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## Misled and Misfed: Policies Mean Processed Foods Make Us Sick and Fat



By Adele Hite

The array of nutrition information available to us these days is overwhelming, confusing, and contradictory. We may hear one thing on the news, another from our doctor, a different message from a friend. How do we know what to believe?



This is an on-line op-ed section for women. Please have your say by commenting.

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In Other News...

### Planned Parenthood: Permitted Telemedicine

In Iowa, Planned Parenthood clinics let FU-486 be administered by a doctor by videoconference. An anti-abortion group that filed a complaint with the state board of Medicine; but the board has decided to permit the practice. Women who receive RU-486 must undergo a physical exam and counselling.

### Chemicals Found in Pregnant Women

A team from University of California at San Francisco discovered the presence of 43 chemicals in pregnant women, including the now-banned PCBs and DDT. The 268 women, chosen to be nationally representative, also showed the presence of phthalates and PBDEs used in flame retardants and banned in many states.

Does it even matter? If the experts are going to change their minds every few months about what constitutes a healthy diet, shouldn't we all just eat less, move more, and hope for the best.

While nutritional messages may be confusing, the truth is out there. In 2005, experts at the Institute of Medicine—an independent body of unpaid volunteer experts—created a summary of current nutritional knowledge meant to bring scientific accuracy to our prevailing dietary guidance. Their report contains this surprising statement: "Compared to higher fat diets, low fat, high carbohydrate diets may modify the metabolic profile in ways that are considered to be unfavorable with respect to chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease (CHD) and diabetes."

How did these experts arrive at a conclusion that so completely contradicts our current nutritional beliefs? Unfortunately, what we think of as nutritional fact isn't fact at all. Since the first Dietary Goals were released in 1977, low-fat, high-carbohydrate dietary recommendations have been based on science that is weak and contradictory. For over thirty years, Americans have been told to reduce their intake of fat, especially saturated fat and cholesterol, and instead consume a diet primarily based on grain and cereal products. These recommendations have persisted even though research conducted in the intervening years has failed to support them. What we think of as nutritional truth is little more than an unproven theory. In 1977, even the American Medical Association felt that these recommendations were inappropriate, unsubstantiated, and could result in unforeseen negative consequences. In fact, we've seen these consequences unfold.

Although Americans are accused of ignoring dietary guidelines, we have indeed reduced our fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol intakes as recommended. We are accused of being sedentary, but leisure time activity is on the rise. We are accused of overeating, but the average intake of most Americans is within recommended calorie ranges. Adult women consume the fewest calories—about the same amount as elementary school children—but 72% of adult women are overweight or obese. What is going on?

While it is true that our calories have increased in the past 33 years, the amount can hardly be called excessive. If adult women were to eat any less, their average caloric intake would be equal to that of most preschoolers. Yet eating less and moving more—restricting calories and burning them off—remains the single-minded solution to the obesity crisis.

The problem isn't just the amount of calories that we are consuming, but also the source. The increase in caloric intake we've seen in the past 33 years has come almost entirely from highly-processed carbohydrate food products—subsidized and

Researchers urge more study to understand the sources of the exposures and what it means for policy making read more

### **Report Urges DoD to Allow Women in Combat**

A group called the The Military Leadership Diversity Commission released a draft report this week and among the recommendations is that women be allowed combat roles officially. The group which is composed of both active and retired service members, and which was established by Congress will present the final report to President Obama in March. Read more at The Army Times

### **Davos Makes Quota for Women**

Usually just 15-17% of attendees of The World Economic Forum are women. Now organizers of the Davos meeting will require that women make up 25% of delegates from major corporations which pay the highest membership fees. The WEF has other equity goals: by 2014, the organisation wants 50 per cent of its Young Global Leaders program to be women. @Read more at E-financial News

### **Eating Disorders Among Natives**

Bulimia and Anorexia aren't just for white girls. A study using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health revealed similarities in the experience of eating disorders among Native American and white women. It also showed that women are more likely to develop disordered eating or eating disorders than men. Furthermore rates for men of the same two groups were also similar. @Read more at Wiley

### **More Women Islam Converts in UK**

endorsed by the USDA. It is the particular qualities of these food products that have contributed significantly to the health crisis that our nation currently faces.

Why are these grain- and cereal-based products a problem? First of all, thanks to USDA subsidies and marketing, they are cheap, abundant, and widely-believed to be an important part of a healthy diet despite the fact that there is no biological need for them. In addition, thanks to our industrialized food system, these products are conveniently available everywhere in hundreds of fun-filled varieties designed to appeal to our senses and our appetites. It is no coincidence that, thanks to human physiology, sugary and starchy foods have a number of addictive and fattening properties that protein, fat, and fiber foods do not. Not only do they create a "feed forward" mechanism in the central nervous system, they set up a hormonal environment in our bodies that encourages fat storage and prevents fat burning. When we are unable to access our fat stores for energy, we have no choice but to get that energy by eating more. The cheap, convenient, and highly-appealing carbohydrate foods that surround us set up a viscous cycle of hunger, fatigue, desire, and consumption, as our bodies store the calories we consume and send us back out for more.

Misguided scientific theory, an agricultural policy created to promote quantity over quality, and a food industry happy to take advantage of human physiology have created a perfect storm of dysfunctional eating patterns within a food environment designed to perpetuate obesity and chronic disease. Scientists eager to protect their government funding have established their careers attempting to prove that a diet low in fat and high in grains and cereals is the healthiest diet possible. But human physiology trumps scientific agendas. Thirty years of trying has failed to produce substantial evidence that a low-fat diet leads to healthy outcomes. In fact, the science accumulated in the USDA's own Nutrition Evidence Library shows that in head-to-head comparisons, diets that limit sugars and starches produce increased weight loss and improved cardiovascular and diabetes risk factors compared to low-fat diets, even when those diets have the same calorie level.

These results are especially significant for women, particularly minority women. A diet high in processed carbohydrates can lead to poorly regulated glucose and insulin, factors in the mechanisms behind obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Women tend to have higher baseline insulin levels and more glucose intolerance than men, conditions that can be exacerbated with pregnancy. As a result, diets high in sugars and starches can be especially detrimental to a woman's health. According to the American Heart Association, low blood levels of "good" cholesterol (high density lipoprotein or HDL) and high blood levels of triglycerides (another type of fat found in the blood) are strong predictors of heart disease in women. These are also the two risk factors that a diet that reduces grains, cereal, and sugar will most predictably correct. In postmenopausal women, a low-fat diet

The numbers of Muslim converts has doubled in the past 10 years to nearly an estimated 100,000 people. More significantly, nearly two thirds of recent converts to Islam in Britain have been women. The study by the think tank Faith Matters also showed that 70% of converts were white; the average age, 27. Of the 122 people polled, 97% felt that some practices of born Muslims related to culture rather than Islam. Read more at Arab American News

### **Economics and Marriage Gap**

Along with the huge income gap, Scholar Stephanie Coontz asserts there is a growing class divergence in legal partnerships. Among college graduates 64% are married, compared to just 48 percent of those with a high school diploma. However, in the 1960's, class made little difference in marriage rates. People without a B.A. are also three times likely to divorce as their middle-class fellows. Economic instability exacerbates relationship problems. Read more at The Philadelphia inquirer

### **TV on Afghan Reality**

A new talk show in Afghanistan called The Mask, or Nigab, features women and the problems and violence they face at home—such as rape and forced marriage. The radical show is produced by a 28-year-old Afghani man who hopes to help the women and open the minds of Afghani men. Guests tell their stories to a studio audience composed of legal and religious experts as well as human rights advocates who discuss the woman's situation. Read more at **Cnn.com**

### **The United Nations: Open for Women**

The UN started the new year by opening an agency designed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. **UN**

does not improve in heart disease risk factors or weight loss. In fact, for Americans in general, a diet that adheres to current nutritional recommendations has been shown to produce weight gain over a 20-year period; significantly, the weight gain is nearly doubled for African-Americans.

Efforts to bring our nation's obesity crisis under control will have limited success until we insist that our Dietary Guidelines adhere to a complete evaluation of the best science available.

This is especially important for our most vulnerable populations. Dietary guidelines shape public health nutrition policy; in this regard, having an accurate scientific basis for these recommendations is a human rights issue. Pregnant women, children, and older adults who receive food assistance from the government deserve equal access to truly healthy foods, not just cheap grain- and cereal-based foods that set up a pattern of addiction and obesity that can trap them in the cycle of poverty and poor health.

It's time to call this 33-year-long experiment on the people of America to a halt. We deserve to have recommendations based on facts rather than theory, science rather than politics, food rather than products.

#### **Adele Hite is the Policy Chair for the Healthy Nation Coalition**

[www.forahealthynation.org](http://www.forahealthynation.org)

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**Women** will work with member states to agree on international standards for gender equality and assist countries implement them. UN Women also aims to integrate gender equality into other UN agencies and programs

#### **Oklahoma: Prison Capital**

The state puts more women behind bars than any other. Along with Tulsa World, a group of news organizations is starting a project to find out why and what happens to the children left behind. Read more at Tulsa world



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