

Leyla weighs in: Diets and willpower, deconstructed



We are on a forever quest to find the best diet to lose weight and reach our health goals. The diet that will finally cure the epidemic of overweight and obesity.

There is no shortage of experts in this area. Whether it's Paleo, low carb, low calorie, low fat, etc.

The thing is, *all diets* require willpower to some degree, at least in the beginning. Indeed, this is the difficulty, because any time we feel deprived, the reward value of the food or treat we miss *increases*.

Willpower is necessary as long as *desire* is present. It's the desire that makes us uncomfortable or even miserable, depending on how strong it is. (If you're a yoga aficionado like me, you know about the concept of desire and discomfort.)

So what do we do about desire?

We have to reframe it. There needs to be a critical shift in perception and approach—you've heard me say this before. Because it is only when we no longer need to employ willpower to achieve weight loss goals, or any endeavor for that matter, that we will truly be free. Philosophically this is all well and good, but what can we do physiologically to control desire/craving?

We have to take care of the body's other mind: The gut. The enteric nervous system, or "gut brain," can operate independently of the brain. With emerging research about the microbiome, we know that disruptions to beneficial gut bacteria can affect mood. Moreover, a prominent symptom of gut-brain imbalance is craving!

Consider that neurons in the gut produce neurotransmitters also found in the brain, such as serotonin. As a matter of fact, as much as 90 percent of serotonin is produced in the gut.

What imbalances the gut? Among other things, a poor diet is a big contributor to gut-brain imbalances. High sugars and preservatives alter the environment allowing bad bacteria to take over. But as long as beneficial organisms are in charge, the gut functions efficiently and sends positive feedback to the brain. – Integrative Psychiatry

If we can help to deal with desire/craving physiologically by taking care of the gut first, we can boost the serotonin (read: feeling positive, confident and enthusiastic) needed to help us psychologically shift our perception so we can begin to follow a lifestyle that will ultimately lead us to our health and weight goals.

To your health!