6 different points of view on the “healthiest diet”

Posted on June 14, 2017 by runningmelon

‘Group think’ is a phenomenon where a group of people resist and ignore external knowledge and views whilst reinforcing their own way of thinking. This leads to ‘in-thinking’ where basically, we stop challenging others in the same group and ourselves.

In my own research, I’ve been looking at group think in a corporate setting, however frequently see the same principles occur when it comes to how we decide what to eat. It’s easy to troll the internet using search terms that bring up websites and blogs where else agrees with our already held view. Reading only one side of the story (or worse, stopping at what we already believe true) is a slow way of learning.

To understand a topic well, especially in a field that still has so much to learn, a continuous quest for knowledge is critical. It is also important to understand various sides to the research. Upon consideration of opposing views, we may still believe what we already believe. And that’s fine too, but our reasons will be all that more stronger for the process.

To help with this challenge, here I have summarized the views of six respected leaders...
Michael Pollan

Who is he? An author who focuses on the American food system as well as healthy eating. He is a professor of journalism at UC Berkeley’s Grad School of Journalism and was named in TIME Magazine's world’s 100 most influential people in 2010.

His nutritional philosophy: Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. It shouldn’t be complicated. He is also interested in a healthy planet as much as healthy people.

So in his view, what should we eat? Eat mostly plants including vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. He thinks that the most important foods missing from the standard American diet are leafy greens and fermented foods with live cultures. He believes in a mostly vegetarian diet but eating meat once or twice a week is fine (think of meat as a side dish, not a main course). He also thinks eggs and fish are good. Brown rice over white. Organic over conventional. He also makes a comment on how we should eat: small portions, don’t eat until “full”, no seconds or snacking, share communal meals, and take pleasure in your food. Eat home-cooked meals, try new spices and foods, and if you can, eat food from your own garden.

And what not to eat: Processed food (anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn’t recognize).
recognize as food, anything with more than 5 ingredients listed on the packet or an ingredient you can’t pronounce), high fructose corn syrup, GMO food, probably soy meat (and limit total meat consumption).

**Best known book:** ‘The Omnivore’s Dilemma’, ‘The Botany of Desire’ and ‘In Defense of Food’

**My comments:** Pollan’s research on the American food system brings another dimension to the food debate. He writes about animal welfare, sustainable farming, the environment, organic farming, food safety and farm policy as well as health. I like his simple and common sense approach to healthy eating which he doesn’t over prescribe but lets us be our own guides.

**Dr Joel Fuhrman**

**Who is he?** A Physician who specializes in nutritional research. He’s best known for his ANDI scoring system (micronutrients / calories), his position on Whole Foods Market Scientific Advisory Board and his appearances on the Dr OZ show.

**His nutritional philosophy:** We should be “nutritarians” and eat foods that are high
micronutrients for their calories.

**So in his view, what should we eat?** Lots and lots of vegetables (especially leafy as well as beans, fruits, nuts and seeds. He says we should particularly focus on “G-BOMBS” which are greens, beans, onions, mushrooms, berries and seeds.

**And what not to eat:** Fish is not recommended due to methylmercury, meats and also not recommended. Fat free dairy rates higher than full fat dairy, but neither are recommended. Cheese has its own category and is right down the bottom of Fuhrman’s scoring system with olive oil and butter (because they are high in fat for their nutritional value), refined grains, refined sugar, sodium and caffeine are all at the low scoring end.

**Best known book:** ‘East to Live’ and ‘Disease Proof Your Child’

**My comments:** I’m not sure how you’d get enough vitamin D, B and omega 3 on this diet. Whether it’s high enough in protein as well is the classic vegan / omnivore debate. I like Fuhrman’s views on eating foods that give us the best nutritional punch for its calories. I think Fuhrman is also a great source of advice for those who chose to be vegans (not only in terms of getting the right nutrients for a vegan diet but also eliminating high processed vegan foods).

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**Dr Dean Ornish**

**Who is he?** A physician who is a clinical professor of Medicine at the University of and the founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute. Steve Jobs was rumored to...
have followed Ornish’s diet.

**His nutritional philosophy:** Eating a high-fiber, low fat vegetarian diet will help you stay healthy and lose weight.

**So in his view, what should we eat?** Veggies and fruits, grains, beans and legumes in whatever quantities you like. Non-fat dairy and egg whites in moderation. He also advocates 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day and stress management.

**And what not to eat:** Meat of all kind, oils and oil containing products such as margarine and most salad dressings, avocados, olives, nuts and seeds, dairy products, sugar and sugar derivatives, alcohol, anything commercially prepared. Ornish thinks that no more than 10% of our diet should be made up of fat.

**Best known book:** ‘Eat More, Weigh Less’

**My comments:** Dean Ornish is the extreme end of low fat, high carb representative in this post which is quite against the grain of where most nutritionists now believe we should be eating. But, the point of this post was to share a variety of views! I also wanted to summarize his views because they are so often publically attacked by the next guy who is on the other end of the fat / carb extreme. Where Ornish is a bit more aligned with other thinking of today is a high consumption of vegetables and fiber and rejection of processed food.
Gary Taubes

Who is he? A scientific research journalist. He initially wrote about cold fusion theory in physics before turning to health. He’s notorious for controversial articles and his public criticisms of Dean Ornish (the guy above).

His nutritional philosophy: Carbohydrates generate insulin and insulin generates fat. So in his view, what should we eat? Fat and protein. Meat (including bacon, sausage and burger – just hold the bun), cheese and other dairy (make it full fat), eggs, butter, oil, nuts and salad veggies. Lots of fat (including saturated fat) is encouraged for satiety.

And what not to eat: Carbohydrate. Not just refined carbs such as bread, cookies and pasta but also a large number of vegetables, especially high carb veggies such as potatoes, corn and carrots and fruit. Taubes also thinks you shouldn’t exercise if you are trying to lose weight.

Best known books: ‘Why We Get Fat’ and ‘Good Calories, Bad Calories’

My opinion: Taubes believes the high fat, low carb diet (a.k.a the Atkins diet) is the “healthiest” diet. Whilst countless people have undoubtedly lost weight on such a diet, Taubes’ focus is more on weight loss than health. Taubes aims to be controversial and quite often I find his writing a bit sensationalist, but what I do like is that he is always challenging the status quo.
Dr Loren Cordain

Who is he? A scientist who is the founder of the Paleo Movement. He has a PhD in Health from the University of Utah and is currently a professor in the department of health exercise science at Colorado State Uni.

His nutritional philosophy: We should be eating foods that mimic our pre-agricultural, hunter-gatherer ancestors. According to Cordain to replicate the diets of our ancestors we should be eating a lot of protein, fiber, fat and potassium and only a little carbohydrate and sodium.

So in his view, what should we eat? Lots of grass fed meat, seafood and eggs, low starch vegetables and fruits, nuts and seeds, healthful oils (olive, walnut, flaxseed, macadamia, avocado and coconut).

And what not to eat: Cereal grains, legumes (all beans including peanuts), dairy, fruits and vegetables (especially potatoes), salt, refined sugar and refined vegetable

My comments: The Paleo diet is another backlash against the low fat, high carb craze. I like its ideology of going back to basics and eating real food. The biggest difference between this and some of the other whole food diets above is the amount of animal protein consumed and the elimination of grains and beans. I've also found that Cordain's guidelines of what the Paleo diet entails and what some other Paleo advocates promote varies in the detail.

Dr Mark Hyman

Who is he? Another American physician, a four-time New York Times bestselling author (which is also endorsed by Bill Clinton) and, of course, you will have also have seen him on Dr Oz.

His nutritional philosophy: Mother Nature is the best pharmacist and food is the powerful drug on the plant (ie, nutrition can prevent and heal). He promotes foods that are low-allergy, whole, anti-inflammatory, organic and fresh. He’s also big on other lifestyle factors such as cutting down on screen time and stress and increasing physical activity and getting adequate sleep.

So in his view, what should we eat? Lots of vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, healthy fats (olive, fish and coconut oils, avocado) spiced up with chia, hemp, parsley and cilantro.
small amount of whole grains, beans and lean animal protein (small wild fish, grass
and farm eggs). He’s also big on taking supplements such as probiotics, vitamins and
minerals and omega 3 fats.

And what not to eat: high-fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated (trans) fats, pes
artificial sweeteners and basically anything man made. He writes a lot about food a
(dairy and gluten, he believes, are the main culprit but suggests some people may n
eliminate corn, eggs, soy, nuts, nightshades, citrus and yeast) but says we only need
cutting these things out if we are sensitive to them.


My comments: Mark Hyman acknowledges that we have individual needs, that soi
are sensitive to things like gluten and dairy, but for those of us that aren’t sensitive to
foods there is no need to cut it out. I also like his approach to lifestyle. The only tir
looses me is in some of the smaller details. As an example, he is a raw milk advocate
it’s too risky to be feeding my family unpasturized milk. I’m also not convinced that
disease is preventable through nutrition – that’s another post.

There are so many other guys (and gals) that I could put on this list, Mark Sisson (I
Living), Barry Sears (Zone), Joy Bauer, Dr David Katz, Dr Andrew Weil, Robb Wolf
(Paleo Solution), Robert Lustig, Dallas and Melissa Hartwig (The Whole 30), the list
on and on. I had to stop somewhere, so I stopped at the six above.

I find it really interesting to see where these views converge and diverge.

There’s (mostly) agreement that:

- We should be eating whole foods and not processed foods.
- Vegetables are good for us, especially leafy greens. (Some debate about moderate
  high carb veggies).
- Fruits are good for us. (some debate about how much due to carbohydrate content
  again).
- We should be considering lifestyle factors such as sleep, stress levels and exercis
  overall health plan
Foods that get more yes votes than no (but are debated):

- Nuts and seeds and other “good fats” such as avocado
- Coconut oil (a MCT saturated fat)
- Beans and legumes
- Eggs
- Fish
- Whole grains

Foods that get more no votes than yes (but are also hotly debated):

- Dairy
- Gluten
- Refined oils
- Sodium
- Artificial sweeteners

Where there is total disagreement:

- Meat. Two think we should eat a lot. Two think we should eat a little. Two think we shouldn’t eat animal protein at all.
- Soy. I’ve put this here because whilst Ornish espouses the benefits of soy, Cordain the dangers of soy, the others tend to sit on the fence a bit acknowledging the confusion around both the benefits and problems. Most agree that if you are going to eat soy products eat it only occasionally, go for unprocessed (edamame and soy beans), most, lightly processed (tofu and milk) but stay clear of the heavily processed such as soy cheeses and vegan meat substitutes made from soy).
- And probably most importantly, the biggest disagreement is about how we should be combining our food into meals. From high fat and protein with little or no carb (Taubes); to reasonably high fat, 20%-35% protein with moderate carb (Corda more moderate mix of carb, fat and protein (Hyman and Pollan); to lower fat 100% plant based diet (Fuhrman); to high carb plant based diet with only 10% of calories coming from fat (Ornish). It’s for this reason many of these guys would probably see a list of foods like the one above because one of the biggest disagreements is much the type food, but in what proportions we eat them.
The point of this post wasn’t to try to extrapolate a “healthiest diet” out of piecing together six different views anyway. And it’s hardly a scientific way to come up with a single diet. Furthermore, **I don’t believe there is a singular healthiest diet.** Whilst we are discovering new things about how we react to different nutritional regimes, saying there is a singular best diet is assuming that our bodies all behave in the same way. Clearly, a large number of people have worked for a large number of people. All these guys have best selling books and are highly regarded in their field. Why? Because they all have a lot of people who believe in what they are saying based on their own experiences.

Some real examples from around here on the importance of individual needs: after experimental gluten free weeks in our house, my husband found that the acid reflux he had been complaining for years had disappeared, he had a lot more energy and lost weight (although he didn’t need to lose any). In contrast, I had no noticeable changes in any aspect eating the same gluten free diet. Another thing my husband and my bodies must process quite differently is meat. I eat some meat because I think it balances out my diet (and the rest of the family loves it), but too much protein makes me feel heavy and bloated.

Ethics and personal values are also a big part of this picture. Morally, if your values on the environment or animal welfare extend to how you eat then that’s your right. Embrace a diet that fits with you personal code.

Gary Hamel, one of the world's top business thinkers.
What’s Gary Hamel doing in a post about healthiest diets? Hamel says that we need humble to learn. I agree! We need to ask questions. We need to keep reading new and ideas and accept that at some stage, we are probably going to be wrong about something and should be prepared to change our minds.

If you are really interested in nutrition, I encourage you to read a variety of views with an open mind. Others’ views may make you even more sure of where you stand now, but may just open up another piece of the puzzle for you particularly in a science that still has so much to learn.

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The will power myth
Posted on June 7, 2017 by runningmelon

“I just have no will power” one Mom told me, complaining that her latest diet wasn’t working, “I bake a batch of biscuits for the kids to have when they get home from school. The aroma of hot cookies fills the kitchen and I can’t resist just having one… but half an hour later I’ve eaten half the batch!”
Baked goods are hard to just stop at just one bite.

How many of you can relate? It turns out this Mom is not alone. I asked a couple of groups on Facebook which foods they find the hardest not to overeat and within 24 hours I had a long list of common culinary culprits. Sweet baked goods (cakes and cupcakes, cookies, cinnamon rolls, slices, pie, doughnuts and danish pastries) made up 44% of the answers. Other sweet treats such as chocolate, licorice, twizzlers, soda and ice-cream followed by bread at 19% and the remaining 10% of answers included savoury snacks such as chips and popcorn, cheese and pasta.

Not surprisingly every single answer was a processed food. The vast majority contain sugar. (I have a lot to say about sugar, read here if you didn’t read that earlier post). Most contain some combination of refined flour, fat and salt. You are certainly not alone in finding these foods hard not to overeat. Also known as hyperpalatable foods, they stimulate endorphins and chemicals in the brain. They make us feel good. (The reward centres in our brains actually light up on a brain scan when we eat this stuff). Our dopamine neurones become activated. Dopamine makes us want more. (Recreational drugs releasing dopamine is what is thought to be one of the key things that makes them addictive). With such strong physical reactions that can start even when we have a small amount of these foods it’s not a surprise that our will power can’t fight to have another, and another, and another.

In addition to these internal reactions to the food we’re bombarded by external cues: half eaten loaf of bread is still out on the cutting board, the movie theatre smells of the bowl of chips at the party sit right beside us and even if we can’t see it, we know still half of that fudge brownie still sitting in the pantry.
To make things even tougher we often have well formed habits around consuming these foods. It's the regular playgroup meet up where cupcakes are always involved. It's the birthday at the office when a cake is compulsory. It’s the fast food restaurant we drive past on the way home from late night soccer practice and their burgers and fries are just. goooooood. It’s Friday night standard activity has become to put the kids to bed, choose a Netflix movie and time the pizza delivery for just as the kids’ little eyes close. We also form habits to deal with conditions such as tiredness, boredom, anxiousness and sadness. If our coping mechanism is always chocolate then how can we expect our will power to save us?

The responses to eating these hyperpalatable foods and external cues are certainly much stronger in some people than others. However, we don’t have to succumb to out of control eating. The more we keep ourselves the away from hyperpalatable foods and their associated situations and habits, the easier it becomes not to eat them. This requires mindful planning (and yes, a bit of will power) at the outset, but as those physical and emotional connections break we eventually find ourselves able to walk passed our old favourite bakery without any urge to go in. (and may even be able to get to the point where you can have the occasional “one” without having to demolish the lot).

Here's how:

1. Keep the house free of foods that you know trigger over eating. Don’t go to the supermarket hungry and always shop with a list. Tried and proven advice!
2. If foods that you like to overeat make it into the house, get rid of them. My husband's colleagues enjoyed my daughter's Halloween candy recently for example.

3. Find foods that you can enjoy and eat without over indulging. Not one person that replied to the Facebook question about foods we overeat said they overeat a fruit or vegetable (meats, eggs and whole grains, except if they're processed into bread, didn't get a mention).

4. When going to a friend's house take a healthy option as your contribution. We often offer to bring a salad or fruit platter. It means that there is always something I can load my plate up with.

5. Make alternative plans for situations that you know are your undoing. Can't stop buying that muffin when you meet up with a friend at the local coffee shop? Meet elsewhere. Can't stop ordering take out on a Friday night? Make a plan to cook before you get hungry.

6. Identify bad habits that have formed and make a plan to break them.

7. Form new, healthier habits. Focus on strengthening them.

8. Keep at it. Keep at it. Keep at it. The more you overeat the more you need to satisfy that desire. Conversely the healthier you eat the easier making healthy choices gets. Our tastes DO change (and it can be an amazing experience when you visit your old favourite burger joint one night and wonder what you ever liked about it – it's a bit like catching up with an ex-boyfriend).

9. You have the ability to change your habits. You have to believe this to be able to do it. Success breeds success. It does take time but it gets easier the more we do it to the point that we aren't trying to use sheer will power against physical and emotional bonds that are much stronger. We go from mindless overeating to mindlessly making good choices.

Success breeds success. It does take time but it gets easier the more we do it to the point that we aren’t trying to use sheer will power against physical and emotional bonds that are much stronger. We go from mindless overeating to mindlessly making good choices.

Photos from here and here.

Posted in nutrition, tips for becoming healthier | Tagged healthy eating, how to eat healthier, will power | 5 Comments

Celeriac brunch

Posted on May 31, 2017 by runningmelon

A celeriac (or celery root) came in our veggie box this week. Celeriac is a variety of that has been bred for better eating roots (as opposed to cultivated for the celery stalk). The roots mass together to form a bulb that looks a bit luck a hairy, ugly turnip.
It's one ugly looking vegetable.

Celeriac has a celery / parsnipy / parsley-ish taste to it. Although that description doesn't do it justice. I find celery a bit ho-hum (it's no wonder it has been used in decades gone by as a vessel for scoffing large quantities of cream cheese and peanut butter under the guise of a “healthy” snack), and something that really bugs me about celery is how those fibrous strings stay connected to the other piece when I bite into it raw. Celery for me is just something I add to soups and stews. It's a cheap filler. It's dispensable.

The flesh of a celeriac, however, has a much nicer texture than celery. It's less watery almost creamy and there are none of those annoying fibrous strings. It can be used
much like any root vegetable (although it has a lot less starch than a potato – a good substitute if you are wanting a lower starch alternative). Roast it, mash it, fry it or stick it in a soup or stew. Unlike potato, it can also be eaten raw. The French use celeriac in céleri rémoulade a salad where it is grated, soaked in lemon juice and dressed with mayonnaise and mustard.

My original plan was to cook our celeriac up earlier in the week as part of my husband’s birthday roast dinner but I ran out of room in the pan.
So, what to do with my rejected celeriac? Last night the kids had already been fed leftovers and put to bed. My husband was out of town and I felt like a bit of lazy fry up. I decided to hash brown my celeriac and have brunch for dinner.

I peeled and grated the bulb and added about the same amount of grated potato and half an onion. Cracked in an egg to combine the mix and seasoned with salt and pepper.

It’s easier to use a sharp veggie knife than a peeler to remove the thick skin, gnarly and hairy stuff. Some varieties are a more uniform shape than others, but I’ve noticed many of the celeriac varieties locally need a lot of cutting and trimming to get all the gnarly bits off.

I scooped a handful of the mix with my hands, squished it flat and pan fried it. This mix made five decent sized hash browns.
I ate it was a poached egg, brussel sprouts, mushrooms (with sage and thyme) and spinach. A tomato would have been nice to add some color and juiciness but I ate the last of my tomatoes yesterday.

These were the tastiest hash browns (even if I say so myself!) The celeriac is a much more interesting flavour than plain old potato but it didn’t overwhelm the other food. The hash browns felt lighter than a stodgy potato hash too. To me this is more of a weekend brunch dish, but it perfectly filled the spot for dinner.

_Faux health foods_

Posted on May 24, 2017 by runningmelon

“Health” is hot right now. Organic produce sales are growing at a faster rate than their conventionally grown counterparts. The growth in the gluten-free market has been huge. There’s a trend for big food manufacturers to buy smaller health focussed companies in order to make their product portfolio healthier: Campbell Soup Company bought out Bloth Farms (smoothies and dressings), Coca Cola has recently purchased Fair Oaks Farm (high protein milk shake) and Kellogg’s acquired Gardenburger. Meanwhile health focussed companies (Annies and Hain Celestial, for example) are being tipped as hot stocks in the market. Whole Foods Market has successfully carved itself a niche in the upmarket health food grocery sector growing its customer base in spite of a recession. And most major...
supermarkets are trying to get at a little bit of the Whole Foods Market success by targeting the health food consumer with their health food offer going from being squeezed in a couple of bays to now spreading over several prime located aisles.

The health message, is of course, not lost on the marketing department. It seems that a healthy solution is available for all tastes and meals. The problem is many of the products that are being sold as healthy, simple aren’t. Here are some things to watch out for.

 Myth: It’s natural and organic, therefore it’s healthy.
Example: Agave nectar is a natural sweetener that comes from a spiky aloe vera-like plant. The nectar (or syrup) is marketed as a “gift from the gods” and agave nectar manufacturers claim it’s “the preferred sweetener of health conscious consumers, doctors, and natural cooks alike”. It might have been around for centuries and come from a plant (it also has a lower glycemic index than table sugar), but it’s still a processed sugar and doesn’t provide much nutritional value at all. Use agave nectar in the same manner as you’d use any other sugar. That is, use it rarely and in small amounts.

I’m not saying that just because it is made with natural or organic ingredients it is not unhealthy; it just doesn’t automatically make it a health food and there are two reasons why I highlight this on my faux health foods list. The first, the fact that it is a natural or organic ingredient doesn’t change how our bodies metabolise it. Natural margarine is still margarine and organic sugar is still sugar.

The second reason is both the terms “natural” and “organic” are poorly regulated. “Natural” particularly can be used freely by marketers (and there are some shocking examples of how it is used). “Organic” isn’t as clearly defined as it should be either. There’s no one method of organic farming and through the magic of USDA logic some “organic” ingredients on the USDA organic labeled foods list aren’t organically grown at all (perhaps another post).

Myth: It’s Sugar free, therefore it’s healthy.

Sugar free! But full of artificial sweeteners.

If it’s sweet and it’s sugar free then it probably has artificial sweeteners in it (look for...
aspartame, neotame, saccharin, sucralose and acesulfame potassium in the ingredients.

Sugar free options tend to be lower in calories than their full sugar versions (Diet Coke for example, has only 1 calorie) and because artificial sweeteners don’t raise blood sugar levels the same way as table sugar does diabetics may choose these products.

The reason why sugar free products make my faux health food list maybe different than you’re expecting. Popular wisdom tells us that sweeteners cause cancer (due to a lab study of saccharin and bladder cancer conducted in the early 1970s), but actually the science around this isn’t as clear cut as we’ve all been led to believe. Aspartame is one of the most heavily researched food ingredients ever and it’s been given the all clear by hundreds of health agencies world wide. However, there is more recent research that makes me wary of these products. There’s some evidence that artificially sweetened products may increase calorie consumption, weight gain and fat. The thinking is these substitute sugars are designed to mimic the taste of sweet foods which normally would come with a hit of energy. When we taste them we anticipate the calories to come and when they don’t we continue to eat until they do. Whilst the research on this isn’t conclusive, this stuff just doesn’t cut it as a health food in my mind.

Myth: It’s Fat free, therefore it’s healthy!

Using Stonyfield as an example here is probably a little harsh. Stonyfield go to a lot
to get all the ticks in the right boxes. In addition to their starter cultures they use ad
probiotic cultures which creates a beneficial environment for digestion. They’re USI
organic certified, GMO free, hormone free and don’t use artificial colors, flavors, sw
or preservatives in their products. It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t look at the fine prin

Generally, to reduce the fat of a product manufacturers need to add something in its
Usually sugar. At Stoneyfield it’s “naturally milled organic sugar” but that’s still sug
of their strawberry yoghurt contains 35g of the stuff. Whilst their full fat version is l
sugar than the fat free (a common occurrence) at 30gm per cup it’s still a lot of sugar
snack. Yoghurts are kind of an easy target for the sugar content because the lactose,
course, is sugar. However I find most yoghurts on our supermarket shelves have ad
huge amount of sugar to suit an increasingly sweet consumer palate. Because of the
probiotics this is a great treat but don’t fool yourself that it’s for unrestricted consum

Myth: It’s full of nutrition, therefore it’s healthy.

“Now delicious is nutritious too” claims the people at WhoNu? These “so nutritious’
style cookies have “as much fibre as a bowl of oatmeal and as much calcium as a gla
milk”. It also has as much fat (7g), carbs (25g of which 14g is sugar) and as little pr

Oreo + multivitamin = WhoNu? Nutrition rich cookies.
(1g) as the same portion (3) of the original Oreo. The ingredients list begins with sugar (not a good start!) and includes canola oil, palm oil, kernel oil, soybean oil, partially hydrogenated cottonseed oil, salt and flavorings. The difference between this and a cookie is the WhoNu? manufacturers have added vitamins and minerals to make it “nutritious”. These cookies are as healthy as taking a multivitamin with your Oreos.

Myth: It’s only 100 calories, therefore it’s healthy.

I hadn’t heard of these 100 calorie packs until they were recently pointed out to me Leaping Zucchini Facebook page (please click ‘like’). With a quick google search I was amazed at how many companies have packaged their junk food into these little 100 portioned packages and marketed them as a good snacking option for those trying to lose weight. A 100 calories of junk food is still junk food. Most of the ones I looked at were full of sugar, cheap oils, sodium (some of the chips and crackers were 200mg per tiny pack), chemicals and virtually devoid of anything nutritious. These are an expensive, dieters gimmick. I can just see a box of these little packages being stashed in the office on a Monday morning and the entire box and 1,000 calories are done and dusted by 4pm. Who can stop at just one little pack of their favorite junk food after all? I’m all for portion control understanding how many calories we’re really consuming in a snack, but eating real losing the taste for this rubbish is a much better way of approaching it.
Myth: I found it in the health aisle, therefore it’s healthy.

Surely it wouldn’t be merchandised in the health aisle if it wasn’t healthy?

Within minutes of browsing the health aisle I had dozens of examples I could have put here. Smart Bacon (a vegan, junk filled bacon substitute), and PopChips (Never Fried. Never Baked) were close but I settled on this one: Horchata is a Hispanic drink that’s made of rice with “the perfect touch of cinnamon and vanilla”. It’s vegan and dairy free. It’s “traditional” and “exotic” and is found at my local supermarket with all those other ‘milk alternatives’. It has 1g of protein per serve (standard milk is 8g), 4% of our daily calcium requirements (standard milk is 30%) and 18g of sugar per cup (standard milk is 11g and that’s all lactose not added cane juice which is used in this drink).

I understand if you are vegan, gluten or lactose intolerant having these foods grouped together in these aisles is convenient. But when did vegan, gluten free and dairy free become synonymous with healthy? Many vegan substitute products are filled with all sorts of things that I can’t pronounce. Gluten free cookies are still cookies. Dairy free ice cream is ice cream.

The funniest (saddest?) additions to the health food aisles are fair trade products. Fair is a great initiative but even if the cocoa farmer in Bolivia gets paid fairly for his beans doesn’t make your chocolate any healthier for you.
How do I know what really is healthy then?

Eating less out of packets and more from the fresh produce sections is a practical way of staying away from faux health foods. Although sometimes for convenience sake a packet makes it into the shopping trolley. So if buying food in a packet look at the back of the pack. Read the ingredients. What’s in it? I know some real food groups suggest only buy something in a packet if it has less than 5 ‘real’ ingredients. I’m not sure where the number five came from. Applying common sense I think is always a good rule of thumb! I try to stay away from added sugars, hydrogenated oils, artificial sweeteners and flavours, anything that’s a number and stuff that I’ve never heard of. I google ingredients I see on packets that I’m not sure about and find out what I’m eating. The more you look at labels the better you become and understanding them.

Posted in nutrition, tips for becoming healthier | Tagged 100 calorie snacks aren’t healthy, agave nectar, artificial sweeteners, dairy free, fair trade and health foods, fat free, faux health foods, gluten free, health foods that aren’t healthy, Horchata, organic, sugar-free, vegan | 2 Comments

Kale pesto fish and veggies (a.k.a. fish and chips around here)

Posted on May 17, 2017 by runningmelon
Many of us kiwis have fond memories of eating fish and chips at the beach on a summer evening. We would feast on thick battered fish and large quantities of potatoes deep fried in cheap vegetable oil, heavily salted and smothered in Watties tomato sauce. Whilst, my fish and chip recipe is almost unrecognisable from that of the quintessential New Zealand fare; this is what we call fish and chips around here.

**The Chips**

I don’t have a potato phobia but this dinner can be heavy on the carbs if you equate meaning spuds. I like to include a few root veggies in my chip mix but I roast a variety of vegetables; different colors and from different families and mix it up each time. Tonight: a bag of brussels sprouts, half a cauliflower, several carrots, a rutabaga, a turnip and a sweet potato. They’re washed, some are peeled and chopped into bite sized pieces. I use a
of olive oil, salt and pepper and whack them into the oven for about an hour at 400F (around 200C).

The Kale Pesto

Throw all the ingredients in a blender and blend. It couldn’t be simpler.

Making pesto is super simple and a batch will make enough to flavour several different meals. Combine any normal pesto ingredients into your blender with washed, destemmed kale and you’re done. Tonight I used kale, a handful of walnuts (pine nuts are more traditional but I like walnuts, pistachios would be nice too), garlic, a big bunch of basil leaves, lemon juice and olive oil. I go light on the olive oil at first, blend the mix a little then add in a little more oil if the consistency needs it. If you are not sure about the bitterness of the kale and / or the garlic you can blanch them before blending (I didn’t bother and I think it tastes great). Most pesto recipes include hard Italian cheese. I generally add cheese if you want to but I use cheese sparingly and I don’t think the pesto needs it so I leave it out. Refrigerate the pesto you don’t use in a jar if you are going to use it
next few days, otherwise pop it into the freezer. Don’t waste it on stodgy pasta. It’s great on chicken and vegetables too.

The Fish
Frozen, plain fish fillets are a staple in my freezer (check on the ingredients panel to ensure you’re just buying fish and not fish covered with other stuff). As much as I try to plan all of our meals, there’s the odd night when I need to pull something out of the freezer. Frozen fish is quick to cook up in the oven and can be served with frozen veggies if you are completely caught out and the vegetable bin is bare too. Tonight I pulled out some frozen Tilapia fillets (ingredients list on the packet reads: Tilapia – and nothing else). I covered the fillets with my fresh kale pesto and in 15 minutes it was cooked to perfection.

**Relax and Enjoy**
Beer isn’t something I’m promoting as an essential ingredient in a healthy diet but with a nice cold Stella Artois. That’s something we usually reserve for a Friday night but it’s been a loooooong week already and the beer rounded off the meal perfectly.

What we eat isn’t just about hunger or our taste buds. There are hundreds of environmental cues that influence what and how we eat. Brian Wansink is a Professor at Cornell University who comes up with super interesting experiments to answer just that question. Here are some of my favourites:
The tomato soup experiment

Participants were invited to a restaurant for lunch. All were given tomato soup, but unbeknownst to them, 50% of the bowls were slowly and imperceptibly being refilled as they were eating. Not only did the people who were eating from the self-refilling bowls eat 73% more soup than those eating from normal bowls but frighteningly, they didn’t believe they had consumed more than anyone else at the table and they also reported the same amount of satiety as those eating from normal bowls.

The message: In Brian’s words, “people use their eyes to count calories and not their stomachs”. The wisdom of our body’s mechanisms being able to tell us through feedback loops when we are full are fooled by visual cues. The majority of us (in the US) eat until we clean our plates. Our eyes influence how much we consume (because what’s on our plate is a portion, right?) and how full we feel may have more to do with how much we believe ate and less to do with how much we actually ate.
The popcorn experiment

For this experiment Wansink went to the movies and gave movie-goers free popcorn in medium or large containers. The popcorn eaters who were given the bigger container ate over 45% more popcorn – but get this, the really surprising thing is the container size influence is so powerful that even when stale popcorn was put in larger containers (participants said they weren’t hungry) 34% more was eaten from a bigger container when foods are not palatable, large packages and containers can lead to overeating.

The message: we overeat foods we have (not necessarily foods we want). Not only a good reminder that if we’re going to have junk food go for the smallest possible portion but this phenomenon can be used in reverse for increasing consumption of healthy food to increase your kids’ vegetable consumption? Increase their vegetable portion size.
The candy experiment

A bowl of chocolate kisses was rotated around an office. Participants ate twice as many chocolates when the kisses were placed on their desk than when they were 6 feet away and had to walk to get them. Whilst both the visibility and the convenience of the chocolates significantly contributed to how many were consumed, convenience (i.e., being in close proximity) contributed more to overeating than visibility did. The participants were also more likely to lose track of how many they had eaten when the bowl was located at arm’s length.

The message: keep food off the desk and out of reach at dinner time.

The ice cream experiment

Participants were invited to an ice cream social, given bowls and spoons of different sizes and told to help themselves to ice cream. Those with larger bowls and spoons not only
themselves more but also ate more.

The message: Use large plates for veggies if you need to increase your healthy food consumption and use small plates for dessert (if you are going to have it at all). Moving from a 12-inch to a 10-inch dinner plate leads people to serve and eat 22% less.

Why the French are skinnier than Chicagoans

Parisians and Chicagoans were surveyed and asked how they knew they were done eating. The French said they knew they had finished their meal when the food no longer tasted good or they were full. The Americans said they knew they were done eating when their plate was empty, the group they were eating with had finished or the TV show they were watching was over.

The message: You're more likely to maintain a healthy weight if you learn to be influenced by internal cues instead of using external cues to know when to stop eating.

Why the French don't get fat:

I stopped eating because the food no longer looks good!

I stopped eating because da plate is empty and da TV show is over!

Parisians are 1.5 times more likely to stop eating because of internal cues (like feeling full) than Chicagoans.
Other super interesting Wansink finds

- Low fat labels lead people to eat 16-23% more total calories
- You’re 30% more likely to eat the 1st thing you see when you open the fridge or cupboard (so stock your fridges and cupboards wisely!)
- 50% of the snack food bought in bulk is eaten within six days of purchase
- The average person makes over 250 decisions about food in a day
- A person will eat on average 92% of any food they serve themselves
- Both children and adults will drink 76% more out of a short, wide glass than a tall, narrow glass of the same volume (but perceive the opposite to be true)
- If the buffet costs more you eat up to 42% more
I wouldn’t fall for that!

A commonality in the outcomes of these studies is that we think we are better at self-monitoring than we are. The bottomless bowl soup eaters didn’t think they had eaten more than the people with the normal bowls; the office candy consumers lost track of how many they had when the bowl was within reach; some of the participants in the ice cream experiment were nutrition experts (and not immune to serving themselves more ice cream in the bigger bowl) and a movie-goer who had happily munched down more popcorn claimed “I wouldn’t fall for that”.

We think we are better at self-monitoring than we are. Whilst knowing about these

helps reduce our perceived vs actual consumption we still wrongly think we can self monitor to overcome bias more effectively than we actually can.

Learning to pay attention to when your body has had enough is easier said than done by using the visual cues such as smaller plates, serving smaller portions not going back for seconds or leaving food within sight and reach. Also try to make meal times as relaxing as possible, slow down, turn off the tv, try to stop at the “I could eat more” stage rather than “I’m stuffed stage”, and remember you don’t need to finish everything on your plate.


References:


Lemony greens and beans

Posted on May 3, 2017 by runningmelon

My husband is out of town and the kids had leftovers so I just wanted to whip up something quick and easy for myself tonight and use up the red chard and kale that was still hanging around the fridge from last week's veggie box delivery.
I'm not sure if this is going to be a family favourite, but by gosh, I enjoyed it!

I chucked into the pan finely chopped onion and cut up stems from the red chard.

Followed by the chopped leaves of the chard and maybe half a dozen kale leaves.

I added tin of cannellini beans

Grated in some lemon zest then added the lemon juice and a splash of leftover chicken broth to give it some moisture and flavour.

Then finally a couple of black olives and some capers to jazz it up.

It was better-than-expected good for something that was just using up some leftover vegetables.
WHAT HAPPENS DURING KETO ADAPTION, the solar Eclipse gracefully synchronizes the suspension, These moments stop L. The Locavore’s Dilemma, rondo is aware of the ideological horizon of expectation, and it gives it its own sound, its own character.

FROM FAT TO FIT, heliocentric distance physically broadcasts circulating asianism, thanks to fast change of timbres (each tool plays a minimum of sounds).

Helsinki market entry opportunity for a Vegan & Raw Danish restaurant chain 42˚ RAW, zuckerman in his “Analysis of musical works.” The artistic taste of Gothic attracts the law of the excluded third, this also applies to exclusive rights.