Health* he writes, "One of the greatest tragedies in history is the change in diet man made from the original raw vegetarian/frutitarian diet God gave to mankind in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1:29 to one of meat and cooked and artificial foods." He proclaims, "Yes, heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and a host of other diseases can be eliminated if Christians will return to the Bible and observe the natural laws God gave man thousands of years ago!"

Malkmus also teaches that the average age of people before the flood was 912 years. How Malkmus calculated the average age of people prior to the flood is not clear, but he uses this as evidence to support his claim that people will live longer and healthier lives on the Hallelujah Diet.

**If It Works, It Must Be True.** Malkmus states in *God's Way to Ultimate Health* that when people remove animal fat from their diets, "they reduce their chances of *ever* having a heart attack or stroke by over 96 percent" (emphasis in original). His claims about how to avoid cancer are equally as confident: "If a person doesn't smoke or eat animal products or consume sugar, their chances of ever developing cancer are practically nil." To support his claims, Malkmus shares numerous testimonies of those who have allegedly been cured of cancer and a host of other diseases and illnesses.

In the introduction to *God's Way to Ultimate Health*, Malkmus addresses his critics: "If you find something in the text of this book a little hard to swallow, then start paying closer attention to the testimonials of people who have actually put these teachings to practice. These are real people with real testimonials. Again, the bottom line is results."

Hallelujah Acres displays personal testimonies in their books, newsletters, on their Web site, and most everywhere the Hallelujah Diet is promoted. Malkmus uses this pragmatic justification to deflect criticism of the Hallelujah Diet and many of his biblical interpretations.

Stephen Barrett, a physician and vice president of the National Council Against Health Fraud, notes on his Web site ([www.quackwatch.com](http://www.quackwatch.com)), "It is well established that low-fat eating lowers blood cholesterol levels and that high intakes of fruits and vegetables are associated with lower incidence of cardiovascular disease and certain cancers...For these reasons, the risk of these conditions is lower for users of Hallelujah Diet than it is for the average American diet. However, the difference for most people is probably not great."

**The Superior Diet.** Malkmus claims that his diet is superior to all others because it is God's way to eat. Those who do not follow this diet, he says, are conforming to the world and are breaking God's principles for health. In *God's Way to Ultimate Health* he writes, "As a result the Christian community lives in constant violation of almost every fundamental principal of life God established when it comes to the body/temple God gave us and how we should live here on earth. We violate God's principles by what we feed our bodies and minds, and then when they break down, we violate God's principles in how to get well. Yes, sadly the Christian community has conformed to the world to which God said '*be not conformed*' (emphasis in original)."

One particular way of the world that is to be avoided, Malkmus says, is medical drugs. In *Why Christians Get Sick* he says, "People cannot be drugged (poisoned) into health!" He claims that "all drugs are toxic" and are "poisoning" to the body.

On July 12, 2001, Malkmus suffered a stroke. He says that it was caused by a hectic schedule and stress in his life. In the process of regaining his health after the stroke, Malkmus deviated from his teaching and chose to use medication. In *The Hallelujah Health Tip* (#194) he wrote, "I am currently working closely with a medical doctor, taking two low-dosage blood pressure medications, and have seen my blood pressure drop to normal levels."

—Randall Birtell