

My Review: *Good Calories, Bad Calories (by Gary Taubes)*

Note that this is NOT a nutrition or diet book - it's a science book that everyone with an interest in nutrition, weight problems, health should take a look at. Author Gary Taubes is not trying to sell a diet program. Rather, this book stemmed from research that he was engaged in while looking at "bad science" for an article that he was writing for the journal, Science.

"Good science" occurs when an individual comes up with a theory and then tests it to make sure that the results are accurate and reproducible. The individual then publishes his/her findings in a manner that correctly summarizes the experiments' conclusions. When experiments are conducted and the published results are not what the tests demonstrated, that would be considered "bad science" (think propaganda).

During the course of his research into instances of "bad science," Taubes was startled to find that many nutritional/diet studies were just that - bad science. He then went back and examined studies of diet/nutrition, exercise, diabetes, lipids (cholesterol), etc and learned that almost everything we've been taught about obesity and diet is not supported by the evidence. For example, some people have been promoting low fat diets and increased exercise as what's best for humans to live long and healthy lives. It turns out that this is pretty much the opposite according to the legit scientific studies.

Fat is not the evil that it's been made out to be. Instead, the culprit is sugars (and refined carbohydrates such as white flour) and their inherent ability to stimulate insulin production. Insulin, as most are aware, lowers blood sugar. Most people are not aware, however, that insulin serves a more important function - it stores energy for future needs. It accomplishes this by depositing fat in the body (including inside of the blood vessels).

This is an evolutionary thing. Let's look at, let's say, a saber tooth cat that is eating its fresh kill (e.g. a woolly mammoth). It will gorge and the excess calories must be stored for another day because - after all - who knows just how long it will take before another mammoth comes by? Insulin handles this situation by storing the consumed calories as fat on the cat's frame.

On a practical basis, many people snack on sweets (soda, cakes, candy) and eat meals that contain starches e.g. potatoes. This results in elevated insulin levels throughout the day doing what it does best - depositing fat on the body. This is just one reason for why it's so hard for many people to lose weight. The excellent movie, [Supersize Me](#), demonstrated this nicely. Most of Spurlock's McDonald's meals included large sodas and French fries. However, the guy who ate only the Big Mac's every day ([Big Mac Man](#)) did not gain weight!

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High fructose corn syrup is another culprit in our lives. While it may not stimulate as much insulin as sucrose, it directly stimulates the liver to put out triglycerides which screws up the good cholesterol (HDL). This leads to heart ailments and strokes.

Taubes also discusses the historical impact that sugars (et al) have on common disease states. Just a few hundred years ago, missionaries and doctors studied native tribes in Africa, South Pacific Islanders, and Eskimos (among many others around the world). All consumed diets relatively high in fats and protein (and low in carbs). Think coconuts and ocean fish, for example. None of these groups suffered from heart disease, diabetes or any other chronic diseases. Even cancer rates were very low. Enter their exposure to western diet through trading: "Here. Try some of this sugar stuff. Let us show you how to make bread from this white flour." You get the idea. Soon after, all of these populations started to develop problems with obesity, heart disease and diabetes. The evidence is very compelling.

Be aware that I just over-simplified these concepts, but Taubes does a great job of laying out what the science really says about what really works for losing weight (cutting down sugars, refined carbs, etc) and what doesn't (dieting, exercise). Check out the Borzoi Reader's excellent review of the book [here](#). They summarize Taube's findings and even list what the science bears out.

As noted, this really is a science book and can be somewhat tough to go through. For an easier read, in 2011 Taubes put out ***Why We Get Fat: And What to Do About It***. Check it out [here](#).

Also, check out Gary's 2002 article in the New York Times, ***What If It's All a Big Fat Lie?*** It can be found [here](#).

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