Myth #1: The Starvation Myth: Eat Less + exercise more = weight loss

How many times have you been told that weight gain is caused from overeating and not enough exercise? That to lose weight you need to eat burn more calories than you take in? The truth is many overweight people do not eat enough calories. The “Energy Balance Model” as this is known as, is an oversimplification of weight loss.

Here is why this model is flawed. Our body is smart and recognizes that we need food to survive. When calories are restricted, the body goes into starvation mode. Its survival instinct is to reserve energy so it burns muscle rather than fat resulting in slower metabolism. This is why calorie restricted diets are not sustainable. Studies show “starvation diets” result in the person gaining more weight back than they lost (yo-yo dieting).

Myth #2: The Calorie Myth: All calories are created equal

The calorie myth is similar to the starvation myth. Cutting calories will result in weight loss. When in reality, it’s the type of calorie that is more important than the quantity of calories. Calories are any food that provides energy. These include Carbohydrates, Proteins, and Fats. Each of these has a different role in the body. Protein, Fat, and Complex Carbs have a low glycemic index meaning that they are slowly metabolized and keep blood sugar stable. High glycemic index foods such as simple carbs (bread, pasta, baked goods, candy, etc) absorb quickly into the blood stream and spike blood sugar and insulin. Once blood sugar is off balance, hunger and cravings pursue. This is what causes weight gain.

A study was preformed that fed children instant oatmeal, steel cut oats or a vegetable omelet. They were fed a similar meal at lunch. After that, they were told to eat whatever they were hungry for. Children fed instant oatmeal ate 81% more food than those fed the omelet. In addition, they had higher blood insulin, blood sugar, lipids (controls appetite), and adrenal levels. Eating a breakfast high in protein and fat within an hour of waking can help start the day with a stabilized blood sugar.

Myth #3: The Fat Myth: Eating fat makes you fat

The low fat diet has been very prevalent in the last few decades. The grocery store is overtaken by “low fat” products. Coincidently, obesity rate has tripled since this time as well. The Low Fat Diet was founded on political lobbying and not actually scientific evidence. In fact, scientific evidence shows that high levels of dietary fat do not promote weight gain.

Our brains are made up of fat. We need a good source of dietary fat to feed our brains and allow our neurotransmitters to communicate and tell us we are full. Low fat products often use sugar or simple carbohydrates to replace the fat and provide a better taste. They do not nourish our brain cells and leave us hungry again shortly after eating. Additionally, the added sugar converts to triglycerides and bad increases cholesterol causing plaque buildup on the artery walls resulting in cardiovascular disease.

This doesn’t mean we should start eating any sort of fat we can find. Trans Fats founds in processed foods and margarine creates free radicals in the body which cause a variety of diseases including inflammation and cancer.

Myth #4: The Carb Myth: Eating low carb or no carb will make you thin

Low carbohydrate diets will result in weight loss but the weight loss in not sustainable. Just as fats are not equal, either are carbohydrates. We need to differentiate between complex carbs and simple carbs. Simple carbs (i.e. breads, pasta, candy, baked goods, etc) have high glycemic index meaning that they break down into sugar and enter the blood stream quickly thus spiking blood sugar and release insulin which converts the excess sugar into fat. Complex carbs (i.e. vegetables) have a low glycemic index meaning that they have a gradual release of energy allowing the body to use it over several hours. When paired with fat and protein, absorption is slowed even further.
Myth #5: The Sumo Wrestler Myth: Skipping meals helps you lose weight

It’s not only the calories you consume, but when you eat that impacts weight loss.

By the time you eat after skipping meals, you are starving and overeat. To optimize weight loss, we need to eat breakfast, to spread out food intake evenly throughout the day, and not to eat at least 2 hours before bed.

During sleep, metabolism slows down and undigested food in left in your system as stored fat. Additionally, it is while we are sleeping that we produce more growth hormone. This is when children grow up but when there is no more growing up to do, you grow out.

Myth #6: The French Paradox Myth: The French are thin because they drink wine and eat butter

It is true that the French drink wine, eat a lot of fat and are leaner than Americans. It is not because of the wine or the fat that the French are healthier. The French eat a whole foods diet that is fresh, rich in nutrients, and minimally processed. They also eat slower, smaller portions, and walk a lot.

The French also appreciate the social aspect of food. They enjoy feed slowly with family and friends in a relaxed atmosphere. Americans tend to eat on the go and eat very fast. It takes 20 minutes to signal the brain that we are full; therefore, when we eat fast we don’t know we are full and overeat. Stressful eating also leads to weight gain because we don’t digest the food properly and stress hormones slow metabolism and promote fat storage in the belly.

There is a lot to learn from the French and Greek diets but its not to drink more wine and eat more fat.

Myth #7: The Protector Myth: Government food policies and food industry regulations protect our health

It would be nice to know that our government agencies that are responsible for monitoring all of the food on the market is looking out for our best interest. Unfortunately, that is not the case. The government is easily swayed by the food industry whose number one goal is profits not health safety of their consumers. The food industry is promoting “food” that does not turn promote health and metabolism. Government agencies like the FDA allow dangerous additives be added to processed foods and then marketed to the public as being “heart healthy”.

Unfortunately, we cannot trust the food industry and regulators to protect our health so we need to do the research on our own and take responsibility of our own health.