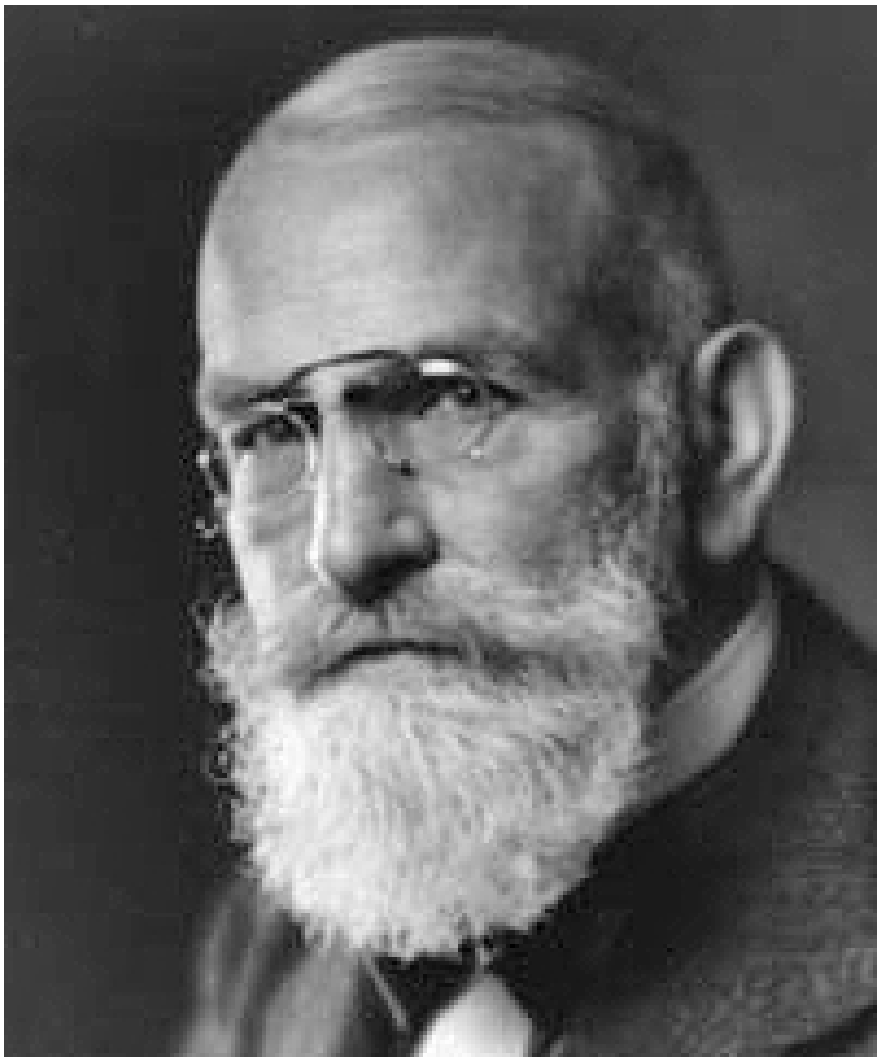


Maximilian Bircher-Benner, 1867-1939

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http://www.bircher-benner.com/index.php?id=24&l=en

Doctor in Medicine Maximilian Bircher-Benner (1867-1939)

The ethically and scientifically dedicated physician and researcher discovered the substantial benefits of a balanced diet of raw vegetables and fruit and regulative therapy. In 1905 he published his first and much noticed dietetics doctrine.

At that time he proved, both clinically and with the support of the second law of thermodynamics, the entropy law. It is not the caloric energy of food but rather the quantity of energy contained by food which is crucial to keep in good health and to recover.

He also explained that the energy of raw vegetal living cells is similar to sunlight, and called these vegetal cells light accumulators. Later he divided them in four categories, according to their biologic affinity to photosynthesis. These four categories became the basis of his dietetics.

In the course of the 20th century, it became possible to measure light accumulation and prove that solar light photons are accumulated by living cells -as happens with a laser. This luminous effect activates enzyme systems much more than caloric energy (by a factor of 1030). In his global therapy scheme, Dr Bircher-Benner submitted exactly to Nature's conditions and succeeded in obtaining therapeutic results which had never achieved up to then with incurable diseases. In 1937 he declined the appointment of Professor Ordinarius in Berlin's Hess Hospital (for political reasons).

The Bircher-Benner Clinic has welcomed patients like Tsar Nicolas II, Sir Stafford Cripps (former UK Chancellor of the Exchequer), Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Tunisia President Habib Bourguiba, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Geza Anda, Yehudi Menuhin, Helena Rubinstein and many other well-known figures. Among Dr Bircher-Benner's friends were Dr and pedagogue Maria Montessori, Dr Auguste Forel, and Sigmund Freud (whom he viewed critically after his very different interpretation of the Oedipus complex, in his book “Der Menschenseele Not” (The pain of the soul), psychiatrist C.G. Jung and the Swiss poet Carl Spitteler. In his capacity of doctor researcher engaged in ethics, from a human and scientific point of view, Dr M. Bircher-Benner discovered the considerable effect of the raw vegetable s vital diet. In 1905 he published his first dietetic theory, which was well received.

This article appeared in the Vegetarian Friends website and was written by Gracia Fay Ellwood.



Arau, Switzerland was the birthplace of Maximilian Bircher-Benner. He studied medicine in Vienna, Berlin, and Zürich, took his degree in Zürich in 1891, and set up his practice there.

The idea that whole raw foods are hard to digest has long been widespread in Western culture; such vegetables and even fruits as were eaten were usually very thoroughly cooked. Young Dr. Bircher-Benner, however, was open to new ideas of a more natural lifestyle that were circulating.

An experience that helped convince him of the healing powers of raw foods was his own illness in 1897 with a case of jaundice that robbed him of appetite. Sitting at his bedside, his wife cut up an apple and fed him a small slice. During the next two or three days he managed to consume another two applies, and his appetite began to return. A month later, a colleague told Bircher-Benner about one of his own patients who was unable to digest any food at all. He tried giving her a dish made from a recipe of the ancient Pythagoreans, a puree of raw fruits mixed with honey and goat's milk. This she not only liked, but was able to digest. After a time he added some vegetable to the puree, and in a few weeks she recovered fully.

Another influence on Bircher-Benner was an encounter with a shepherd during a hike with his wife in the Alps. He was impressed both by the shepherd's active lifestyle and the simple main dish, composed of coarse whole grain, milk, apple, and a little honey that the man served them. This was the forbear of muesli, which, with the addition of seeds and nuts, was to become Bircher-Benner's mainstay.

He experimented with giving his patients raw fruits and vegetables during the next months, and found that, overall, they was *more* easily digested than when cooked. He opened several clinics,

and some years later he set up a sanatorium whose menu featured muesli for breakfast or even two meals a day. Meat was eliminated (or almost eliminated, depending on one's source) and more than half the total food served was raw. Daily exercise and plenty of sleep were also prescribed. Patients improved or returned to health, and the sanatorium became very popular.

Bircher-Benner did years of reading and research to find out why whole raw plant foods supported health so much better than the traditional cooked cuisine centered in meat. He became convinced that the basic reason is that there is solar energy in whole fresh plants, whereas subjecting them to refining, cooking, smoking, and fermenting destroys this energy. Colin Spencer in *The Heretic's Feast* (p. 302) claims that Bircher-Benner would not have opposed flesh-eating if a whole, freshly-killed corpse were consumed; however, the Kaiser Permanente website essay on him says he believed humans to be natural vegetarians.

Despite the acclaim given his clinics and sanatorium (and the lasting popularity of muesli), not everyone was charmed. His radical theories were denounced as the work of a "blockheaded anarchist" who valued the evidence he himself discovered over tradition and scholarly consensus. Food historian Albert Wirz suggests that an element in this protest was the feeling that the traditional meat and potatoes were a man's breakfast, and that Bircher-Benner's new ideas amounted to a feminization of the venerable meal. The notion that "real men eat meat" is hardly new.

The idea that apples--an ingredient in muesli from the outset--are a lifesaver resonates in my family. When my spouse was a small child, he was hospitalized with a frightening, obscure disorder that left him unable to keep any food down. However, it was discovered that he could retain fresh apple, which kept him alive until his health returned. He still regards the apple as a daily essential.

Bircher-Benner would not have been surprised.

--Gracia Fay Ellwood

The Zurich Development Centre



http://www.zurichdevelopmentcenter.com/aboutzurichdevelopmentcenter/locationhistory/

The Zurich Development Center is located at the site of the original Bircher-Benner Clinic, founded in 1903.

Dr. Maximilian Bircher-Benner was a visionary pioneer in holistic, natural healing - the bringing together of body, soul and spirit. He believed that diet, exercise, work and spiritual peace were all key to a healthy life and mind. He opened his clinic to help patients rethink their diets and lifestyles and to bring them in harmony with the "forces of nature" - air, water, sun and the earth. The world-renown Swiss health food muesli was created by Dr. Bircher-Benner, very probably on our campus.

The campus of the Zurich Development Center is made up of the original Bircher-Benner clinic, its three chalets, and Dr. Bircher-Benner's private residence. Called "hotel architecture in the mountains," it was designed to bring to life the idea of a natural environment. The renovation of the site has left intact these historically protected buildings, and added a modern, flexible, new space. The original chalets and structures have been carefully preserved, updated, and complemented with new structures conceived to facilitate the expansion of what's possible. It's a wonderful combination built on the simple innovation of the past and the complexity of tomorrow.