

INTRODUCTION

AS WITH MANY projects, “Calorie Wars: Fat, Fact and Fiction” started with something personal. Larry contacted Jeff after reading his book “[Beyond Cosmic Dice: Moral Life In A Random World](#).” We got together to discuss the philosophy detailed in the book and soon realized that along with a shared interest in ethics, we had both been noticing a disturbing health trend in popular culture with increasing frustration.

That we need help is easy to see every time we walk down the street. The experts confirm what the obscured view in front of us tells us. They estimate that 64% of adults in the United States are obese and that this percentage is growing. Even our children are being affected, as nearly every one in three American children under the age of 18 is overweight. Associated with this weight gain are increased risks in adulthood for joint problems, angina, high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, type 2 diabetes, and ultimately premature death. Outside of the human costs, health experts estimate that treating adult obesity-related ailments will cost the American economy nearly \$150 billion in 2009.

Everywhere we looked we see someone championing a “superfood” or complicated formula for losing weight. We each have our anecdotes of frustration. Jeff hit a wall of bias after submitting a blog to the Huffington Post detailing the fallacy of all diets based on anything other than calorie reduction. The editors there believed that the sage advice of “eat well, eat less and exercise” constituted “medical advice” that could only come from an MD, which was simply an excuse not to publish an article that challenged virtually every other blog on the site.

For Larry the epiphany came when standing captive in the checkout aisle at the supermarket. In front of him, in bright colors and eye-catching fonts was a women's magazine that promised to help readers “lose weight like a teenager,” “lose ten pounds a week,” and introduce them to crucial “fat-burning foods.” A well-known doctor wearing a white lab coat over his shirt and tie smiled at Larry from the cover. “Is he really signing off on this?” Larry wondered, getting angrier as he thumbed through the magazine. “He knows better.” Larry thought of all his patients

and many others who might see the magazine and come away with the idea that by following Dr. O's special diet they would be delivered from their weight loss problems. This was nothing but a modern version of snake oil, and a disgrace.

Rather than tapering off, the \$40 billion-a-year weight-loss industry, bolstered by pseudoscience and wishful thinking, continues to ramp up. Magazines, books and diet gurus touting special fat-burning and metabolism-increasing foods and eating schedules are the rule rather than the exception. As a biologist and as a physician, we could clearly see the impact of this barrage of myth-disguised-as-science on the nation's knowledge base and health.

Most of us no longer believe in the Tooth Fairy. Yet we believe in the equivalent, as adults, when we accept the idea that we can lose weight by taking a pill or eating some superfood or by following the latest nutrition fad. Because most of us lack an understanding of how physics and biology dictate what happens in our bodies, we are easy targets for an industry trying to convince us to buy weight-loss programs no less mythical than exchanging dollars for teeth at night. Our general lack of knowledge has also allowed us to accept as food all kinds of engineered junk destined to make us fat, including many "health foods."

As a scientist, Jeff is concerned that pseudo-science has taken over the collective conscience, confusing the differences between basic terms like "calorie," "metabolism" and "fat-burning" as they are now commonly but incorrectly used. If the fundamental concepts are not understood, we can be easily exploited by official-sounding diet advice that is nothing but pure nonsense.

Having worked for over 30 years as a family doctor and hypnotherapist with patients trying to lose weight, Larry knows there are no shortcuts to lasting weight loss. The solutions themselves are not complicated, but for most of us losing weight takes time; creating a lifestyle that will keep us thin requires dedication. Having seen the powerful mind-body connection in action with hundreds of patients, Larry believes hypnosis can help identify unknown weight-loss hang-ups and reinforce healthier habits. But hypnosis is no quick fix. True liberation comes only when we rid ourselves of our ties to superfoods, fast weight loss and fads diets, and instead embrace a sustainable way of eating and exercising based on real science.

We've seen the toll these trends in weight gain have taken firsthand and felt an obligation to use what we've learned to explain the truths of weight loss and guide you toward healthful eating and exercise so that you, too, will have a real chance to lose weight and improve your health.

Fact and Fiction: Don't Be Fooled by Fad Diets and False Promises

Let's start out by being blunt: we're fat and it is killing us. We need to talk honestly about how we can decrease our girths and improve our health. If we hide behind euphemisms and false promises we will never make any progress. That is why this book is all about tough love: telling you the hard truth about losing weight that you might not want to hear. But it is real, and what we offer really works.

As such, this book is short. Our goal is to tell you everything you need to know, and not one thing more. We could easily pad the text to make this a 300-page tome. Instead, we stick to the most essential basic facts. This slim volume contains everything you need to lose weight and keep it off, and nothing extraneous to that specific goal.

We include here, too, some important myth busting to attack the worst, and most popular, diet claims. One prominent diet guru, for example, tries to explain “why a calorie is not a calorie.” Run for the hills! This nonsense masquerading as science exemplifies everything that is wrong with the diet industry today. There aren't different kinds of calories, just as there aren't different kinds of degrees Fahrenheit. Fad diets try to defy physics with pseudo-science, but you can't fool Mother Nature.

If you learn one thing from reading this book, know that any diet promising results too good to be true is nothing but an empty promise meant to con you. Admit it: you've tried a dozen diets, and have eventually abandoned each one, often packing on more pounds than ever after the last diet is a bitter memory. Why? You start each with renewed enthusiasm and commitment, so why don't they work? Herbal Magic, Zone, Atkins, South Beach, 4-Hour Body, Body Fat Diet, the list is almost endless, and so are the gimmicks, broken promises and silly fads. The reason for “serial dieting” is that weight loss has no easy answer, but that is nevertheless exactly what you are promised, and each ultimately leads to failure.

Do not succumb to the seduction of easy. There are *simple* answers, but no easy ones. That is the hard truth: losing weight and staying thin is not easy. Anyone telling you otherwise is selling you Florida swampland.

You might object that you know friends who really lost weight following one diet or another. Let's be crystal clear about this: any diet works by altering your behavior to reduce caloric intake. If eliminating carbs from your diet induces you to eat fewer calories, you'll lose weight. But that has absolutely nothing to do with avoiding pasta and rice; what you've done is found a way to reduce the total calories you consume.

So what is wrong with that? Nothing in itself, but we have yet to find someone who can avoid carbs for the remainder of his or her life; and when carbs come back in, so do the pounds. Fads fade, but calories stick. The answer instead is to find a healthy, sustainable way to reduce caloric intake so that staying thin is a natural and normal part of your daily life.

Have you noticed that almost every major diet to reach fad status includes compulsory supplements and meals? Are these items essential to reaching a healthy weight and maintaining it? Of course not. The diet industry makes a fortune training you to eat tasteless, manufactured food because they think you are not smart enough to eat real food and too lazy to cook for yourself or bag your lunch. The truth is, real food tastes much better than whatever special formula some guru or food giant corporation prepackages for you as a “convenience” or “time saver.”

Are we really too busy to feed ourselves properly? No, what we are is too busy doing nothing much productive: texting, logging on to Facebook, babbling on our phones and watching TV. That driver weaving in the next lane is probably not urgently texting the hospital to prepare the OR for the next organ transplant. We confuse the immediate for the important. We confuse motion for action. We really do have the time to stop by the store and pick up some fresh fruit. It's simply a matter of setting priorities. We have time to live well, no matter how busy we are,

because in the end living well takes no more time than living otherwise.

You can be fat or you can be thin; the choice is yours. This book is designed to help you make well informed choices. Instead of supporting an industry selling junk science and snake oil, declare your independence, take control of your life and lose the weight you want. We show you how with some very simple advice that requires nothing from you but a real desire and dedication to slim down. But you must be willing to let go of the destructive fantasy that you can lose weight without working hard at it with a deep commitment to the end result. That is tough love, and that is the truth.

Rather than presenting restrictive diets that simply cannot be followed long term, our suggestions are geared toward helping you find a new, sustainable way of eating and exercising. While we aren't deprivation advocates, losing weight *will* require you to set some new boundaries around what you eat and do not eat. We hope that as part of choosing well, you will come to like and include many new foods that can substitute those you may have to set aside.

Our first chapter, [The Basics](#), deals with the calorie and the science of weight loss. It is our hope that with a good basic understanding of what goes on in your body when you eat, you will be better able to tailor your eating and food choices to your weight-loss goals. The next chapter, [Before You Jump In](#), previews what to expect when you follow our suggestions, including *realistic* weight-loss time frames. Being realistic is one of the most important elements in creating lasting weight loss. Since losing weight and staying thin requires some deep self-examination, this chapter also gives you some hard questions to ask yourself about your weight and what you plan to do about losing excess fat.

In the last chapter, [It's A Plan](#), we introduce our rules: eat less, choose well, be active and restructure your relationship with food. These tools will help you focus on what you'll need to do lose weight for good.