“My FRUSTRATION w/ the Beyond Meat Debate” - Dr Garth Davis Transcript

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Beyond Meat and the health debate

It's all new trans fats, no hormones. Makers of Beyond Meat say that they that the product is healthier than >> Hey, well, Beyond Meat will likely price beyond the company's initial expectations.

>> Yeah, that's >> Impressive. >> It was billed as one of the most successful IPOs at [music] the time. >> Beyond Meat, the best performing IPO so far this year, up 163% on day one.

>> We've never eaten soy leg hemoglobin before, and scientists just don't know enough about it yet. >> Is it safe? >> In health news, a number of new meatless alternatives to traditional burgers have made headlines in recent months, but some consumers have raised questions about what these products are made from and how nutritious they really are.

>> If you're going to say that [music] there's less risk of disease, then let's see the clinical research. >> Dr. Garth Davis, uh he when he's on a rant, this guy's epic. Let's hear what he has to say. >> So, I just went to this uh restaurant uh burger place that I go to from time to time occasionally.

You just want a burger, and uh they made Beyond Meat burgers, and I went in this time and there's like, "Sorry, we don't carry Beyond Meat anymore. We do mushroom burgers." Fine, thank you for giving a plant-based option.

But, of course, I had to ask, "Well, why did you get rid of the Beyond burger?" And so, the guy was like, "Because it's not healthy." And I said, "Hm." You're selling regular burgers, like regular burgers. Yeah, but those are real meat.

Okay, but why is that healthier?" And he said, "Well, they're not processed." I'm like, "Actually, they are processed, um but I get what you're saying, but it's a burger." And um I said, "Do you know about the Swap Meat Trial?" Of course he hasn't. Um the Swap Meat Trial, they took um I believe it was 30 people, but they uh put them on eight weeks of two servings a day of either regular meat burgers or plant-based alternative, which was Beyond Meat. And they looked at several different cardiac factors. Now look, in 2 weeks you're not going to see a lot of changes either way, but they actually found that there was a a big difference in a chemical called TMAO, especially if you'd started on the meat and then went to the plant-based burger. Um TMAO um is a it's basically a byproduct of a breakdown of certain things inside meat, but it has been highly associated with heart disease. Um there was also a rise in the LDL.

This was a crossover trial, so it was the same people. For 8 weeks they ate the regular burger, 8 weeks of Beyond Burger. Either they started with Beyond or they started with the meat. Uh during eating meat they had substantially higher cholesterol levels. Um and they also, believe it or not, lost weight when they were doing the plant-based burger. Now, the burgers, there's 280 calories in a regular burger and there's I believe 230 calories in a Beyond Burger. Beyond Burger has a little bit of fiber, not a lot, but 3 g.

What makes a burger healthy?

Basically, the claim that a burger is healthier than a Beyond Burger is absolutely unfounded. I mean, completely unfounded. It's ridiculous. Now, do I think a Beyond Burger is necessarily healthy? No, I mean, there's a lot of salt in Beyond Burgers. Um there's not as much fiber. Um like if you're trying to get the same amount of calories in just black beans, it'd be a cup and a half of black beans and there'd be a lot less salt and there'd be a lot less fat. It'd be a lot more fiber. It'd be a lot more filling. Obviously, whole foods are always going to be healthier. But once in a while you want a maybe more healthy, than a regular burger, or probably more healthy than a regular burger. And uh yeah. So, I gave them a friendly earful to my local burger place, but I don't think they bought it.

>> People don't eat burgers to be healthy. People eat burgers for delicious indulgence fattiness taste texture

memories of childhood or experiences where you've eaten that food and it transcends you to a time and a memory.

That's what food does. That's what burgers do, right? They They give an ownness of indulgence. And I think that's a very important marker to make here, right? Like nothing about a burger is healthy. Let's not quote that. And even I mean, your black bean burger alternative, potentially, yes. But if it's laden with vegan mayo and other heavy saturated fats like avocado and on a burger, that can also not be the healthiest type of burger as well, right?

But I think the biggest thing here, it kind of just it it almost gets me off onto like what Jeffrey was talking about before. Like has the plant-based movement lost its way and I'm like, "No, Jeffrey. This is kind of where the plant-based movement is going, right?" What we're seeing here is we're building indulgent-style foods like burgers and trying to invite people in to give them a comparative value of you can still get what you like, what you, you know, your beefy-style texture without all of the saturated fat. Without all that extra caloric intake.

And by the way, the sodium is comparable when we take a look at what the studies are saying, right? Because oftentimes when people are eating beef, they're adding more salt to their home-cooked burgers, right?

So, burgers have never been about health. >> But here's the thing, and this is something Rich Roll said in a recent podcast episode with Simon Hill, and it's really taking off. This video is doing really, really well. He acknowledged that these plant-based burgers are healthier than their animal-based counterparts. But he said one of the reasons the vegan movement suffered a few years ago is cuz these companies were making out like they were miles ahead of the pack. They were so much healthier. And actually, you know, these beyond I'm not talking about, you know, the I still say the Engine 2 Diet burgers with like one ingredient. I'm talking about, you know, Beyond Burger, Impossible Burger. Yeah, okay, they might be a little bit healthier, but in the grand scheme of things, they're still very, very processed. I think part of the problem here is a messaging problem from the companies. And people just felt uh like it was kind of disingenuous. They felt like they were being lied to.

>> When you look at Beyond Meat or Impossible Foods or Oatly, like the stock prices of these companies are in the tank. And grocery stores that used to have gigantic sections devoted to plant-based milks or meat and dairy alternatives have shrunk. The appetite for these products has been reduced. And it does have a lot to do with the way that the health benefits or health implications of these products were communicated publicly. I think that when you look at them, you can make the argument that they are healthier in the wash in comparison to their animal versions of them.

Processed food, trust, and plant-based messaging

The communication was presenting them as health foods, when in fact, most of them are pretty highly processed foods. And I think people felt gaslit a little bit, like they're being fed a lie that was pretty transparent. And that led to a breach of trust. And I think that contributed to people breaking up with whatever short-term affair they had eating a more plant-predominant diet.

>> That is very interesting cuz yeah, I do remember there was a time where everybody was eating these vegan burgers and absolutely loving life. And then the whole ultra-processed argument came in. So, like you said, maybe it was more just about the disparity between how much healthier they healthy are healthier they actually are versus trying to market it, like Shabnam said, it's just like an enjoyable thing to eat once in a while. Like I think >> [sighs and gasps] >> Yeah, it's frustrating to me because like I want to go to a barbecue and have a Beyond Meat burger, but even amongst like, you know, people I know that eat meat, they'll be like, "Ooh, that's very unhealthy." And I'm like, "You're eating a burger!" Do you know what I mean? We're all here to eat burgers, or they're having sausages on the barbecue, or, you know, any other amount of processed things, but for some reason the plant-based burger is just seen as like, you know, really, really bad. >> True, but I think that opens up a conversation of like, how do we define healthy? What are What are the metrics and standards of that? Are we looking at saturated fat? Are we looking at TMAO?

Are we looking at um LDL cholesterol after the consumption of a beef-based burger versus a plant-based burger? Like, these are all evidence and factors that we now have in our studies that can showcase that, technically speaking, eating a plant-based burger can be healthier than eating a meat-based counterpart, but it's not

considered a health food. So, we we can't conflate the two. Just because it has healthier in its in its comparative value doesn't make it a health food.

Um and and that's very important to note. >> Yeah, but that's why I find it weird when people are like, "Oh, yeah, but it's unhealthy." whilst they're simultaneously eating a burger made of animals. Like, we aren't talking about health foods. Anyway, I'm just like, "Ugh." >> That was um this comment on and I know um Sari, you're going to be talking about the comments on the Dr. Garth Davis video, which are fascinating, but on the Rich Roll video that I mentioned, um which was titled The Lies That Killed the Vegan Movement, one of the comments was, "The problem was that the movement became plant-based rather than vegan.

Health trends come and go, but veganism is an ethical commitment to reducing animal exploitation and suffering wherever practical and possible. For many of us, it's also a spiritual practice, living in compassion, non-violence, ahimsa, and respect for the interconnectedness of all life.

Trends fade, compassion doesn't. >> True, but that's an identity that a majority of people in this world don't share. And so when you live on the fringes of that bell curve, of the 1 to 2%, um it's ideal. We'd love everybody to be there, but not everybody falls there.

Most people fall in the middle of the bell curve. And so we need to be communicating in ways that bring them into our particular lifestyle patterns. And to be honest, talking about animal welfare is not a way that turns people to eating less meat sometimes. That's what we're just finding in our research. So it's it's how do we start enticing people to eat foods to showcase that they are comparable in taste parity and satiety. Right? You're not sacrificing something by You're not giving up your burger. You still get to eat that. And it's a transitional food.

It's a transitional way of thinking, and I feel like that that's that's where the movement is going. How do we tap into not the vegans, but the flexitarians? And so I can see how the vegans who have fought for this movement for eons feel a bit slighted. >> There is one comment here from a guy Well, I actually don't know if it is a guy, from a person, um who says, "Even the lack of heme iron should be a plus for the Beyond Burgers." But then goes on to say, "Yet the coconut oil, the canola oil, the potassium chloride, the methylcellulose are off-putting. For the record, I do not eat flesh and do not miss it, but if I did, the list of highly processed ingredients would probably make me postpone the change to a vegan diet indefinitely." >> And again, I think this is what we were talking about earlier, like the scientific verbage that language doesn't fit the anecdotal story.

But if I start like giving a nursery rhyme of like what methylcellulose is comparative to its everyday usage people will listen. And so I I I I hear people loud and clear, but it's frustrating.

Swap Meat trial results and cholesterol

>> Hey, the other thing on this you know this processed argument where people are saying like you know the vegan burgers are more processed. The meat industry call their factories meat processing plants. So even if a meat burger has one ingredient, I mean most have more, right? Let's be honest, most meat consumed is a class one carcinogen which causes cancer by the World Health Organization. But even if you're going to take um many many forms of animal products, they are reared in meat they're killed in meat processing plants. So they are processed. Certainly way more than just putting a few ingredient vegan ingredients together.

>> Exactly. And it has to be in some way preserved, right? Which is also a form of processing. I mean farmers or slaughterhouse people will literally call it processing an animal. But nobody wants to think about that because they like their foods and they like the way things have been, you know? And we have another comment here which is kind of casting aspersions on the conversation about plant-based meat versus animal meat which says, "I wonder how much you get paid to promote this. I would love to see a study comparing the fake meat with a true carnivore or ketovore diet." >> And I'll even go back to when I sort of got the idea. I was opening the New York Times three different times and there's this full page ad like slamming all the new plant-based meats, saying these things are dog food, these things are crap, these things I can't believe people are eating them. Um maybe they're good for the environment, but they're full of uh coconut oil for the saturated fat, they're high in sodium, and they're ultra-processed. So your cholesterol's going up, your blood pressure's going up, and your weight's going up. And I

thought, that's my superpower. I I do that kind of study.

That wouldn't really be that hard. I could give people a couple servings a day of plant meat and a couple servings a day of red meat. In fact, I bet we could deliver that. I'm not This is 8 weeks each. It's a crossover, so everybody did both things. So, I think we enrolled 40 and 36 finished, so we have good retention. And LDL cholesterol went down, not up.

And that was pretty easy to predict, cuz yes, coconut uh fat is saturated, but there was less saturated fat in the plant-based alternative. We said, you know, you're on your own for the rest. We're not buying you the rest of the food. But, we do want to say that if it's the burger and you're having a white bun, and we don't want you to have a white bun, but if you have a white bun in one phase, you need to have it in both phases.

And if you put on uh uh iceberg lettuce on one, you got to put iceberg lettuce on both. But, if you put the whole grain organic foofy bun on one, you got to put it on both. And if you have the farmers market lettuce and tomato on one burger, you got to have it on both. LDL cholesterol went down, not up.

Blood pressure didn't change. So, let's just do the sodium really quickly. So, yes, the um Beyond Meat burgers have more sodium than ground beef. But, guess what? When people get ground beef, they salt it.

And so, by the time you looked at it at the end, the sodium intake was identical in the two groups. And the blood pressure didn't change. We also looked at TMAO, trimethylamine oxide, which is uh if you're on Twitter, you'll see it's a little controversial. Some people think it's a very cool emerging new risk factor that Stan Hazen from the Cleveland Clinic identified about a decade ago. That was our primary outcome, and it went down in the um Beyond Meat eaters. So, anyway, basically, that was swap meat. The things that they got trashed for in the newspaper of getting worse didn't. They even lost weight. Not much weight, but they lost pretty much on average they lost a pound or two. Clinically, a pound or two is not very relevant, but it was fascinating. Almost everyone lost a pound or two. And so it's if it's very consistent, it can still be statistically significant even though it's not clinically relevant. But I kind of liked it because the story was, "Oh, because of Kevin Hall's study, they're going to gain weight.

Because of the saturated fat, their cholesterol go up. Because of the sodium, their blood pressure will go up." None of those things happened. And TMAO went down. So, it was a win for the plant-based meat. If the question is instead of what instead of red meat. >> Hey all say guys, there's another um really cool clip that I saw from Dr. Matthew Nagra that I think is really relevant here. So, he was talking about a meta-analysis from 2025 that looked at the difference in plant-based meat and animal meat.

>> And just earlier this year, there was a meta-analysis on plant-based meats and heart health, and they looked at seven randomized controlled trials at the time. Again, like I said, I think there's been even a couple others uh since uh since they wrote up this meta-analysis. And they found that there was the plant-based meats reduced total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and body weight. And there were no significant differences in glucose, triglycerides, or blood pressure. And again, that blood pressure finding is interesting given the the sodium content. >> What I got away from this from Dr. Nagra is this doesn't mean that every plant-based burger is a health food or healthy food. Some are actually really genuinely high in sodium. But ultra-processed? Well, it really isn't the own that people think it is. There's plenty of animal products that are also ultra-processed. The thing to remember here is the category really isn't the enemy.

Industry backlash and the future of plant-based meat

The nutrition profile is what really matters. >> So, if I had to come up with a summary myself on this topic, it's that Beyond Meat burger is most definitely healthier than regular burgers, but it's not going to be the cross I die on. It's not going to be the argument I spent ages researching because I just think we're swimming against the tide. I just think it's not worth spending loads of effort educating people about how, you know, Impossible Foods or Beyond Meat, companies like that, um, are producing products that aren't that much healthier than regular burgers. They might be marginally a little bit healthier, maybe significantly healthier, but I don't really think that's going to win people over in my opinion.

>> I don't think burgers are a health food, but if you see me at a barbecue this summer, yes, I will be having a plant-based burger. >> [laughter] [snorts] >> And around 2019, a group of industry representatives, and I refer to them as the merchants of doubt, which is a reference to a book that was written on that subject, uh, when they were doing this around tobacco and climate change.

And the the merchants of doubt got money together, and they started to fund campaigns against our industry and against Beyond Meat. So, every time we'd have a quarterly call with investors, they would publish something in the paper, they'd run TV ads, they would do big social media campaigns, and they were brilliant. They were smarter than us. They beat us.

They said, "Fake meat, real chemicals." They said, "This food is ultra-processed." And those that didn't want to make a change didn't make a change. But what was so dangerous, King says, "Every society will have its protectors of the status quo, but he also says in the fraternities of the indifferent." And it's the fraternities of the indifferent that we found so frustrating.

Because here we were building beautifully clean products that took protein right from the farmer's field, and instead of running it through factory farms and through animals to the plate, we ran it directly from the field, and we separated the protein from the fiber, and we put that protein through heating, cooling, and pressure, and we landed that protein right on the center of the plate. Clean, efficient process, but it became demonized. And we knew that the people that didn't want to make the change would accept that argument. What we didn't know is that the enlightened omnivore would also accept that argument. That the progressives would also accept that argument. And they'd say, "You know what? That food's processed. I don't want it." So, we started to fight back. We started to create products that we thought would be unassailable. The challenge is this narrative, this negative narrative has a very long tail.

And it has folks that are willing to keep spending to make sure that people believe it. But, here's the truth. The system we're going up against is also challenged. So, I work with meat providers in Europe and I say, "Why are beef prices going up so much in Europe?" They have the foot-and-mouth disease. Why are they going up so much here in the United States? They have drought. This system that we're going up against is held together by duct tape, antibiotic, and subsidies. We just have to survive and advance. >> [applause] >> And if we do that, we will prevail.

This system will perish and we will be successful. We have to survive and advance to get there. We have to pull together. So, if you're a plant-based eater and you're buying in and you're posting on our site, "Oh, just have legumes." You're perpetuating a belief system which is false. So, that protein doesn't have to go through a factory farm.

That protein has no antibiotics, no hormones, no arsenic, no pus, no feces, no death, no fear, not a large amount of methane. You can shrink the agricultural footprint.

We can allow nature to come back. People forget this. The 60 billion bison that were here, the wolves, the prairie dogs, the cougars, the beautiful creatures that were here, the pronghorns. We can let them all come back if we shrink our agricultural footprint.

And in doing that, in saving nature, we can save ourselves because we're taking carbon out of the air. We're bringing cooling the climate. This is enough if we do it aggressively to meet the UN requirements to bring the temperature down, to stop this climate catastrophe.

We need to get after this. We need to recruit the people that are closest in to help us do this. We can do it, and that to me is the most inspiring part about this. It's not between us and the government anymore. It's between us and the consumer.

Let's help them make that choice to take the right type of protein, whether it's legume or it's plant-based meat, so that we together can take control of our destiny, of our world, of our future, and not let this negative narrative prevail.

>> [music]