

TO DIET OR NOT TO DIET

BY LORETTA MOSTOFI

I am in two minds about the whole diet concept. Should I be doing low-carb, no-carb, Atkins diet, cabbage diet, detox diet? The list goes on and on. The pressure from society to be on a diet is steadily increasing, and if you are not on a diet you feel that you will be left behind in the weight loss world.

I find myself in a very conflicting situation, as a personal trainer I do believe in a nutrient-rich diet, but generally I do not advocate dieting. From my own experience, and that of my clients, it is clearly evident that diets do not usually work. They may deliver a quick fix but they will never provide a long-term solution. Based on what I have witnessed in the fitness industry, as soon as you start to eliminate food groups from your diet by, for example, avoiding carbohydrates or labelling food as good and bad, you will inevitably fall off the nutrition wagon.

Over the past two years I have competed in figure competitions. It is no secret that I was on a very strict eating plan and my food was always measured; carbohydrates, fats and proteins were calculated per meal. Furthermore, during the final weeks of preparation for these competitions I had to completely avoid dairy, fruit, bread and pasta. To be successful in these competitions you generally do not eat outside your scheduled times and you definitely do not eat out. Although this type of diet appears very extreme, it needs to be understood that the sport of bodybuilding itself is very extreme.

Having decided to not compete this year has taken me out of this eating regime for the first time in three years and I must confess it hasn't been easy. Many people have commented on how happy I must feel to be able to eat what I want without all the restrictions. What I wasn't prepared for was the feeling of guilt I experienced with this change in lifestyle. Never in my life had I felt guilty about eating an apple or a tub of yogurt.

The point that I am trying to make and the comparison of my experience to any type of dieting is that yes, both can deliver amazing results. The physique I display on stage is proof that the dieting does work. Similarly, a no-carb diet can help you lose a lot of weight. However, I also do realise that the physique of a figure competitor is neither healthy nor maintainable long-term. For me to be able to live and function normally I do need to switch to an off-season eating plan and reintroduce certain foods

back into my diet. As a result I do put on body fat. I try to educate anyone on a new fat-loss program that they may feel great now and love the fact the fat is melting away, but it will be very hard to maintain that eating regime without sacrificing their happiness and freedom of living and socialising.

It has taken me some time to reach a middle ground. When I started to label foods as good or bad I found myself trying to eliminate the bad food from my diet only to find myself feeling guilty when I did eat those foods. Quite often I ended up eating more

than I needed because I felt a sense of failure. This probably stems from the fact that I had deprived myself of these foods as they were imprinted in my brain as being 'bad'.

So I find myself in a conflicting position. As a personal trainer I cannot tell my clients to diet or follow unrealistic eating regimes when I do not truly enforce them myself. I do not believe in diets and no longer label any food as bad. I treat all foods as equal.





A friend of mine recommended the book: "If not Dieting, then What" by Dr Rick Kausman and let me tell you: it has changed the way I think. I am proud to say that I eat everything now; chocolate, fruit, cakes, ice cream and carbs at night. I now follow a very different philosophy on life.

At present, whenever I am faced with a food choice I tell myself that I can eat it if I want to but I then ask myself whether I really feel like it.

When I was competing, if you had told me that I could not eat bread I would find myself dreaming about the day that I could. I have no regrets about competing because it was a journey I chose to take and I was well aware of all the sacrifices I had to make along the way. It was a commitment that I made and enjoyed.

Today I allow myself to eat anything and regard all foods as the same. Surprisingly some days I may choose to eat bread and other days I do not.

You need to remind yourself of the big picture, and in the end everything balances itself out. The majority of the time I find myself consuming nutrient-rich food but there are times when I do feel like pasta for dinner or burger and fries for lunch, or even a slice of cake with ice cream for dessert. I realise now that this is OK. I do not eat these things everyday because I do not feel like them every day. It is an amazing feeling to not be so self-consumed with what I am eating or not eating.

MY ADVICE ON REACHING YOUR HEALTHY WEIGHT RANGE IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. TREAT ALL FOODS AS EQUAL.
2. ALLOW YOURSELF TO EAT EVERYTHING - BUT TRY TO BE MORE IN TUNE WITH YOUR BODY AND WHAT IT NEEDS.
3. EAT SLOWLY AND ENJOY EVERY MOUTHFUL.
4. BE MORE AWARE OF EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS THAT SEE YOU EATING WHEN YOU ARE NOT ACTUALLY HUNGRY.
5. BE ACTIVE FOR AT LEAST 30 MINUTES EVERY DAY.
6. INDULGE YOURSELF OCCASIONALLY BY EATING WHAT YOU WANT WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY.
7. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF INDULGING TOO FREQUENTLY THEN SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE TO HELP YOU MANAGE WHY YOU MAY BE EMOTIONALLY EATING.
8. BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR APPEARANCE DOES NOT DEFINE WHO YOU ARE AS A PERSON.

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