

Taylor Forth

Holistic Health

Final Paper

15 November 2020

Why Diets Don't Work

For centuries now, men and women of all ages have attempted to diet in order to lose/maintain weight, improve their health, or change their figure. There are over 300 different diets on the market today. A few of those diets include the paleo diet, vegan, atkins, blood type diet, mediterranean, raw food, keto, low-carb, and many more. Each diet targets a specific food group to exclude or concentrate on. Diet technically means the type of food a certain individual, animal, or community habitually eats. However, dieting is just a temporary solution for a food plan and will continuously fail. I decided to write about diets not working because I have struggled in the past sticking to eating healthy and I wanted to know how I can fix this and help others understand it as well.

Roughly two-thirds of adults are currently trying to lose weight or maintain their weight. Many of these individuals partake in new behaviors only for a short period of time and not maintaining those behaviors. According to Boucher, Shafer, and Chaffin (2001) “individuals reported using each of the following behaviors at least once in 4 years, but used these behaviors only 20% of the time; decreased fat intake (78.7%), reduced calories (73.2%), and increased exercise (82.2%)” (p. 169). These individuals may have made unrealistic expectations, and when those expectations are not met, they give up. One reason for this is that weight-loss goals can be based on appearance or physical comfort, rather than improving overall health. Boucher et al. (2001) also discussed that in today's society, Americans are spending around \$33 billion

annually on supplements for weight loss and services, even when there may not be evidence supporting their effectiveness. People are using dietary supplements as a means to achieve quick weight loss. “Under the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), a dietary supplement is defined as a product other than tobacco that contains ‘dietary ingredient’ and is intended to supplement the diet” (Boucher et al., 2001, p. 169). Those ingredients include minerals, vitamins, herbs, amino acids, and metabolites. A concern about these dietary supplements is that the DSHEA does not require pre-market safety approvals and manufacturers do not have to disclose any information about the safety or alleged benefits of the products. There are many other concerns regarding supplements such as advertising “drug-free”/”natural” and the lack of congruency between doses and forms of products. Despite the lack of evidence and controversy for these supplements, many individuals choose to self-medicate with them for the means of weight loss (Boucher et al., 2001).

According to Drillinger (2020), desired effects for diets disappear after one year and weight loss and weight management are the two popular reasons for it. Roughly 45 million Americans attempt a diet each year; however people quit right after because results aren’t initial. In a study conducted by BMJ, evidence showed that most macronutrient diets for the first six months resulted in moderate weight loss and improvements in cardiovascular risk factors such as blood pressure. However, around one year of the diet, the effects of weight reduction and improvements for cardiovascular factors disappear. Another study in 2018 followed 29 long-term weight loss studies. It was found that by two years, half the weight initially lost was regained, and by five years, 80% of the weight was regained. Therefore, diets are only a short-term solution (Drillinger, 2020). Selig (2010) elaborates more on why diets don’t work. She stated that when you slow your metabolism, it makes it harder to lose weight. Deprivation of restrictive

diets may lead an individual to overeat or binge eat. Selig stressed that fad diets can be harmful because they lack essential nutrients and once you have “completed” the fad diet, you simply go back to your old eating habits. This can then lead to eating disorders; a person is eight times more likely to develop an eating disorder if they diet. Those eating disorders include anorexia, nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, pica, and various others (Selig, 2010).

Every five years, nutrition guidelines are issued and they influence diets in the United States, determining nutrition education, food labeling, government research priorities, and public feeding programs. The guidelines are created by a committee composed of 11-15 experts, who are appointed to review the best and most current science to make recommendations. However, there have been many concerns with how accurate these guidelines are. For example, the committee proposed in 2012 that there is a connection between saturated fats and heart disease. Nonetheless, there was a large controlled clinical trial by the Women’s Health Initiative. It had 49,000 people within the lower intake of the saturated fat group and a controlled group. Experimenters observed no benefits for the experimental group in the incidence of fatal and non-fatal coronary heart disease events and total cardiovascular disease. There were also three meta-analyses that had been conducted and found that saturated fats did not increase cardiovascular mortality, but the committee still downplays these findings. Studies about low carbohydrate diets were also conducted and the committee ignored the results. “The overall lack of sound science and proper methods in the 2015 report could be seen as a reluctance to depart from existing dietary recommendations. Many experts, institutions, and industries have an interest in keeping the status quo advice, and these interests create bias in its favor” (Teicholz, 2015).

Diet Fiction is a film directed by Michal Siewierski containing various health nutritionists, whole food marketers, health coaches, physicians, biochemists, and others. They all gave their professional opinions on obesity and diets. On June 30th, 1998, The World Health Organization (WHO) defined obesity as an epidemic. This was crucial for food and pharmaceutical companies because everyone could profit from this by providing a cure. Obesity is a condition characterized by the excessive accumulation and storage of fat in the body. It can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, and many other health-related issues. We live in a very toxic food environment because processed foods keep us coming back to eat more. The focus needs to be on how to lose weight in ways that enhance our health, rather than mortgage it. However, food addictions are so common today and there is chronic overnutrition that no one wants to deal with. A major issue the public faces is that the nutrition industry lies, gives misinformation, and sells products that are not connecting people more deeply with themselves. The media can fool us as well because one can literally go find any “study” conducted on nutrition or food that supports the wrong thing. For example, a professor could give a presentation on how smoking is not as harmful as we think; that professor could go find studies in medical journals stating that smoking is actually beneficial because it relaxes people and takes away anxiety. We would be ignoring the large body of information that smoking is terribly horrible for us (Siewierki, 2019).

The next topic the film discussed was New Year’s resolutions because everyone thinks it is the time to lose weight; therefore, gyms have an 18% increase in new numbers, but those numbers plummet within months. When you diet and work out at the same time, your body tells you it can consume more, but ultimately it can’t and you overload on calories. However, you can not exercise alone just to see weight loss results. A lot of people think that all you need to do is

burn more calories than you consume, yet this does not reverse the deleterious effects that bad food had on your gut microbiome. It also affects your metabolism in a bad way and you can not simply exercise that away. According to Siewierki (2019), about 15% of adults in the United States have used a dietary weight loss supplement. These companies are roughly making \$2.1 billion a year, yet they are just fooling the population because many don't actually work. Next, they focus on specific diets to debunk. The first one discussed is portion control diets; people think all calories are the same, so all you have to do is eat less of a specific food. This is definitely not the case and many times it leads to overeating. You can not just look at the amount of the food, you have to look at the type of food (food density). They stressed that sugar is not the entire problem, but excessive amounts of sugar and fat can be evil to our bodies. Oil is an unhealthy food because it is highly processed and has no nutritional value (it definitely leads to excess calories). Even with this knowledge, people thought that it helped with weight loss. Saturated fat diets actually increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease (triples the likelihood). People were actually putting butter in the coffee in the morning because they believed it was "healthy" for their bodies (Siewierki, 2019).

Low carb diets were discussed next, and people were told to cut carbohydrates. Experts say that bad calories are your enemy, not carbs. Many think that they must get rid of all carbs such as white bread, but quinoa and beans are good carbs for you. Low carb diets actually cause more chronic diseases than helping prevent them. The statement that grains cause weight gain and inflammation is incorrect. Whole grains prevent heart rate, cancer, lowers risk of premature death, anti-inflammatory, and prevents Type II Diabetes. This type of diet also increases your risk for premature death, which is called all-cause mortality. The next focus was on yo-yo dieting, which is where the recurring cycle on losing weight and then gaining it all back. It is not

sustainable because we try to lose weight very quickly and expect instant gratification. This just makes us become incredibly hungry, have food cravings, and force us to gain all the weight back. Chronic problems can arise from dieting like this (i.e. three weeks of dieting and then go back to old eating habits after). A very popular diet, but one that is widely misunderstood is the ketogenic diet. By using these diets to burn fat, we are actually doing something very unnatural. This diet has never been studied long term; therefore, Internal Medicine Physician, Michelle Mcnacejeb, stated that she would never recommend this diet to a patient. It can cause low blood pressure, kidney stones, constipation, nutrient deficiencies, eating disorders, and increase risk of heart diseases. The mediterranean diet is based on whole food and plant-based food, but from that information, we took that olive oil is good for us, when it is not. Gluten-free diets are unneeded unless you have celiac disease, can't tolerate gluten, or allergic to it. Cutting of foods such as cookies, cakes, or breads are obviously going to make one feel better because you are taking the bad foods out, but you shouldn't completely take out gluten. Currently, our society is obsessed with eating meat and protein. Studies have shown that we should not consume a large amount and we need to reduce our red meat intake. The main topic should be getting enough fiber daily instead of protein (Siewierski, 2019). All of the diets listed have issues among themselves, but there are other reasons that diets fail.

The reasons diets do not last for individuals can be for various reasons. People see dieting as a chore or punishment for being overweight, leading them to resent doing. Instead, people should view it as a reward to get to make their bodies healthier. Another reason is that some healthier options cost more. For example, McDonald's sells a cheeseburger for \$1 and a salad for \$6. Someone who is on a budget would rather spend the dollar than the six in order to save money. The film did stress that there are ways to budget a healthy diet if needed. The main

takeaway from *Diet Fiction*, is that basic nutritional knowledge is what many individuals lack and; therefore, causes them to pick unhealthy diets to start. Ultimately hurting their health for years to come (Siewierski, 2019).

Throughout this essay, I have made it a clear understanding as to why diets do not work for individuals. The goal now is to change the mindset of today's society, including myself, that dieting and exercise is needed to better my health, not just for weight loss or appearance. I do plan on taking this information into consideration when deciding to diet again. One key thing I took away from the articles I read was that even though you burn more calories than you consume, you can not reverse the damage that has been done to your microbiome. I never thought of it like this, so I am glad it has been brought to my attention. Another concept I found important is the idea of just going 100 calories over for one day. It seems like nothing, but if it becomes constant, then you are looking at 700 calories over for the week and that builds up. That is something I would need to focus more on in the future because it could make a big difference, especially during volleyball season. Overall, I truly think if the population were to educate themselves on the reasons why diets don't work and could be harmful, then they would actually be able to benefit from it and make a healthy change.

References

- Boucher, J. L., Shafer, K. J., & Chaffin, J.A. (2001). Weight loss, diets, and supplements: Does anything work?. *Nutrition FYI*, 14(3), 169-175. <https://doi.org/10.2337/diaspect.14.3.169>
- Drillinger, M. (2020, April 3). *Most diets don't work for weight loss after a year: Here's why*. Healthline. Retrieved November 22, 2020, from <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/diets-work-for-one-year>
- Selig, M. (2010, October 21). *Why diets don't work... and what does*. Psychology Today. Retrieved November 22, 2020, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/201010/why-diets-dont-work-and-what-does>
- Siewierski, M. (Director). (2019). *Diet fiction* [Film]. Gravititas Ventures.
- Teicholz, N. (2015). The scientific report guiding the US dietary guidelines: Is it scientific? *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 351. Retrieved November 22, 2020, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26521982>