

# The diets don't work

Many diets recommend processed foods on the shelves of supermarkets and stores, rather than eating nutrient-dense foods that can have a positive effect on wellbeing, as Rosalia Barresi explains

**Rosalia Barresi**  
Complementary  
Therapist  
and Nutritionist,  
Oxfordshire

**D**iets don't work – fact! Once the weight has been lost it can be hard to maintain unless you are extremely strict and focused. Many diets tell you to eat processed foods on the shelves of supermarkets and stores, rather than nutrient-dense foods that are better for you because they are unprocessed. This is the key as these foods can have a positive effect on our being.

By eating processed foods we are increasing our sugar intake, contributing to weight gain, obesity and diabetes. Not exercising and a sedentary lifestyle are also huge factors to being unhealthy and obese.

The yo-yo effects of sugar in our bloodstream play havoc with our mood throughout the day. We can start to recognise the effects of sugar and the hidden sugars contained in processed food, and their detrimental effects on our bodies. We gain weight for a start. Our white fat is activated (this 'white fat' is the fat that causes obesity). If we have more brown fat this is what is used to help us exercise and lose weight.<sup>2</sup>

## Food on the go

For around 10,000 years, grains have been eaten more regularly as farm techniques and the pressures of increased population and mouths to feed increased. These primitive needs were the precursor to what we now have in our supermarkets, in the form of quick and convenient processed foods. Despite this length of time, the human body, our metabolism and digestive system have still not adapted to these foods.

In the 20th century, big food companies come along and created products packed full of chemical additives, produced in vast stainless steel industrial vats. Under the all-permeating umbrella of profitability, these



chemicals can help to add to a longer shelf-life. But their knock-on effect is cumulative, seen in health problems in the population devouring them for the sake of low price and convenience.

Rice has been a staple food in China for over 10,000 years, and its equivalent, corn, in the Americas for a similar period. Emmer or farrow wheat, which is more akin to what we would consider natural and is provided free of charge by nature, has been replaced by commercial, genetically bread-specific wheat; the type that we are all familiar with. This type of wheat has been altered hugely. In some parts of America wheat was not eaten until 300 years ago. This demonstrates that our bodies have had to adapt to grains and the very refined type has affected us. Spelt, eikhorn and farro are all old grains, which have a beneficial natural effect on us.

Eating smaller amounts frequently, or 'grazing' if you will, is the perfect way to keep our metabolism operating in our favour. Snacking here and there on foods such as nuts and berries can kickstart our bodies into a much healthier way of living. Expressions such as, 'Well, it filled a hole' will not be needed when we can appreciate and savour

all the excellent and variety of food we in the west have access to.

### Hidden sugars

Hidden sugars hit our blood sugar levels hard. Our blood sugar falls on an empty stomach and we seek a quick fix in the form of something fast, easy, usually cheap and available, to eat. We are rewarded in the short term with a delicious energy-filled sugar rush, but the sugar is burnt up and we crash again. It's the same with coffee and alcohol (in the latter case causing the dreaded hangover). Even seemingly healthy options, such as fruit juices, syrups, honey and smoothies can have this effect.

Spiking sugar levels are followed by an inevitable rebound and crash effect. This cycle can lead to weight gain, as we are almost always not burning off the deluge of calories we are putting in. There is also the effect of fructose on our bodies where we put on the extra calories in the form of fat. This was fine during the hunter-gatherer epochs of our cavemen ancestors, but not so fine with central heating, nice clothes and a cushy sit-down office that many of us spend our lives in. Eating as much as we can in the way of fresh food can help prevent weight gain, as long as our portions are balanced and we are keeping our blood sugar levels normal. Foods with little nutritional value, such as white rice, pasta and bread, should be eaten minimally. A diet incorporating nutrition found in, among others, lean meats, fish, shellfish, eggs, nuts, vegetables and root vegetables, fruit, berries and mushrooms requires a little extra preparation, but can pay off in our sense of vitality and wellbeing.

Recently in Italy, it occurred to me yet again that the Italian cuisine depends so much less on processed food being part of a meal. Food is something that is taken much more seriously and dinner is a time of sanctuary. Compared to the rest of Europe, Italy is proud of having proportionally fewer fast-food outlets and commercial coffee shops; the only Starbucks coffee shop there will be opened in Milan this year. It speaks volumes about the importance of cuisine and culture to its people, and the benefits of the Mediterranean diet. It's OK to have the occasional fast-food takeaway or highly processed microwave meal – but if illnesses (minor or major) or mood swings are to be avoided, a balanced diet of fresh food could help do this for you.



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### Fat or sugar?

Lean protein is beneficial, but not too much. Eat fruit in its natural form and avoid drinking fruit juice as this causes a sugar hit. Good grains like quinoa, millet, brown rice and barley, which are slow release, and small quantities of fats like cheese and butter are fine in sensible quantities.

As long as small quantities of fat are eaten we will lower our risk of heart disease, diabetes and obesity. Sadly, as a nation people are getting bigger because of processed food that is laced with sugar.

The more one eats the more one wants. Sugar hits the reward centre of the brain and after eating it the brain craves more. Have you noticed this? After something sweet or something processed, we want more of it. Have you ever eaten a whole bar of chocolate intending to eat only couple of squares?

The fashionable incorporation of mindfulness in what we do, in this case eating, works. We can taste, take time over and savour each and every small mouthful; no guzzling down or filling a hole, appreciating the sensations of the food and the gentle energy giving properties they give us. **PM**