

**On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.**

# Weight loss: So Much More than Calories

So much has been written about obesity in the past few years that you would think there's not much left to say. But the research world of obesity, its origins and its complications is abuzz with new research these days. I am lucky to be practicing and teaching in the area, as it gives me a great excuse to devour the "usual suspects" for the discoveries and dots that continue to be connected at a furious pace.

Several of my recent investigations have shed light on the delicate dance of our hormones, and the exquisitely intricate role they play in regulating our ability to burn fat, or to store it. Sadly, environmental and dietary toxins have disrupted that delicate balance.

Sugar, for example, was scarce and precious to our ancestors, available mostly in the summertime in the form of fresh fruit. Our progenitors apparently knew something that it's taken modern folks decades to figure out: sugar promotes fat storage. Of course this was undoubtedly quite a life saver when they may well have been facing a long cold winter of possible food shortages.

Today, however, we suffer from no shortage of quantity. In fact, the average American consumes one hundred and fifty-six pounds of sugar per year, or the equivalent of 31 five-pound bags per person, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This includes not only desserts and sodas, but the sugar and high fructose corn syrup found in foods like ketchup, peanut butter, salad dressings, baked goods and hundreds of other packaged and prepared foods.



When we drown ourselves in this much sugar, the hormone that promotes fat storage, insulin, skyrockets. Even artificial sweeteners appear to have this effect, we are learning. That is, nature designed our brains to send the "secrete insulin" signal when the taste of sweetness lands on our tongue. The result: instead of the mean, clean, fat-burning machine nature intended us to be, we've become masters of hoarding fat, leaving us anything but lean.

Not only do these sweeteners, natural and unnatural, cause our insulin levels to surge, they disrupt a host of other mechanisms: they interfere with thyroid and liver function, they damage mitochondria - the tiny fat-burning engines that populate every cell in the body - and they wreak havoc on the hormone leptin, whose job it is to signal the brain that we are full. As our fat burning mechanisms become less efficient, we pack on the pounds around our midsection. These abdominal fat cells (known as visceral adipose tissue or VAT for short) then get busy cranking out inflammatory chemicals, which sabotage even the best weight loss efforts. You see how the cycle works.

In short, losing fat and keeping it off has little to do with calories and everything to do with metabolic power. In fact most

weight loss experts now agree, cutting calories is at best, a short term solution to weight loss and at worst, a first step on the road to a life of yo yo dieting. The reason goes back to nature's brilliance, once again. If your calorie intake drops below what's required to meet your basic metabolic needs, your body will respond by putting the brakes on your metabolism in an attempt to preserve your life!

## What you *can* do

So, if counting calories is no longer the answer what is? The secret lies in healing your metabolism - in finding out what is getting in the way of your body's ability to burn fat, and fixing it. Cleaning up your act is a great place to start. Throw out the sugars, trans fats, MSG-laden processed foods, the artificial sweeteners and the boxed treats. Eat real food, with ample amounts of natural, unprocessed healthy fats like salmon and halibut, grass fed meats, avocados, nuts, olive oil and coconut oil. These help to stabilize blood sugar, reduce insulin, and some, like coconut oil and the CLA found in grass fed animals actually turn up the metabolic heat, leading to weight loss.

Don't let yourself be fooled by marketing schemes that promote foods that are "nonfat". The sugars, flavorings, MSG and other chemicals that replace the fats nature wisely provided will just cause more damage to what might already be an ailing metabolism. To lose unwanted fat, stoke your metabolic engine first with pure, nutrient dense foods. Add a muscle building component to your exercise program, gently detoxify, remove the biochemical, emotional and social blocks that are undermining your efforts and

you'll be well on the way to recreating a body that's functioning at full capacity – a body that's a lean, clean, fat burning machine.

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