

Calorie Control

COMMENTARY

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Experts Sort Out Fact from Fiction about



Seats are getting wider at Yankee Stadium. Belts have increased in length. And more Americans are choosing the “super-size” meal at fast food restaurants. What does this add up to? Despite the fact that fat consumption is down, obesity has reached epidemic proportions and continues to grow.

For 30 years, nutritionists have been telling Americans to cut the fat in their diet as a way to lose weight. Food manufacturers responded by developing reduced-fat and fat-free products. But many Americans took this as a license to eat more, food authorities say. So, are fat-free foods to blame? Or, are there other factors making us fat?

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) experts say the reason for the increasing number of overweight Americans – 55 percent of the population is now considered overweight – is that people are consuming more calories than ever before. According to the latest National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), total caloric intake by adults increased from 1,969 calories per day in 1978 to 2,200 calories in 1990.

One of the factors contributing to America's overweight problem is eating meals out. The number of meals eaten away from home has increased by 16 percent, almost double compared to 1977 and 1978, a USDA report says. The report also notes that

meals eaten in restaurants contain more fat and saturated fat and fewer nutrients than foods made at home. Approximately 38 percent of calories come from fat in an average restaurant meal. A recent *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* study found that women who eat out more than five times per week consume almost 300 more calories and nearly 20 more grams of fat per day than those who eat at home.

Another problem accounting for the rise in obesity is inactivity. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General, recently urged Americans to make fitness “a national health priority.” Experts estimate that approximately 60 percent of Americans are not physically active on a regular basis, and one in four are not active at all.

As for low-fat foods, experts agree they're not a panacea. But when used appropriately, they can be

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Experts say the reason for the increasing number of overweight Americans is that people are consuming more calories than ever before and are not exercising enough.



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Today's Fad Diets: Too Good to be True

According to the American Dietetic Association, weight loss programs, pills and products are a \$33 billion industry. The Atkins' Diet, The Zone and Sugar Busters are some of the most popular diets today. The authors of many of these books claim to have solved the weight loss problem. But with so many diets available, which one should you choose? Before you choose any weight loss program, read what the experts have to say. They have the "skinny" on the most popular diets available.

DR. ATKINS' NEW DIET REVOLUTION

How it works: This diet encourages consumers to limit carbohydrates to 20 grams per day for the first two weeks. Certain vegetables are limited and most carbohydrates such as pasta, grains, cereals, etc., should be avoided. Protein is unrestricted, so you can eat as much steak, eggs, bacon, chicken or fish as you want. Dr. Atkins' book is based upon the theory that excess carbohydrates prevent the body from burning fat efficiently, thus the reason for restricting carbohydrates and increasing protein. Dr. Atkins was recently quoted in a September 7 CNN story as saying, "So it's not that it (the eating plan) needs to be low-calorie; as long as you cut out the carbohydrate, the weight loss is automatic."

The facts: *Environmental Nutrition Newsletter* notes that although one may lose weight on the diet, it does not come without a price – low energy and muscle breakdown. According to the Mayo Clinic's Web site, most of the weight loss is a result of water loss. Additionally, as a result of the increase in protein, saturated fat and cholesterol increase as well, both of which are capable of promoting heart disease. And, there are still other problems. Tufts University's School of Nutrition Science and Policy identified this diet as providing less than 60 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for calcium. (RDAs are reference values established by a board of experts to prevent Americans from developing deficiencies due to inadequate consumption.) Dr. Kevin Vigilante, a public

health specialist, and Dr. Mary Flynn, a nutritionist, both of whom are with Brown University, have written a new book called "Low-Fat Lies, High-Fat Frauds." In the book they write, "The Atkins diet is potentially so dangerous that the Surgeon General should probably put a warning on every book Dr. Robert Atkins sells. The diet's only salvation is that people can't tolerate it for very long – not long enough for the increase in the risk of heart disease or cancer that long-term use of such a diet could bring."

THE ZONE

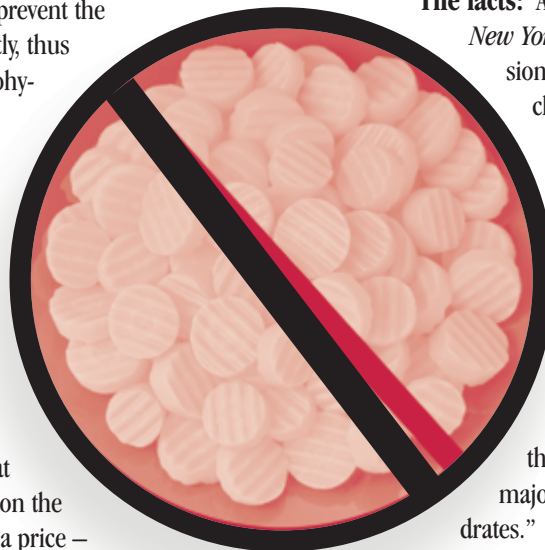
How it works: This diet is very similar to Dr. Atkins' diet. Both are classified by health professionals as "high protein diets." Author Barry Spears also encourages consumers to increase protein and decrease carbohydrates as a means of losing weight, as well as bettering athletic performance. Dr. Spears bases his diet on the theory that carbohydrates cause insulin levels to rise and increased production of insulin causes obesity. However, this diet does not restrict carbohydrates as severely as Dr. Atkins' plan.

The facts: Although this book has topped *The New York Times* best sellers list, professional organizations disagree with the claims. The American College of Sports Medicine, the American Dietetic Association, the Women's Sports Foundation, and the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research have stated that "high-protein plans are neither the answer for weight loss nor for athletic performance and can cause harm." They also point out that this diet is "inadequate in some major nutrients, particularly carbohydrates." While high protein diets usually encourage 30 percent of calories from protein, 30 percent from fat and 40 percent from carbohydrates, most health professionals and health organizations advocate that carbohydrates should make up approximately 55 to 65 percent of the calories in the diet. Protein should make up 10 to 15 percent. Although some people do lose weight on the diet, it is usually due to the decrease in calories, not the increase in protein. The Mayo Clinic found that The Zone's "recommended diet" is approximately 850 calories. However, the American Dietetic Association recommends that persons trying to lose weight should not dip below a 1,200-calorie-a-day level.

"The Atkins diet is potentially so dangerous that the Surgeon General should probably put a warning on every book Dr. Robert Atkins sells."

– from "Low-Fat Lies, High-Fat Frauds"

Foods such as pasta, rice, white potatoes, carrots, corn and watermelon are prohibited.



Low-Calorie/Low-Fat Bulletin

THREE KEYS TO LOSING WEIGHT

Eating a low fat diet, watching total calorie intake and exercising vigorously are the three keys to losing weight and keeping it off, according to an ongoing study by the National Weight Control Registry, as reported in a recent *New York Times* article. The study began approximately five years ago and involves over 2,500 participants who have all met the requirements of having lost at least 30 pounds and kept it off for at least one year. According to Dr. James O. Hill of the University of Colorado, "What we've learned so far is that these people have not found any secret to maintaining weight loss." It appears to be the three common factors the dieters share which keeps their weight in check. Dr. Rena Wing, a colleague of Dr. Hill's, said, "It's not like these people are so different from other people. It seems to me that they had a whole different approach: 'This time I'm going to do it.'"

RATES OF OBESITY, PHYSICAL INACTIVITY ON THE RISE

The incidence of obesity in adults and children, physical inactivity, diabetes and asthma are increasing, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2000 Review, released in June. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher noted that more than 20 percent of U.S. children were overweight, and defined childhood obesity as an epidemic. He also commented that families should become more active. Physical activity has declined due to more time spent in front of the computer and TV, as well as a decrease in the physical education programs in schools, he said.



SPLENDA APPROVED AS GENERAL PURPOSE SWEETENER

FDA has approved the use of SPLENDA® (also known as sucralose) as a general-purpose sweetener in foods. McNeil Specialty Products Co. petitioned FDA for the broadened use of sucralose. The FDA approval now allows sucralose to be used in products where standards of identity do not preclude its use, including all foods and beverages, nutritional supplements, medical foods and vitamin/mineral supplements. In related news, the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) has chosen McNeil Specialty Products as the recipient of the 1999 Industrial Achievement Award for the discovery and commercialization of sucralose. IFT presents the award yearly to innovators of an outstanding food process or product that exemplifies significant advances in food technology, production and product commercialization.



DATA SHOW OLESTRA'S SAFE

As part of the FDA approval of olestra for use in savory snacks, Procter & Gamble is monitoring olestra intake and its effect on nutrient status in the U.S. A full year of data is now available. Among the findings: intake of fruits and vegetables did not decrease with consumption of olestra-containing snacks; total snack consumption did not increase with olestra consumption; and a significant trend toward reduced percentage of energy from fat and reduced serum cholesterol was observed with increased olestra intake. No statistically significant associations between olestra intake and reduced serum carotenoid concentrations were found.

JECFA AND EU RULE AGAINST STEVIOSIDE

Stevioside is not "acceptable" as a sweetener, according to two international agencies. The sweetener was recently reviewed by the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and the Scientific Committee for Food of the European Union (EU) and determined not to be acceptable as a sweetener on the basis of available data. Stevioside may be used as a dietary supplement in the U.S., but no reference to sweetness can be made. It is not approved for use as a sweetener in the U.S.

LANCET'S "LETTER TO THE EDITOR" DENOUNCES ASPARTAME RUMORS

In response to misinformation about aspartame circulating on the Internet, a letter to the editor, published in the July issue of *The Lancet*, said, "Virtually all of the information offered is anecdotal, from anonymous sources and is scientifically implausible." The letter, written by Anthony Zehetner and Mark McLean of the Department of Endocrinology, Westmead Hospital, Sydney, Australia, stated, "The anti-aspartame campaign purports to offer an explanation for illnesses that are prominent in the public eye. By targeting a manufactured chemical agent, and combining this with pseudoscience and selective reporting, the campaign makes complex issues deceptively simple." Aspartame is one of the most thoroughly tested food additives and its safety has been affirmed 26 times over a period of 23 years by the FDA. For more information on the safety of aspartame and health scares perpetuated by the Internet, check out the spring 1999 issue of *Commentary* at www.caloriecontrol.org.

WEB SITE IS SWEET ON SACCHARIN

The Calorie Control Council has developed a saccharin Web site – www.saccharin.org – to educate consumers on the history, benefits and safety of saccharin. Included on the site are position statements from scientists and related links.

Experts Sort Out Fact from Fiction about Fat (continued from page 1)



included as part of a healthy diet and aid in weight control. And, they advise that cutting fat isn't the only key to maintaining a healthy weight. The motto today is calories still count.

Commentary asked leading health authorities their opinions on what's causing America's obesity problem, and to sort out fact from fiction on fat. Here is what they said:

FICTION: Americans have decreased the fat in their diet, so it must be something else that is causing people to gain weight.

FACT: Although Americans have cut their fat intake to 34 percent, they still do not meet the U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommendation of 30 percent or less of calories daily from fat.

According to Karen Collins, R.D., of the American Institute for Cancer Research, several factors contribute to weight gain.

"Today people lead fast, high-stress lives," she says. "Many people turn to food as a stress relief or as an emotional comfort. People are no longer in touch with their hunger cues and have not been well educated about portion control."

FICTION: Fat is not the problem, therefore, there's no need for fat-free and reduced-fat foods in the diet. Many diets say that you can eat as much fat as you want, and you won't gain weight.

FACT: Diets that claim you can eat as much as you want and still lose weight have been around for years and have had little success in the long run, according to Chris Rosenbloom, Ph.D., R.D., associate professor of nutrition at Georgia State University in Atlanta and an American Dietetic Association spokesperson. "In truth, these diets really don't allow you to eat all you want," she says. "Instead, they have some very restrictive guidelines." John Foreyt, Ph.D., director of the Nutrition Research Clinic and professor, Department of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, notes that these diets are unproven and have not been peer reviewed. What's more, their safety and efficacy have yet to be shown. "Reduced-fat and fat-free foods have had a tremendous impact on the American population. They have helped to keep the taste in foods, while allowing people to control fat," says Dr. Foreyt, a leading obesity expert.

FICTION: Low-fat and reduced-fat foods have only made people fatter.

FACT: Ms. Collins notes that reduced-fat and fat-free products can be incorporated into a balanced diet, when used appropriately. Two recent studies reported in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* demonstrated that even "casual" use of reduced-fat foods can significantly reduce overall fat intake. However, she says, some people believe that because these products are low in fat, they can eat twice the amount. They are surprised to find that they have not lost weight, and in some cases,

have gained. "Reduced-fat products should be used as substitutes for higher fat items, not as additions," she notes. Dr. Foreyt comments that in addition to reducing fat in the diet, many low-fat foods and beverages allow people to enjoy their favorite foods without extra calories.

Another problem contributing to increased weight gain is lack of physical activity. A study in the October 13 *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that even those who are exercising and reducing calories often aren't exercising enough. Only 42 percent of the men and 37 percent of the women who said they were trying to lose weight are meeting federal recommendations of at least 150 minutes of exercise weekly, the study found.

FICTION: Calories from fat are much worse than calories from carbohydrates or protein.

FACT: Although the calories from fat, protein and carbohydrates are metabolized differently, a calorie, despite its source, is still a calorie. However, fat is more calorically dense (9 calories per gram) than carbohydrates or protein (4 calories per gram). Still, researchers say that while increased fat intake can contribute to an increase in calories, over-consumption of any food can cause weight gain. "More calories consumed than expended equals weight gain, no matter where those calories come from," Dr. Foreyt notes. The bottom line is: calories still count.

FICTION: The only fat people should worry about is total fat intake.

FACT: Dr. Foreyt advises that total fat intake is important because fat is associated with obesity. However, consumers should pay attention to saturated fat as well, as it has the potential to raise cholesterol levels. He advises (as do many other experts) to watch overall fat intake and consume a balanced diet. The U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee has recommended a shift in focus from total fat to saturated fat. The recommendation, if approved by the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services, will read as follows: "Choose a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and moderate in total fat."



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Karen Collins, R.D.



John Foreyt, Ph.D.

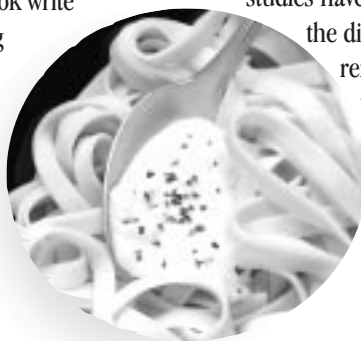


Today's Fad Diets: Too Good to be True *(continued from page 2)*

SUGAR BUSTERS

How it works: Co-authors Mr. H. Leighton Steward, Dr. Samuel S. Andres, Dr. Luis A. Balart and Dr. Morrison C. Bethea have found their book topping the best sellers list, as well as recommended by several restaurants in the New Orleans area. The basis of this diet is that certain foods, namely carbohydrates, cause insulin levels to rise. Authors of this book write that insulin makes you fat by promoting the storage of fat in the body. Foods such as pasta, rice, white potatoes, carrots, corn and watermelon are prohibited.

The facts: *Environmental Nutrition Newsletter* reviewed this book and found some problems. First, insulin does not promote the storage of fat, unless excess calories are ingested. Insulin is important for good health as it brings energy to the cells in our body. Although you may lose weight, it is most likely due to water loss, not loss of fat. People also tend to ingest fewer calories while practicing Sugar Busters. Vital nutrients such as calcium, vitamin A, and fiber are all found in low



amounts in this diet. However, there are some redeeming qualities. Sugar Busters encourages you to eat whole grains, to trim the fats from meats, and to decrease overall sugar intake.

The bottom line: Be wary of diets that go against what credible health care organizations and professionals recommend. While many of these fad diets encourage limiting certain foods, many studies have shown that incorporating a variety of foods in the diet is important. The Mayo Clinic Web site reminds consumers that research has shown that grains, fruits and vegetables help to prevent certain diseases such as cancer. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Health care professionals agree that you can't eat unlimited calories and still lose weight.

Many of these diets offer quick fixes. They sound glamorous and easy but the reality is, losing weight is never easy. For permanent weight loss, it is important to learn sound eating habits. While fad diets may take the weight off, they don't teach how to keep it off. Losing weight requires eating less, being more active, or — preferably — doing both. Exercise is also key. Most importantly, any change you make should be something you can stick with for life. ■■■

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The site offers tips on cutting calories while maintaining a healthy weight.

"CALORIE CONTROL" WEB SITE LOGS OVER 30 MILLION HEALTHY HITS

Health Conscious Consumers Depend on the Site's Nutrition and Diet Information

On the Web for two years — www.caloriecontrol.org — has now surpassed 30 million hits and 1.3 million visitors. Why do people log on? The "Calorie Control" Web site offers consumer-friendly information on calorie counting, light foods and beverages, weight control and exercise.

In recent weeks, the site has averaged over 600,000 hits and 20,000 visitors per week. Updated information on a healthy lifestyle keeps visitors coming back. The "Calorie Calculator" tells consumers the number of calories and fat grams found in their favorite foods, or they can track overall daily consumption of calories and fat grams, using the "Enhanced Calorie Calculator." Weekly news on the latest calorie and weight-control research is found on the Calorie Control NewsNet and the site offers tips on cutting calories while maintaining a healthy

weight. Light recipes and an exercise calculator are other popular features. It also features useful information on low-calorie ingredients and other topics of interest.

Recently, the site has been updated with several new sections and a newsier, more consumer-friendly Home Page and additional links. Also, due to its popularity, the online calorie calculator has been moved to its own domain: www.caloriescount.com.



The site has received more than two dozen awards for excellence in content and design. A *Los Angeles Times* Award, *USA Today* Hot Site Award, the Lycos Top 5% Award, the LookSmart Editor's Choice, Chartmakers Internet Top 10, MSN Pick of the Week, *PC Magazine* Pick of the Day, Fitness On-Line

Award, MedExplorer Top Rated Site and Best Association Website are just a few of the many awards and recognition given to the site.

Commentary also is posted on the site and has a feature that allows readers to send an issue to a friend. ■■■

Obesity Increases Risk of Dying Earlier



Can being overweight actually contribute to the risk of dying earlier?

Researchers are now saying "yes." A landmark study, conducted by the American Cancer Society and published in the October 7 *New England Journal of Medicine*, found that there is an increased risk of an earlier death in obese persons, even for non-smokers and otherwise healthy individuals. The study found "an especially clear association between excess weight and a higher risk of dying from heart disease or cancer."

This is the largest study that has been done concerning the relationship between obesity and life expectancy. Participants enrolled in the national Cancer Prevention Study II between the years of 1982 and 1996 were used in the study. Researchers calculated Body Mass Index (BMI), a ratio of height to weight, and tracked age and cause of death.

Researchers accounted for age, education, physical activity, alcohol use, marital status, use of aspirin as a blood thinner, consumption of fats and vegetables, and use of estrogen supplements.

After adjusting the results based on the information mentioned above, researchers found that starting at a BMI of 25 [a BMI between 19 and 24 is considered a healthy weight for men and women], the risk of premature death gradually increased in healthy non-smoking white males and females, as well as black males. Men with a BMI of 40 or above were nearly three times more likely to die early than those men who weighed significantly less (100 or more pounds less) at the same height. The researchers also found that white women with a BMI of 40 or above had double the risk of dying than did those women who weighed approximately 100 pounds less at the

same height. The only exception was seen in black women. No increased risk of premature death was observed in obese black women when compared with slender black women.

Dr. JoAnn Manson, the Harvard researcher who conducted the study, said it "settles once and for all any lingering questions about whether weight alone increases the risk of death and disease. The evidence is now compelling and irrefutable. Obesity is probably the second-leading cause of death in the

United States after cigarette smoking, so it is a very serious problem."

Only a little less eating or more exercise is all it takes to turn around weight problems that kill many Americans early, according to health experts. "Modest changes in what we are eating and what we are doing may go a long way," stated Dr. William H. Dietz, director of the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Just 50 fewer calories a day, or more exercise, works out to five pounds less weight over

a year. Just 100 fewer calories per day, whether by consuming less or burning more, can result in a 10-pound weight loss per year.



The study found "an especially clear association between excess weight and a higher risk of dying from heart disease or cancer."



Calorie Control COMMENTARY

Providing timely information on low-calorie and reduced-fat foods and beverages, weight management, physical activity and healthy eating.

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5775 Peachtree-Dunwoody Road,
Suite 500-G, Atlanta, Georgia 30342.
Phone: (404) 252-3663. E-mail: ccc@assnhq.com.
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