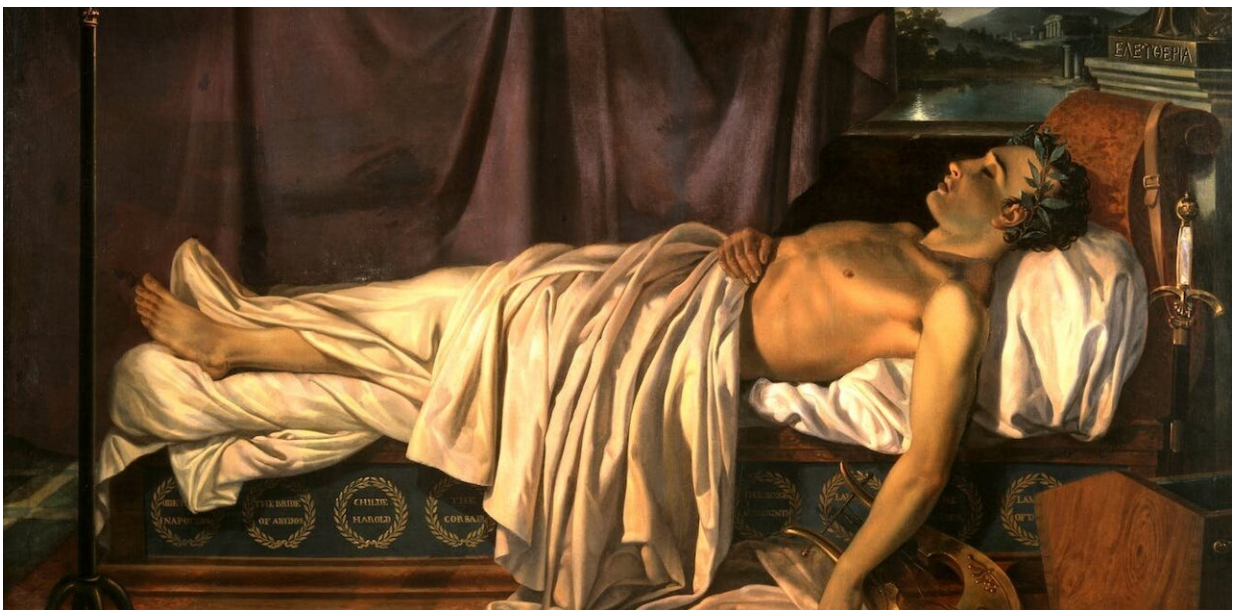


Lord Byron vinegar diet can have a series of harmful health effects

November 16 2023, by Jose Miguel Soriano del Castillo and M^a Inmaculada Zarzo Llobell



Lord Byron on his death bed, by Joseph Denis Odevaere. Credit: [Groeningemuseum / Wikimedia Commons](#)

Romantic poet [Lord Byron](#)—famed for his rich and expressive portrayal of landscape and human emotions—is considered to be one of the key figures of English literature.

Over the course of his life, however, he suffered from a raft of health

problems, ranging from [vertigo, clubfoot and gonorrhoea](#) to [malaria](#) and even [bulimia and anorexia](#).

The dubious treatment methods of the time were recorded in his writings, including the well known burlesque epic poem [Don Juan](#). Here he mentions the consumption of [Epsom salts](#), which were used as a laxative, or as a muscle relaxer when dissolved in bathwater. They were also combined with other strong diuretics and cathartics to purge the body and induce vomiting.

Demanding diets

In his youth, [Byron followed strict diets](#) to avoid the problems suffered by his mother as a consequence of being overweight. At one point, he experimented with consuming only a quarter pound (113g) of meat per day alongside small amounts of wine.

In his later years he turned to [vinegar](#), believing the sour liquid could reduce his appetite. The resulting weight loss was dramatically successful, but it took its toll: dental problems, vomiting and diarrhea became constant features of his life. He ingested it only with water and rice, as he thought this would enhance its cleansing effects.

As a result of this and other extreme diets, the writer managed to reduce his [body mass index](#) (BMI) [from 29.7 to 22.1 kg/m² at least twice in his life, in 1806 and in 1822](#). While in Venice, before his second substantial weight loss, [his lawyer reported being troubled by his pale, bloated and sickly appearance](#).

Other victims of vinegar

Byron was not alone in using vinegar for slimming purposes in his time,

as various tragic events show. One of the [earliest published cases of this](#) involved a French woman called Mademoiselle Lapaneterie in 1773. Worried by her physique and the red color of her skin, she followed her neighbor's advice of drinking a small cup of vinegar per day to lose weight and achieve a fairer complexion.

As the doctor Pierre Desault reported, Lapaneterie followed this recommendation for over a month. She saw her weight decrease and her vivid complexion—considered undesirable for women at the time—became paler. However, she soon developed a cough, night sweats, nausea, swollen feet and legs, and diarrhea, and she eventually died.

A [second case](#) was reported in 1826, two years after Lord Byron's death. Louise, a [young women](#) from Dijon, took to drinking vinegar because "the young people where she lived were making fun of her". The diet also led her to an early grave.

Despite cases such as these, the commonplace cooking ingredient formed the basis of slimming diets across Europe—especially in France—throughout the 18th century and remained popular until the mid-19th century.

The serious health effects of drinking vinegar

In 1998, a group of researchers at the Department of Internal Medicine at the Medical University of Innsbruck (Austria) [observed that high vinegar consumption can have three main harmful effects:](#)

- Hypocalcaemia: Low levels of calcium in the [blood serum](#), which can cause muscle spasms.
- Hyperreninaemia: Excessive levels of renin (a hormone produced by the kidneys) in the blood. The body's homeostatic response to

this results in high blood pressure and kidney failure.

- Osteoporosis: A condition that weakens bones, making them brittle and more prone to break or fracture.

The effects of vinegar on teeth

In 2012, a [clinical report](#) was published of a 15 year old girl who was suffering from eroded teeth caused by drinking a glass of cider vinegar each day. Curiously, [Byron was also troubled by his teeth](#). He chewed and smoked tobacco in the belief that it would preserve his dental health and, in later years, to stave off hunger. At the end of his life, he still had some white teeth remaining, but they had become somewhat loose.

At least [one study](#) has shown that white vinegar, cider vinegar and hydrogen peroxide can both whiten and weaken teeth. Additionally, in 2016 it was observed that white vinegar may cause greater levels of damage to the hardness and quality of tooth enamel.

However, according to [a study led by Philipp Kanzow](#), the presence and severity of these erosive defects also depend on several factors including nutrition, saliva composition, disease and abrasive stress.

Appetite suppressant

The slimming effect that Byron attributed to vinegar most likely came from its ability to suppress the appetite. In 1998 [it was shown](#) that [acetic acid](#)—the chemical that gives vinegar its characteristic taste and smell—significantly reduces glucose and insulin response after eating, perhaps due to a reduced digestion rate.

This suggests that the spike in blood sugar levels after a meal can be reduced by consuming vinegar. This is because it causes the body to take

longer to digest food, meaning carbohydrates are broken down more slowly.

[Our study](#) suggests that Lord Byron's vinegar diet did help him to lose weight and give him a paler complexion. However, its long term consumption may have contributed significantly to the anorexia nervosa—complicated by episodes of bulimia—from which he suffered.

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