

healthy

ISSUE: 24 2014 LIVING

IS LOW-CARB EATING THE ANSWER TO OBESITY?

The latest stats are in and they don't paint a pretty picture of New Zealanders, or of any other nation for that matter.

A review of more than 1,700 studies covering 188 countries from 1980 to 2013 failed to find a single country that had been able to reverse the worrying obesity trend that has resulted in 2.1 billion people being either overweight or obese. That's nearly 1 out of every 3 people in our global community. Back in 1980 this figure was 857 million, or 20% of the global population.

New Zealand come out above Australia for our rates of both adult and childhood obesity. Not something we should be proud of. In New Zealand 2 out of every 3 adults are either overweight or obese - that's an estimated 2.2 million Kiwi adults. We don't have many more than that.

The statistics and the clinical outcomes for the population's health are pretty grim and no one is arguing that this is a significant problem, but what remains to be agreed upon is what to do about it.

For the past 40 years we've been told to reduce our intake of fat, particularly saturated fat and to eat 60% or so of our calories from carbohydrates. The NZ Ministry of Health's current recommendations (as of June 2014) state that we need to eat breads and cereals every day; a minimum of 6 servings to be precise, of breads, breakfast cereals, rice, noodles and pasta. But many nutritionists and researchers think this is a disaster for our health.

If we've been eating the same way for the past 40 odd years and our health is declining while our obesity skyrockets - then we really have to ask why we would carry on following this advice, it's clearly not working.

Since the early 1970s the consumption of saturated fat has decreased by around 11% while the consumption of carbohydrates such as pasta, grains, fruit and starchy vegetables has increased by 25%. The nutritional quality of many of the carbohydrates in the modern diet are very poor, with more and more of them coming from processed food



So what if it isn't dietary fat after all but too many carbohydrates that has made us fat?

made in a factory with increasingly higher levels of sugar. As this Western style diet spreads across the globe reaching even remote villages in the Himalaya's obesity and poor health follow. Modernisation has not been good for our health.

So what if it isn't dietary fat after all but too many carbohydrates that has made us fat? Well there is plenty of research to support this. A critical review in 2001 that assessed diets based on varying levels of fat and carbohydrates found that it wasn't fat that dictated waist size or even chronic disease, but a diet high in refined carbohydrates and sugar. Furthermore, there have been rigorous clinical trials that have shown that a higher fat and lower carbohydrate diet is better for reducing heart disease as well as obesity.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) have picked up on this and just this year (2014) have reviewed the recommended intake of added sugar, reducing it from 10% to no more than 5% of our calorie intake. To make this easy to visualise – that’s no more than 25g or 6 teaspoons of sugar per day for adults – a single can of soft drink (soda) typically contains around 40g or 10 teaspoons.

Prior to 1800 the annual sugar consumption per person in the United Kingdom was less than 5kg. During the 1800s there was an increase to around 8kgs annually per person. With the industrial revolution of the early 1900s came a massive leap of sugar consumption to over 30kg annually per person. With the exception of small reductions during World Wars I and II this trend has continued to increase – and obesity along with it.

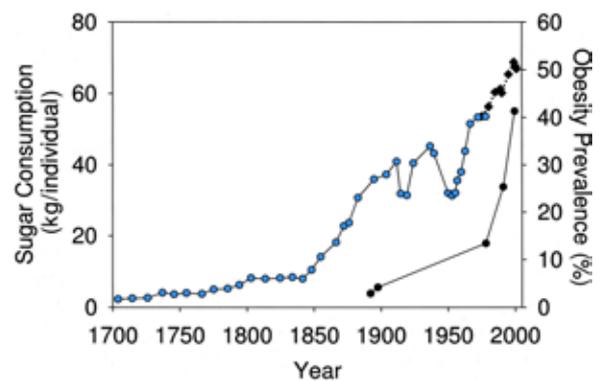
Where to from here?

Well the science and a lot of industry experts are suggesting a diet low in carbohydrates with good fats and adequate protein is the way to go. This is more in line with the way that we used to eat, pre-industrial revolution and is really what our bodies are suited to.

1. Your plate should consist mostly of vegetables
2. Go easy on the starchy root veg like potatoes and kumara
3. Eat protein with every meal, it doesn't have to be meat - eggs, dairy and nuts are all good options
4. Reduce carbohydrate intake to 1-2 servings from whole grains, pulses, lentils and starchy root vegetables – choices that are nutrient dense
5. Don't fear fat – choose healthy unprocessed fats e.g. avocado, nuts, salmon, olive oil, coconut products, even the odd rasher of naturally cured streaky bacon
6. Limit natural sugars – yes fruit is natural, but it is loaded with sugar, stick to 1-2 pieces daily
7. Get rid of refined sugars
8. Avoid processed pre-prepared food
9. Don't drink soda. Just don't. Not diet, not regular, none of it.
10. Think fruit juice is ok? Think again. It's concentrated sugar without the benefit of any fibre

Typically, to maintain good health and stable weight your daily limit of available carbohydrates (that's starch and sugar) should be around 100-150g, though this will vary depending on your activity level, individual metabolic rate and other factors.

Remember, these dietary guidelines are not solely for weight management but for everyday living if you want to live a healthy, long life.



Bibliography

Ng M et al, 'Global, regional, and national prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults during 1980–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013' The Lancet, E-pub 29 May 2014, S0140-6736(14);606460-8

AUT University, 'NZ has highest rates of obesity in Australasia' available: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/GE1405/S00163/nz-has-highest-rates-of-obesity-in-australasia.htm> 29 May, 2014

'It's pretty grim: 30% of world is fat, no country immune' The New Zealand Herald, available: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11263914 May 19, 2014

Shaw, Dave, 'Six facts to fight your fear of fat', The New Zealand Herald, available: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/health/news/article.cfm?c_id=204&objectid=11148891&ref=rss October 31, 2013

Walsh Bryan, '6 Facts About Saturated Fat That Will Astound You', Time Magazine, available: <http://time.com/96626/6-facts-about-saturated-fat-that-will-astound-you/> May 13, 2014

Richard J Johnson, Mark S Segal, Yuri Sautin, Takahiko Nakagawa, Daniel I Feig, Duk-Hee Kang, Michael S Gersch, Steven Benner, and Laura G Sánchez-Lozada, 'Potential role of sugar (fructose) in the epidemic of hypertension, obesity and the metabolic syndrome, diabetes, kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease' American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2007;86:899–906