

It's become axiomatic that the ability to eat meat helped spur development of intelligence in early humans. Let's reassess

Modern man is a born meat eater, they reason, as a glance at human history shows. What's more, the mastery of fire, the development of language, the origin of the division of labor, the beginning of social hierarchies and even the emergence of culture could be related to hunting and eating meat. Accordingly, the consumption of meat is a natural need of humankind whereas vegetarianism is unnatural and possibly even harmful to health. But experts from such diverse fields as paleoanthropology and nutrition are questioning these ideas.

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In a 2022 study, a research group led by paleoanthropologists W. Andrew Barr of George Washington University and Briana Pobiner of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History took another systematic look at the purported archaeological evidence for the "meat made us human" theory. The scientists compiled data from 59 sites from nine major research areas in East Africa, ranging in age from 2.6 to 1.2 million years old. Then the team put all previous bone finds into chronological perspective. Archaeological evidence of meat consumption does increase sharply when looking at specimens linked to the emergence of the *Homo erectus* species, [the researchers reported in the journal PNAS](#). However, they found, this trend reflects the scientific focus on that period of evolutionary development; that is, there is simply more material collected from sites linked to early *Homo erectus*. As a result, the picture is distorted and the connection between eating meat and the evolution of the genus *Homo* is falsely underscored, they said.

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