The History Of Dieting and Take Home Lessons
by Dan John

Moderation and Glazed Doughnuts

A couple of years ago, I was asked to speak to a group of high school students. I said no. I was asked again and I said no again. The third time something in my guilt-ridden conscience made me say yes. I regretted it as soon as I found out the topic: moderation.

I instantly realized I'd been conned. Nobody wants to stand before a group of teens and talk about "just say no," or death and dismemberment from drinking and driving. I needed another focus, one that would make the same point without having a roomful of adolescent faces glaze over like this morning's doughnuts.

Fortunately, a friend of mine, Kathy, had just told me about her current three day diet. It was called the "7-7-7 Diet." On day one you ate seven eggs throughout the day. That, by the way, was all you ate. On day two you consumed seven oranges and on day three you ate only seven bananas. According to Kathy, on day four you woke up seven pounds lighter.

Now, I didn't have the heart to tell her this, but any period of starvation will cause "weight loss," but by day four she'd probably wind up fourteen pounds heavier with less lean muscle tissue. Kathy's wonder diet (you "wonder" why she does it) was the perfect inspiration for the topic of moderation. During my research I also came up with a few truisms about weight and fat loss that seem to hold the test of time. Here's what I learned.

Moral Fiber, Masturbation and the Cancer Diet

As you wander around the grocery store this week, notice that yesterday's diet crazes are today's staples. Oddly, some of the oldest "diets" were designed to battle not only corpulence but immorality. The remnants of these diets can be found on grocery store shelves even today.

In the 1830's, Reverend Sylvester Graham believed that gluttony was the gateway to lust. Any such "venereal excess" was deemed evil. Graham thought men should remain virgins until age 30, and then should only have sex once a month after marriage. Masturbation was off limits too as that particular act leads to "a body full of disease" and mental illness.

Want sex? Have a cracker instead.

To get rid of hunger, both sexual and nutritional, Graham prescribed a vegetarian diet that included a biscuit he'd created which later became known as the Graham Cracker.
Within a few decades of Graham, another noted dietician and full-time undertaker, William Banting, lost 50 pounds on lean meat, dry toast, eggs and vegetables. "Banting" became the verb for weight loss in America not long after the book, *Letter on Corpulence*, became a best seller.

At the same time, Dr. James Salisbury proposed a high protein diet of ground meat patties and hot water. He preached against "starches" and thought these would turn into poisonous substances during digestion. The solution was ground meat three times per day with limited amounts of vegetables, fruits and starchy foods. Today you can still order Salisbury steaks in most family restaurants.

The most noted of the pre-1900 health enthusiasts was enema enthusiast Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. Yep, the same guy who basically invented cold cereal and whose name probably appears on the cereal boxes in your cabinet. Kellogg invented Corn Flakes and an early version of granola to reduce sexual desire and curb the "epidemic" of masturbation.

"Breakfast or a cure for masturbation?"

He also recommended that small boys be circumcised without anesthetic so they would forever associate the penis with pain. Women should have their clitorises treated with carbolic acid to prevent what he called "abnormal excitement." Yes, Kellogg was a real winner.

Kellogg’s regimen of vegetarianism and colon cleansing were lampooned in the 1994 film *The Road to Wellsville* with Anthony Hopkins portraying the good doctor. (Hopkins also portrayed a carnivore in *The Silence of the Lambs*. The Doctor Hannibal Diet will not be discussed here).

"Meat: Don't eat it and don't spank it. But how 'bout some Corn Flakes and a lovely enema?"

So, graham crackers, Salisbury steaks and Kellogg’s foods were at one time the cutting edge of nutritional
strategies in America. Moreover, we already have one of the most interesting relationships in understanding weight and fat loss: the role of money.

My personal favorite ad campaign for weight loss came in the 1920’s when Lucky Strike cigarettes promoted itself as a fat loss supplement: "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet." Lung cancer seems to be an effective weight loss program, although I wouldn't recommend it.

Certainly, a quick look through the back pages of women’s magazines, especially those in the 1950’s, would provide plenty of insightful ways to lose weight, including creams, lotions and, of course, the famous tapeworm infested diet pills (although I still think this is more "urban legend" than truth.)

We've come a long way, baby.

3 Basic Diet Methods

The three basic diet methods can be categorized into:

1) Food Sorting or Combining Diets: These methods have been around a long time, as some argue that the Kosher food laws are dietary magic for weight loss. Basically, it's the idea that certain foods or combinations of foods are good or bad.

2) "More" Diets: Whenever you see the word "high" in a diet, it's probably part of this group. Usually a diet like this encourages the consumption of more of a certain macronutrient: carbohydrates, protein or fat. These normally appear after a period of some other thing being high. For example, higher fat diets followed the low-fat diet craze.

3) "Less" Diets: These would be recognizable with the word "low," but I also included various starvation diets with this idea, too.

Food Sorting or Combining Diets

Food sorting or combining diets have a certain appeal to me at a basic level. It isn’t the fact that I drink a six pack of beer every night that makes me fat; it's the darn peanuts that I snack on with the beer. It's the combination that causes the gut, not calories. Whew, what a relief! Now I'll just drink beer.

Pavlov, of dog drooling fame, had a theory that combining protein rich foods and carbohydrate rich foods together was the greatest problem in digestion. Chiropractic doctor Phil Maffetone developed this concept in a series of books with my favorite being Everybody is an Athlete. Basically, eating a piece of salmon is fine but adding noodles would be an issue for the body. A few hours later, though, that bed of noodles with a tomato sauce would be fine, too, just don’t add a steak. Uh huh.

Being the star of the sitcom Three’s Company developed Suzanne Somers into a household name and "diet expert." No, really. She has a series of books that deals directly with this concept of food combining. Fruits "eaten alone" is the bedrock of many such food combining programs.

Besides Pavlov, there are other food combiners before Somers. In the 1920’s, Dr. William Howard Hay felt that blood pH was the key to health, and one of the factors was not combining starches, fruits or proteins at the same meal.
You also needed to have daily enemas and slow down your chewing, a very popular early twentieth century idea for health known as "Fletcherizing." Horace Fletcher came up with the idea of chewing food until it was liquefied in the mouth, then swallowing. For the record, this was still being discussed as a proper digestion tactic during my high school years.

Judy Mazel may be the most famous food combiner before Somers. Her fruit heavy diet was the rage in the early 1980's with the publication of her book, *The Beverly Hills Diet*. I can clearly remember women eating forkful after forkful of spaghetti, assured that the mango, papaya, or pineapple they ate after the meal would ensure no weight gain.

This diet highlighted a major diet fad during the eighties: the brand name issue. The "Cambridge Diet" was not from Cambridge but written by a doctor working there. They used multi-level marketing (legal pyramid scheme) to sell a protein drink. The Beverly Hills" or South Beach names seem to sell better than the "Ozark Mountain Valley Diet." Funny that.

About this same time, Dan Duchaine and Dr. Mauro DiPasquale concomitantly began writing about the idea of longer periods of food combining. Mixed with specific training for specific days in the cycle, one could go five days of high fat and high protein eating with practically no carbohydrates. This was followed by a two day carbohydrate feast. The original diets, *BodyOpus* and the *Anabolic Diet*, have become very popular for strength and power athletes in the past few years.

Recently, guys like Dr. John Berardi have been advocating diets where you try not to mix too many carbs and too many fats in the same meal. His "Massive Eating" and "Don't Diet" approaches were introduced right here at T-Nation.

The upside to these plans is that no macronutrient is considered evil. You get to eat protein, carbs and fats, as long as the timing and/or meal combinations are addressed. The simple idea that a dieter is forced to plan eating might be the secret weapon in the success of these diets and others.

"More" Diets

Most people recognize the "more" or "high" diets as the last few decades of diet books have emphasized one heroic macronutrient battling to the death with another "evil" macronutrient. Fats are bad, eat more carbs! No wait, carbs are bad, eat more fat!

Historically, some single foods have been the secret of becoming "lank," as was the goal in Dr. George
Cheyne’s works in the late 1600’s when he told his followers to increase the amount of milk they drink.

The advent of the first "high" macronutrient diets didn’t really show up until the early 1960’s, although writings from *Strength and Health*’s Bob Hoffman had been encouraging high protein for decades. In Herman Tallor’s book, *Calories Don’t Count*, Taller pushed the high-fat, high-protein, low-carb diet. Quickly, several books appeared including Stillman’s *The Doctor’s Quick Weight Loss Diet* rich in meat and cheese and, a decade later, Dr. Robert Atkins’s first book on the topic, *Diet Revolution*.

Since the mid-1990’s, the lower carb, higher protein diets have taken center stage. In fact, one could argue that we’ve just seen a paradigm shift in diet thinking in the past few years when the shift of evil macronutrients went from fat to carbohydrates. Barry Sear’s book, *The Zone*, gave rise to the 40-40-30 phenomenon and shifted many away from thinking protein and fat were evil.

Sugar Busters, *Protein Power*, *The Carbohydrate Addict’s Diet* and the various paleo-diets have all been accepted as a mainstream style of eating today. Simply mention "I’m eating Atkins" and the waiter will know exactly what and what not to serve you.

It's obvious now even to researchers that the two-week Atkins induction seems to really make a change in weight on the scale for many people. Increasing the fat in the diet seems to also remind people what it feels like to be satiated after a meal. Again, the reason these kinds of diets work might simply be because the dieter has to plan a meal or, at the very least, limit choices at a meal.

"Less" Diets

The "less, low and no" diets can be traced almost directly to 1910. The concept of "calories" had emerged and with that Gustave Gaertner invented the food scale. His mantra for weight loss: "Without scales, no cure." Within a decade, Dr. Lulu Hunt

Peters offered her lifelong diet plan: begin with a fast, "fletcherize" your food, and limit yourself to 1200 calories a day for the rest of your life.

Soon, of course, 1200 was seen as too high. Diets began to recommend 600 calories with the famous "Hollywood Diet" of 585 calories a day for eighteen days. The staples of this diet — grapefruit, eggs, oranges and melba toast — became the iconic foods of diet perhaps even to this day. Ask grandma about diet advice and she might give you that list.

Later, diets of 400 calories a day are recommended by some doctors to eliminate obesity. By the 1950’s, a whole new market develops for dieting cookbooks which now host entire sections at your bookstore.

In the late 1970’s, Nathan Pritikin decided that eating fat was the cause of being fat and wrote *The Pritikin*
Program for Diet and Exercise, which advocated a very low fat diet. Dr. Dean Ornish added to this a decade later with his book, *Eat More, Weigh Less*, by emphasizing a low fat vegetarian diet for weight loss and improved blood profiles.

The "fat makes you fat" issue is still popular among most people interested in fat loss which leads to a lot of diet failures. All too often, in a carbohydrate friendly environment, one stops eating only when all the chips are gone.

Floating around the diet world during the 1960’s and 1970’s were also several liquid protein diets based on gag inducing products made of liquid cow skin as well as Herman Tarnower’s Scarsdale Diet which allowed only 700 calories a day.

The advantage of these kinds of diets is the rabid, warrior-like mentality that clinging to them seems to develop. Unfortunately, especially with ultra low-fat diets, blood profile tests don’t improve very much. In fact, many meat and cheese eating Atkins dieters find their blood work superior to their old rabbit diet. Maybe the lesson is to eat the rabbit, not the rabbit’s dinner.

What Have We Learned, Kiddies?

So, what do we take from all of this? First, notice that when you look over diets in books or articles that most still discuss "weight loss," not "fat loss." If you want to lose weight, that has practically no meaning. Certainly, an accident with a lawn mower would cause weight loss, but is that our goal? Second, study this stuff enough and you'll notice that you'll soon become a prophet of sorts by guessing the next great diet wave.

The most concrete advice I culled from all of this revolves around one basic issue: your food choices. The key here is that you need to prepare yourself on a daily and weekly basis to be able to make good food choices.

Years ago, at a workshop, we were asked to keep a food journal for a few days and simply "add up" the foods we ate. Not the volume, calories, protein, or anything like that; we were simply asked to make a column of the foods we ate during that time. The point was simple: most people eat about ten to twenty foods a week. Don’t believe me? Keep the journal.

If those foods are:

- Eggs
- Salmon
- Tuna
- Oatmeal
Blueberries
Almonds
Chicken
Apples
Grapefruit
Cottage Cheese
Vegetables

... then you probably don't need to read this article!

So, some quick ideas:

• Never shop or even go out hungry. That’s right, eat before you go out to eat. Not only will you save money, but you'll make better food choices. Eat before you go food shopping and you won’t buy stuff that'll end up as another chin.

• You must have a shopping list. I have one at work, one on the refrigerator and plenty of extras in a drawer. Take a few minutes to make sure you have what you think you have. Then, stick to the list!

• Buy a lot of the stuff that you're planning to eat. If you decide to eat four eggs a day and you buy a dozen eggs, your new-found enthusiasm will end in three days. Then you'll likely eat something you hadn't planned to eat.

• Snacking on fruits isn't a bad idea. Try to eat a bowl of apples. It's really hard to do. I've found almonds or apples to be ideal snack options. Keep 'em handy and you won't be so tempted to pull into a fast food joint.

Finally, really strive to make good food choices. A woman once asked me if I knew a diet where you could eat anything you wanted. I said yes, but first she’d have to eat two pounds of salmon, three cups of oatmeal, a cup of blueberries, two bowls of mixed vegetables, and a carton of cottage cheese. After she finished that each day, she could eat anything she wanted!

In short, focus on good foods and the rest will probably take care of itself. Just think, it only took us a couple of hundred years to figure this out.

About the Author

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Currently, Dan is ranked number one in the world in the Highland Games, ages 45-49, broke the American
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