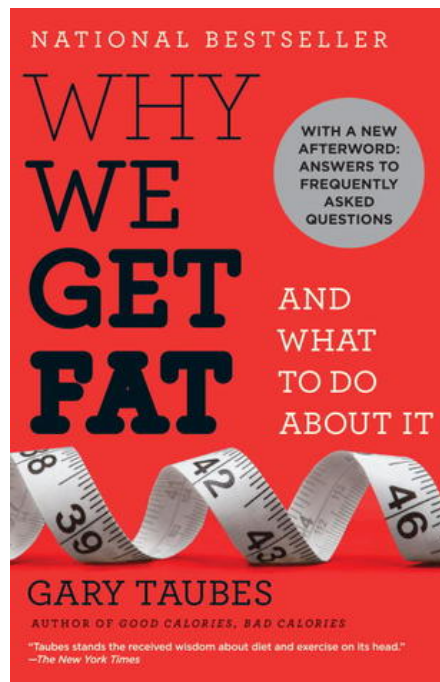




Why We Get Fat: And What to Do About It

Gary Taubes

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Building upon his critical work in *Good Calories, Bad Calories* and presenting fresh evidence for his claim, Gary Taubes revisits the urgent question of what's making us fat—and how we can change.

He reveals the bad nutritional science of the last century—none more damaging or misguided than the “calories-in, calories-out” model of why we get fat—and the good science that has been ignored. He also answers the most persistent questions: Why are some people thin and others fat? What roles do exercise and genetics play in our weight? What foods should we eat, and what foods should we avoid? Persuasive, straightforward, and practical, *Why We Get Fat* is an essential guide to nutrition and weight management.

Why We Get Fat: And What to Do About It Details

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Margie says

An argument in favor of low-carb diets. I'm giving it two stars because I wanted to punch the author. A hint to all aspiring authors out there: if you find yourself writing, "As I said previously," 10 or more times in the first six chapters, you might be repeating yourself too much.

Taubes cites many studies, though notably almost none of them are recent. He explains why, but really makes it sound as though all current researchers into obesity and nutrition are a) idiots and b) highly invested in maintaining the calories in/calories out format of most current diets. I kept asking myself, "Why would researchers be so invested in that paradigm? Why wouldn't they want to make breakthrough discoveries? Why wouldn't they want to solve the issue of obesity and make a name for themselves?"

Although there may be some sound reasons to adopt a low-carb diet, Taubes comes across as so condescending that he lost my support.

Trish says

This book is packed with studies and information that dispell the information we've been served up by government bodies for the past 50 years. Simply put, carbs and sugars are the cause of weight gain, not fats or calories per se. You may feel this goes against the grain - :-) - but it would be difficult to refute the arguments presented in this book. I certainly feel that the only thing I have to lose from following the guidance in this book is 20 unwanted pounds and a point or two off my blood cholesterol reading.

Lee says

Yeah I know New Directions didn't put this one out, it's not the fancy German dead white male lit I tend to like, but it does an admirable job of weaving more than a century of medical literature -- some of it German -- into a convincing argument that's at times stunning (I said "wow" aloud once or twice) and even heart-breaking on a grand scale -- for example, all those low-fat foods you see in the supermarket have extra carbs to replace reduced fats, so people buy low-fat stuff thinking it has less fat so it won't make them as fat as the full-fat stuff (makes perfect sense!), but according to the thesis of this book, the opposite is true: *carbs make you fat*, not the fat you consume. You'd think that shoving lard down your gullet wouldn't be better for you (your weight and your heart and triglyceride levels and blood pressure) than an equivalent amount of bread, even whole grain stuff, but it's counterintuitively true -- this book includes a few really interesting, counterintuitive, scientifically proven again and again assertions (eg, we don't get fat because our metabolism slows; our metabolism slows because we're getting fat). All of this is heartbreaking when talking about how the obesity epidemic snowballs as overweight/obese mothers prenatally increase their unborn children's insulin resistance, which leads to fatter children who more easily become obese when eating typical western carb/glucose diet, who then grow up to have metabolically worse off children, on and on (human bodies are literally snowballing thanks to carb-freaked metabolisms). The structure read sort of like a wonky thriller: initial hook followed by lots of history up front followed by pop science reviews of 100+ years of studies followed by easily vanquished anti-low carb arguments (ie, the impact of potentially higher

LDL "bad" cholesterol levels) followed by a representative high-protein/high-fat/low-carb diet, which apparently is nothing new -- it's been popular pretty much forever, especially among native Americans and eskimos, as well as among 19th century physicians up till the 1960s -- only recently have we associated this sort of traditional human diet with some dude named Atkins. Sucks to have grown up during the food pyramid era, with its fattening base of grain. Recommended to me by my mama whose own mother was done in by carbs/sugars and a genetic predisposition for insulin resistance she passed down to her daughter and now to me. Easy to eat this way now that it's summer but the test will come when it's time for stouts and pizza in the fall and winter. Oh if only porters were brewed from porterhouse steak instead of grains . . . and if meat didnt come from cute cuddly animals or require massive suboptimum land used to fatten these animals with grain, land covered in ever-increasing tonnage of environmentally awful excrement et cetera etc

John Hanson says

It works for me, and it works for EVERYBODY I've seen try it. I am a 36year diabetic, and I follow many, many diabetics around the world. The science is valid, the logic is valid, but you have walls that prevent you from hearing the story. Read this with an open mind, think about his ideas, and try it if you don't believe.

Understand a few things: ancient humans followed animals. North America wasn't populated by migrating pineapple hunters! Refined grains, refined sugars, and even refined vegetable oils are pin-points on the timeline of life. We have no business eating them in quantity. Understand also the evidence that saturated fats and cholesterol are bad for us. You won't find the science because it doesn't exist. There's only a mish-mash of epidemiological evidence which no person should be drawing conclusions from. Example: house fires are 100% associated with firefighters. Let's get rid of them all! Pfft. That's not science. The fact that cholesterol exists in plaque and saturated fats raise cholesterol prove absolutely nothing. We've followed this advice for 40 years and we've only gotten sicker!

But we make bad decisions you say. Really? How do you explain obesity in six month olds. How do you explain a type 2 diabetes epidemic in the American military? These groups are fed by the food guides. If you think military personnel have no willpower, then you need to give your head a shake. Read the book and start thinking about things critically.

Betty says

Reading this book completely changed the way I look at food and nutrition. I deliberately held off from writing a review until I had followed Taubes' recommended regime and food intake for some time. Having started the book almost a year ago, my husband and I began eating in a whole new way and it took nearly a month for us to "lose" our lust for carbs and get used to our new lifestyle. The weight came off slowly but steadily and more importantly, we both lost inches (I dropped three dress sizes in six months - this is really significant because I am quite short and any amount of weight I carry makes me look the size of a house). It has been slow - I have lost nearly 15kg in 9 months - but this does not bother me, as Gary Taubes has made me realise that it took years to put the weight on and it will take time to lose it. Not only do I feel fantastic, but nearly a year down the line I am still losing and enjoying being able to wear lovely clothes again - and that's with very little exercise! My brain is quicker, I don't forget things like I used to and I have so much more energy and positivity! And as for the health benefits, I am far healthier than I have been in years. My friends are incredulous because I eat so much cheese, butter and cream! After following my new eating plan (I do not consider myself as being on diet) for three months, I started experiencing dizzy spells and weird leg cramps. I visited my doctor who ran a full series of blood tests, including all thyroid tests (I have been

suffering from hypothyroidism for years and have been taking thyroxin for nearly 7 years). The results were astonishing - the cause of the dizziness was my thyroid. My new eating plan had kick-started my thyroid again and because I was still on medication, I was over-producing the hormone. My doctor immediately halved my dose of medication and retested me a month later, then the month after that. The dizziness and cramps disappeared. I have been completely off the medication for four months now and a recent blood test has confirmed that my thyroid function has returned to normal! As for the rest of my test results - my doctor told me that my full blood count is that of an 18 year olds! Although my overall cholesterol was higher than it's ever been, there were no red flags because my cholesterol to HDL ratio is very good. I have also suffered with low blood iron following years of regular blood donation and marathon running - at one stage having to give up blood donation because my iron reserves were so low. My iron levels are now extremely healthy. My doctor is 100% behind me on my new eating plan.

I had to laugh at a review of this book that said that's its greatest downfall is that you have to follow this "diet" for the rest of your life and that that's impossible to do. Well, we all know carbs are bad for us, so that's like saying "the problem with giving up smoking, is that you have to give up cigarettes for life!". Taubes' book has truly hammered home the message that refined starch and sugar is poison. Thanks to this book, I have experienced a complete paradigm shift and am all the better for it!

Richard says

Gary Taubes, the author of *Why We Get Fat: And What to Do About It*, wrote a moderately lengthy article in the New York Times Sunday Magazine on April 17, 2011, with the title "*Is Sugar Toxic?*" The evidence seems to be accumulating steadily that the amount of sugar that the average American consumes is profoundly unhealthy, and the article does a very good job explaining why.

I'm not sure if that article covers the same grounds as this book, but I can very briefly recap the article:

- Increasing sugar consumption is highly correlated with diabetes, metabolic syndrome, heart disease, and some cancers.
- Granulated "table" sugar—*sucrose*—consists of one molecule of *glucose* bound to one molecule of *fructose*; that pairing is easily broken, leaving one molecule of each. High-fructose corn syrup ("HFCS") consists of roughly half each of those same two molecules, and all the evidence is that there is no caloric or metabolic difference between the two forms. Plain corn syrup, on the other hand, is effectively just glucose—no fructose.
- *Glucose* can be metabolized by any cell in the body whereas, with few exceptions, *fructose* must be metabolized in the liver. Therein lies, apparently, a key difference. When the liver is presented with fructose, it preferentially metabolizes it, dramatically elevating insulin and related hormones.
- A high steady intake of fructose (either from sucrose or HFCS) means that insulin is elevated too often, leading to insulin resistance.
- Fructose is also sometimes thought of as the fruit sugar. Whole fruits still have *fiber*, which apparently slows down intestinal absorption so much that it doesn't overwhelm the liver the way a soda does. But *fruit juices*? Yeah, sorry — rip out the fiber and you're once again sucking down nothing but sugar water with a bit of "health halo effect" vitamins.
- Insulin resistance is linked to heart disease (and other, related, disorders associated with a poor glycemic balance), and metabolic syndrome.

- A thickening waistline is the visible indicator of metabolic syndrome.
- Insulin is a growth factor in tumor production, which provides one likely explanation for why rising cancer levels have correlated strongly with the rise in sugar consumption for the past hundred and fifty years.

The video that Taubes links to, by the UCSF scientist Robert Lustig, is also well worth watching, even if you don't read the book. It presents the example that a teenage boy's caloric intake, on average, has gone up *in five years* (from 1990 to 1995) a total of 275 calories *per day*. Where is that from? Not fat, so much — that represents only 45 calories out of the total. "In fact, it's all in the carbohydrates." That would be an increase of 228 calories per day. Where is that coming from?

Mostly soda. One can of Coca Cola or other soft drink is about 150 calories. It probably isn't a coincidence that the other standardized container is the 20-ounce plastic bottle. Unless someone is addicted to the 44-ounce "Big Gulp" style. Or, especially disheartening: a "Texas-sized Big Gulp" is reported to consist of a 60-ounce Coca Cola, a Snickers bar and a bag of Doritos, all for 99¢.

Profoundly important, and profoundly depressing, since this trend doesn't look likely to be reversed any time soon.

I hope the book goes into more detail on metabolic and biochemistry. I fondly remember the Krebs Cycle from my high school physiology class, and I really like knowing the science behind all this stuff.

For those of you just looking for the highlights, read the New York Times article, and then watch the video. If you can't be bothered to watch Robert Lustig's 90-minute long video, you could download a 52-minute interview with Lustig from KQED's Forum program: *Sugar and Health* .

Update : yet another way of getting the highlights in an easy-to-comprehend dish is to check out Lifehacker's *What Sugar Actually Does to Your Brain and Body*. For your health's sake, study at least one of these, and get that non-fruit fructose out of your diet.

Scott says

I didn't realize this when I started it (though I probably should have), but this book is a 272-page advertisement for low-carb diets. My main criticism is that Taubes comes across as condescending. He's so convinced himself that low-carb diets are the best that he's unwilling, and in fact does not, consider compelling counterarguments against that contention.

The first half of the book criticizes the conventional wisdom that, in order to lose weight, people must consume fewer calories than they expend. He cites numerous studies and research that establish that doing one of either exercising or reducing calories does not typically result in weight loss. When people exercise more, they eat more. When they eat less, they expend less energy. The major flaw in this position is that virtually none of the research addressed the efficacy of diets that require both diet and exercise. Clearly, both in conjunction can work and have worked; otherwise programs such as Weight Watchers would have no success, and the TV program Biggest Loser would not exist. I don't care how obese a person is, if that person accurately account for calories expended, even if sedentary, and then eats less than that, that person will lose weight. Even if that person eats almost entirely carbs. How else could Mark Haub's (of Kansas State) Twinkie diet have worked? Taubes lost a lot of credibility by failing to acknowledge this fact.

And while it makes sense that diets which severely restrict calories, such as 1500-per-day diets, wouldn't catch hold, what about diets that restrict only a moderate amount of calories? Say, the amount of energy a person a day expends minus 100 calories? I actually lost 15 pounds last year by doing something similar, and I ate desert almost every day. I've kept the weight off by closely watching to ensure that I don't consume more calories than I burn.

That's not to say, however, that some people aren't more predisposed to becoming obese or that it isn't easier for some people to stay lean. But with sufficient motivation, weight loss can be achieved, even while eating carbs.

I acknowledge that many people can't, or won't, live a lifestyle requiring both diet and exercise in the long term, which is a valid criticism I suppose.

But will people live a low-carb lifestyle in the long term? A low-carb diet is boring. How many breakfasts of bacon and eggs in a row can someone stomach? Are people really going to stay motivated, in the long-term, to avoid potatoes, beer, pasta, and sweets? Do you know how many places low-carb dieters can't eat at with their friends? Low-carb diets are also expensive; many can't afford to eat meat at nearly every meal. And what's the success rate of those who begin low-carb diets in the long-term? Astoundingly, Taubes doesn't even address that question.

I'm somewhat perplexed at the unusually high ratings this book has received, given that it hasn't addressed the issues above. It's almost as if the low-carb diet is a form of religion about which supporters will not allow others to blaspheme.

Natalie says

If you have struggled unsuccessfully for years to lose weight, you **HAVE TO READ THIS BOOK**. It is literally the best piece of writing I have ever read pertaining to weight loss. I think everyone should read it, whether you need to lose weight or not, because everyone needs to understand how the body works, and everyone needs to understand how many lies we've been told the last 60+ years.

It answered every question I've ever had about weight loss, including:

- Why do I eat healthier and exercise more than some of my friends, but I am much more obese than them?
- Why can my friend and I go to weight watchers together and she loses weight but I don't?
- Why do I crave carbs and sugar like a drug addict?
- What is insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome exactly?
- Is fat bad for you?
- Is my weight my fault?
- Am I really just slothful and gluttonous?
- Why does "calories in/calories out" not work as well as "they" keep promising me it will?
- Why are some people so doggone skinny?

I was either prophetic or intuitive when several years ago, I said to my husband, as we were watching The Biggest Loser, "I hope that one day people will change the way they look at obesity, so that they don't judge and blame people so horribly. I hope that one day they will view someone obese not as someone who has a character flaw, but as someone with a medical problem, just like any other disease, because surely there is

more to it, like hormone problems, and things like that."

Half way through this book (or perhaps sooner,) I was yelling at the book, "I knew it!" I feel so vindicated after years of knowing I was doing my VERY VERY VERY best to lose weight, and yet failing. There was actually a reason why I was failing, and that reason was called insulin.

The author's premise is that much of the best science and research on weight loss was lost after World War II. The medical and weight loss community grasped onto some theories that were fraught with error and flaws, but kept touting them as God's truth, even though they knew their research didn't support the advice 100%. He says they refuse to look at endocrinology, and fat regulation and how the body accumulates fat tissue. If one does that, one can clearly see that one of the biggest contributors to fat accumulation is high blood sugar caused by too much of the hormone, insulin. Naturally, the solution turns out to be to stay away from carbs and sugar. The more you do, the more weight you will lose, HEALTHILY!

And he doesn't just hope you take his word for it. Every page cites scientific studies upon studies upon studies.

The author's tone is clear, logical, easy to read, and at times, humorous and ironic. I enjoyed this book so much I didn't want it to end. I plan on reading his book, Good Calories, Bad Calories, which treats the subject in more depth.

After reading this book, not only am I getting rid of the big flour & sugar canisters on my counter, but I feel I can get rid of my scores of other diet & weight loss books, too. I'm sure this will be the last "diet" I will be on because it will be successful this time. But I can't stress enough how enlightening this book has been. I feel motivated to give up the carbs because I now understand thoroughly the science and reasoning behind why they are bad for us and why they make us fat. If I could stand on the street and give out copies, I would. That's how much I liked the book!

Suzanne says

Although I am inclined to agree with Taube that low-calorie diets and exercise do not lead to weightloss, based on personal experience as well as some new research, I find his argument for a primarily meat-based diet unconvincing. The primary weakness of the work is the lack of any scientific evidence to support his conclusions, but it also suffers from severe bias. He carefully presents only that data which will support his claims, and ignores reams of contradictory data.

He claims that pre-historic humans lived primarily on meat, but gives no support for that claim, and ignores any evidence that would suggest otherwise. Anthropological work with hunter-gatherer societies today shows that about 80% of the diet is plant food gathered by the women, including seeds, grains, roots, and fruits. The meat that is provided by the men is wild game, which is low in fat and an uncertain source of food.

The only way that he can make his case is to skip thousands of years of human civilization and known history. Certainly historic humans, if we can go by the business records of the Sumarians as well as the Bible, lived on beans, grains, fruits and vegetables.

Logically, if humans were not eating cereal grains, why did they settled down to farming in the first place? And if starchy vegetables, fruits and grains are to blame for obesity, why didn't the epidemic begin around 2,000 B.C.E. with the development of agriculture?

Why weren't the Irish the fattest people on the planet once they began living primarily on potatoes?

He holds up the example of the Pima Indians, yet ignores the known fact that their native diet consists

primarily of beans, corn, squash.

And if fruit leads one to be fat, why aren't Europeans massive? They eat fruit as dessert at least twice a day. They also eat bread with every meal.

He admits that he can't explain why Asians, whose natural diet is high in rice and vegetables, with only a little lean protein, are not fat until they begin eating a Western diet. He unconvincingly suggests that it's because they don't eat much fruit -- a claim he does not document.

The only conclusion that can reasonably be drawn from the data he presents is that it is the introduction of refined grains and refined sugars as basis for our diets coupled with massive overeating that has led to the obesity epidemic.

Mariah says

Gary Taubes shares his knowledge of not what only makes us fat, but what also keeps some people leaner than others. He emphasized how weight isn't only an overeating problem. It can also be caused by genetics, hormones and much more. We need to be careful of the assumptions that we make, because many people that are obese (especially) are because of one of these health issues.

This book was an eye-opener to me and broke down all the assumptions that I have made about food and bodies.

Kevin says

My son saw me reading this book and said, "Put the book down and go outside." Tough love... but a smart son.

Some interesting ideas but I believe this journalist chose to ignore many important studies arguing against such a drastic dietary change. I get it...cut some of the crappy carbs...we all agree. But adding the copious amounts of high fat meats and cheeses makes no sense to this coronary student. For an alternate look that is backed up by literally hundreds of studies, read "Prevent a 2nd Heart Attack" by Janet Bond Brill. I find it much more helpful!

Jessi says

First Line: "In 1934, a young German pediatrician named Hilde Bruch moved to America, settled in New York City, and was 'startled,' as she later wrote, by the number of fat children she saw - 'really fat ones, not only in clinics, but on the streets and subways, and in schools.'"

Taubes takes everything that I have spent the last several years learning about weight loss, fat gain, diabetes, and eating and turns it on its head. I am not yet certain whether I am willing to buy into his arguments, but there are three things that are making me at least consider that he might be right or partially right. 1.) He begins the book by asking all readers to analyze the material (his book and any others) and to make decisions for them. Most fad diet books tend to just take the stance that they are absolutely right and never remind us to use our brains. 2.) For every argument that I came up with while reading this book, he addresses it at some point and provides data to back up his theories. 3.) I have been trying to lose weight through recommended

methods (low-fat diets, calorie cutting, and exercise) for almost nine years and have watched many of my family and friends with the same struggle. I recently read that of the people currently and actively trying to lose weight, only ten percent or so will actually be successful and of those, 96% will fail to keep off the weight they lose. With chances like that, I am willing to consider a different method and give it a try.

I will also say that this book is simply a fascinating read. I don't think I have ever been so enthralled with a non-fiction book (especially one steeped in science) that I literally couldn't put it down, so this was a first for me.

Update 2/29/12

I followed up this book by reading the New Atkins Diet, Primal Blueprint, and the Paleo Diet. From these four which sometimes contradict each other, I constructed a diet with unlimited meats and veggies, no processed sugars, grains, or legumes and limited amounts of nuts, berries, dairy, and root vegetables. I am exercising but only in ways that I enjoy, specifically yoga and hiking. Since Jan 2012 I have lost 24 lbs, 1 pant size, and I feel much more energetic. I have had a few slip ups, but not many and when I do eat sugar or carb heavy items I'm almost immediately exhausted and grouchy. I am at the lowest weight I have been in nine years and my success makes it much easier to stick with it. I've got 66 lbs to go and for the first time I have hope that I'll actually make it and maintain it.

David says

I was attracted to this book, because it contains some interesting ideas, like "we don't get fat because we overeat--we overeat because we get fat." There may be some truth to this concept, and for me, it was the highlight of the book.

After that, though, the book goes downhill. Like a lead weight. Basically, Taubes recommends a diet very similar to the Atkins diet: meat, fat, and some green leafy vegetables. Yes, you can lose weight on this diet, but then you have to stay on it forever. Taubes is honest, when he writes that this is not a diet book, one that you follow for a while just to lose weight. Instead, it must be a long-term, total lifestyle change. And there's the rub. It is very very difficult to stay on such a regime for the long term. People feel sick and constipated on this type of regime. And, Taubes really gives short shrift to the many medical problems that will ensue.

For example, Taubes does not even mention the extra strain put on the liver and kidneys. Since someone following this regime will be eating TEN TIMES more protein than is needed, the excess protein has to be metabolized by the liver and kidneys. Yikes!

As another example, this sort of diet is not a good long-term solution for diabetics. Dr. Atkins admitted as much, in his second book. And there have not been many good studies of the circulatory health of people on this diet; Only one has been done (Fleming RM. The effect of high-protein diets on coronary blood flow. *Angiology*. 2000 Oct;51(10):817-26.) and the conclusions are that blood flow is impeded, and artery disease increases.

So here we have a journalist who is giving nutritional advice. He has never treated a single patient, and he is ignorant of the long-term effects of the regime he espouses.

Diane says

This is a somewhat dense book, filled with numerous case studies and scientific research about why sugar and carbs make us fat. To summarize, it is all about insulin production, and whether the body is burning fat as fuel, or if the body is just storing fat.

The book also discusses the decades-old line that to lose weight, you simply have to eat less and exercise more. Taubes disagrees, saying the formula is over-simplified and what is more important are the *types* of calories you eat. There are health benefits to cutting back on carbs and sugar, and extensive research is included.

Despite needing to skim some chapters because they were so dense, the overall argument was persuasive and this book was inspiring enough that I am giving this eating plan a try. The author includes an appendix with guidelines for a low-carb diet, based on a Duke University medical clinic. To summarize, you can eat eggs, meat and fish, green vegetables, and some fruits. You can also eat cheese, butter and cook with oils. No bread or flour products, no potatoes or pasta, and nothing sugary, such as honey, jam, cookies, etc. If you remember the Atkins diet, it's similar to that.

I was directed to this book by Gretchen Rubin, who mentioned it in her lovely and inspiring memoir, *Better Than Before*, which is all about forming and practicing good habits. One of the ideas both Rubin and Taubes discuss is whether it is easier for someone to moderate eating a certain kind of food, or whether it is easier to abstain altogether. For Rubin (and myself, I must admit) it is easier to completely abstain from a food. Some people can successfully moderate, such as having only one cookie a week, for example. I could never do that. I could never have just one cookie, just one potato chip, just one scoop of ice cream. For me, it is easier to make one decision to abstain from a food, and then get on with my life. I find it liberating.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the science behind a low-carb diet.

Trevor says

I want start this one with a disclaimer. I really know virtually nothing about human dietary requirements and anyone that takes advice from me on this subject is a fool. Also, the depth of my ignorance is such that this guy (who knows infinitely more than I probably ever will on this subject) could make me believe that a diet rich in horse droppings would make me taller. All the same, and with my general ignorance presented as a given, I have to say I found this a very interesting book and quite convincing.

The other disclaimer is that my mother and sister are somewhat obsessed with low cholesterol diets. Something I've been resisting for about two years now.

The fundamental idea that lies behind the generally accepted theory of why we get fat is that it is all about a misbalance between the energy we take in via our food and the energy we expend in working during the day. He makes the point early in the book that if you mess this balance up by as little as a bite of toast a day then over a twenty-year period you will end up obese.

He is really very good at reducing to the absurd the generally accepted theories of why we get fat. The problem is that we humans prefer really simple metaphors that also link nicely to the world we live in. This is part of the reason why the mind used to be thought of as a steam engine and now is compared to a computer, when, really, it isn't like either. Our bodies are likely to be compared to a car. You put fuel in and that lets you drive around – except that if you keep putting fuel into your car that you don't use your mini doesn't grow into a Cadillac and then into a bus – you know, in the way we do. By his stressing how it is almost impossible to balance calories in and calories out he then turns his attention to exercise.

It seems reasonable that if you want to lose weight the best way to achieve it would be to burn your fat off through exercising. The problem is that exercise makes you hungry. So, yet again you need to somehow balance calories in and calories out and if you are like me and have tried to do this you will know that it is virtually impossible. I've used calorie counters and my iPhone to tell me how much energy I've burnt during my walks – but my weight remains remarkably consistent whatever I seem to do.

Central to his argument is the idea that not all food is good food. The calories in and calories out idea is that you could get all of our calories from coke and as long as you were burning off the same number of calories during the day your weight will remain the same. This is the fuel in / energy out model taken to the extreme. But the human body doesn't work like that. Essentially there are two mechanisms that are used to power our bodies and these come into conflict and help to make us obese. The first is how our bodies respond to sugars and carbohydrates. These foods are easy to digest and easy to get energy from, so our bodies digest them first. In response our bodies produce insulin – but one of the things insulin also does is to stop our cells from burning the fat they have stored in them and rather to store more fat in our cells. With increasing levels of insulin in our blood our bodies never get around to burning the energy reserves that are stored as fat within our cells.

This process has a kind of irony about it. We eat carbohydrates and sugars and they encourage fat into our cells to be stored for a later that never comes and by raising the insulin levels in our blood eating carbohydrates ensures that that fat can't ever be used. But our bodies still need energy – so even though we ought to be sated, we crave more food, particularly carbohydrate rich food that can quickly be turned into blood sugar for an energy boost. This again spikes our insulin levels, which again makes it impossible for us to get to the energy stored as fat. So, instead we lay down more fat and feel hungrier still.

The method of overcoming this vicious cycle is to stop eating carbohydrates and this will then allow our bodies to reduce the amount of insulin in our blood and thereby allow our bodies to start burning our grossly increased fat reserves.

Insulin, then, is the problem – essentially, this guy is saying that obesity is a kind of diabetes. But he goes further – he says that many of the diseases that are associated with Western diets are effectively forms of diabetes. This includes many cancers (breast and colon in particular) and Alzheimer's – which he claims people are now referring to as Type Three Diabetes.

So, how to get thin and live a healthier life? Well, this is the uncomfortable part of the story for me. We have to give up sugars and carbohydrates and to eat much more meat and fat. As counter-intuitive as it might seem, fat and meat are 'good calories' and he provides an evolutionary just-so story to prove it. He claims that meat, rather than vegetables and starch, was the key to our diet as hunter-gatherers. And as such we have evolved to eat lots of meat and certainly not lots of bread.

As you can see, this is a full-frontal attack on carbs and like I said, I've no idea if this attack is justified – although the case he makes is very convincing. What he says makes sense. If any of you have some link to something that debunks this viewpoint, I would be keen to read it.

And my interest in all this? Well, the problem is that diabetes doesn't so much run in my family, it sprints. Out of the six siblings in my mother's family only one does not have diabetes. If avoiding diabetes means I can also avoid Alzheimer's I'm more than happy to give up just about anything.

The high meat and high fat diet does have lots of things going for it – not least the promise that it allows you to lose weight without feeling hungry all of the time. I've actually tried exercise and limiting calories and exercise doesn't work for weight loss (though it is much better at improving mental wellbeing and that isn't something to be sneezed at). The promise of an easy way to maintain a healthy weight and avoid the associated problems of increasing body weight is very appealing – but at the risk of sounding particularly

Protestant, it all does sound a little too easy. All the same, I am interested in science and don't like to think that I am believing something that is not supported by the facts.

This is a very interesting book. The problem is that it is supposed to be the snappier version of Good Calories, Bad Calories – but if this is snappy I dread to think what that book must be like. This could really have been cut in half again without much loss, but I do understand he is trying to cover all arguments against and I have to say he does do that. All the same, if what he has to say is even only half true then much of the dietary advice that has been given to us for around 50 years is not only useless, but actually counterproductive.

More links and info on this review here: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>
