



Health Experts: "Jury Still Out" on Theory Behind Many Popular Diets
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Health experts at the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) outlined several basic questions that are still unanswered by the Glycemic Index (GI), an approach that forms the basis of the Atkins Diet, the South Beach Diet, the Zone, Sugar Busters and several other popular weight-loss plans.

The GI is a ranking of how specific carbohydrate-containing foods, when eaten alone, affect blood sugar levels. It was conceived as an attempt to help diabetics gauge their dietary intake. However, over 20 years after the Index was developed, the American Diabetes Association remains unsure that it is a practical guide for individuals to follow. The AICR experts went further, saying that because of several inherent limitations in the way the GI is conceived, it does not fully address the complexity of a person's diet. Because of this, its relation to weight management remains unproven.

"What concerns us most about diets based on the GI" said Melanie Polk, RD, AICR's Director of Nutrition Education, "is the distorted and potentially dangerous take-home message people are getting: If I want to lose weight, I should eat more meat and fat." Polk said that the problem with this popular notion, is that it just isn't true.

Moreover, diets high in meat are probably linked to increased risk of colorectal cancers, and possibly to cancers of the breast, prostate, kidney, pancreas and bladder, according to the AICR/WCRF report, *Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective*. The report also cautions that diets high in animal fat are possibly

linked to cancers of the lung, colon, rectum, breast, endometrium and prostate.

“There is another issue at work here: what the diet books won’t tell you is that plans based upon the GI also happen to be, at heart, low-calorie diets,” said Polk. “And the bottom line for weight loss is, and will always be, about calorie balance.”

The AICR experts say that effective and long-term weight management grows out of a healthy change in lifestyle, not a brief commitment to eating only certain foods because of where they rank on a theoretical chart. “We already know how to lose weight and keep it off,” said Polk. “It’s not a secret: eat less, exercise more. Instead of eliminating all carbohydrates, choose whole-grain options and beans with the fiber to fill you up and provide energy throughout the day. Add vegetables and fruits while cutting back on animal protein and fat.”

But many Americans are daunted by such a commitment to long-term change, and find the “quick-fix” promises of GI diets appealing. There’s a belief that foods high in fat and protein “fill you up” more than pasta, bread and salad. “The problem with that belief is that it doesn’t hold up to scrutiny,” said Polk. “While it may be true that pasta and bread made from refined white flour don’t offer long-lasting satiety, whole-grain pastas and breads are considerably more filling. They also offer health benefits that refined grains do not.”

And despite the tendency of many diets based on the GI to shunt vegetables and fruits to the side, these foods contain fiber that promotes fullness without the excess calories found in animal fat, and belong at the center of weight-management efforts. The AICR experts said that a simple way to ensure a filling, healthy meal without excess calories is to aim for meals composed of 2/3 or more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans and

1/3 or less animal protein (meat, eggs, cheese) – this will provide filling fiber and long-lasting energy at a substantially reduced calorie cost.

If your weight has been slowly increasing and you need help with a “livable” eating plan, take the initiative. *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*TM can provide practical strategies to prevent weight gain. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian today!