

For maltainsideandout

Escape the Diet Trap

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Many of us know what it's like to have fought a losing battle with our weight, though we're assured the solution is simple: all we need to do is 'eat less and exercise more'. Yet, while applying the 'calorie principle' can indeed shift some weight, it rarely leads to sustained success. The usual accusation (by way of explanation) is that individuals are eating more and exercising less than they imagine or claim. But I've lost count of the number of intelligent, seemingly straight-up people who, despite playing by calorie-based rules, have nonetheless failed to kiss their love handles goodbye. Can *all* of these people really be deluding themselves, and others?

Alternatively, could it be, perhaps, that the calorie principle is somehow flawed? I believe so, and for several reasons.

To begin with, the calorie principle neglects the fact that the number of calories consumed can influence the quantity of calories burned by the body and vice versa. When caloric intake is cut, the metabolism tends to stall too. But that's not all: experiments show that when people eat less, they tend to spontaneously *move less* too. In other words, the body appears to do its damndest to conserve energy if food supply is curtailed.

One way, perhaps, to counter these effects is to step up one's level of 'aerobic' activities such as running or brisk walking. However, studies reveal that such measures are generally ineffective for the purposes of weight loss. Why? Well, as anyone who has ever exercised on a piece of gym equipment that counts calories will attest to, caloric 'burn' during aerobic activity is generally depressingly slow. Plus, we have the added complication that exercise can 'work up an appetite', and tends to drive us to eat more as a result.

Another stumbling block associated with the application of the calorie principle is that it can shift our focus away from fat and towards carbohydrate, on the basis that a gram of fat contains about twice as many calories as carb. The issue here, though, is that carbohydrate is the chief stimulator of *insulin* – the chief hormone responsible for the deposition of fat in our fat cells.

Some of the worst offenders in terms of blood sugar release and insulin secretion turn out to be starchy carbohydrates such as bread, potatoes, rice, pasta and breakfast cereals – foods traditionally emphasised on typical reduced-calorie, low-fat diets.

The blood sugar spikes such foods tend to induce have other hazards too. For instance, they promote a process known as *inflammation* in the body. One effect here is to disrupt the functioning of another hormone involved in weight control called *leptin*. Leptin speeds the metabolism and curbs the appetite. By interfering with leptin's ability to do its job, a carbohydrate-rich diet can therefore slow the metabolism and heighten hunger – not an ideal situation for someone seeking to control their weight. Also, highs of blood sugar often lead to lows 2-3 hours later. The end result can be false hunger and a tendency to cravings for sweet or starchy foods.

Put this all together and you'll perhaps see why calorie-controlled, low-fat diets fail so miserably.

A prime part of the solution is to temper blood sugar and insulin levels. Lower insulin levels mean allow fat to flow out of the fat cells. But weight loss is not the only benefit here. Fat liberated from fat cells can be burned by body, and therefore is a form of *food*. This might help explain why when individuals adopt a diet which lowers insulin levels, they typically eat several hundred calories less each day than they ordinarily would, but without conscious restriction of food or increased appetite. Time and again I've witnessed individuals lose weight while being *less* hungry. Of course, if hunger is kept at bay, it makes eating healthily easy and sustainable. It is because of this that I often tell people that the *less* hungry they are, the *more* weight they stand to lose. Scientific evidence and clinical experience show that long-term weight control can be *easy* – when we know how.