

Life Skills for Success with: Sharon O'Brien

Eat to Success

How Your Dietary Choices May Affect You

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Introduction

While one can mediate with others, practice good hygiene, or determine what to wear for being successful, it's often harder to do, when to no known fault of our own, our body is at war within itself. How do you compliment someone on an outfit when they can't really listen to the meaning of what you're saying? How do you express that one needs to shower or better groom themselves, when for them, just getting out of bed that day was an achievement? How do you have a calm and collected conversation with someone who can't quiet the distractions in their brain long enough to think of an alternative way of speaking.

Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to explore the hidden truths of our behavior that most of us have a harder time defining and explaining. I will cover sugar and its impact on our unconscious dietary choices. Create an awareness of what we now know, and the lies that are being told that hold true to this day. Look into the workings of the microbiome, bacteria, hormones, food diseases, allergies and how inflammation plays a role in staging all of them. Then finally, bring to light my own findings and realizations of dietary allergens, creating a greater awareness for those unknowing of what they may not understand of themselves and their peers.

The Craving

Every day on my walk to school I have the misfortune of passing by and getting to smell the deliciousness of doughnuts in four different shops in a 0.7-kilometre distance on one side of the street, of just doughnut shops, not including the endless coffee shops and fast food stops that tempt you along your way as well. I can tell you for a fact that by the time I get to class, I'm hungry for a doughnut, and why wouldn't I be?

According to Dr. Robert Lustig, sugar has highly addictive qualities, with the evolution of our pallets teaching us that sweet things are safe to eat (Sugar: The Bitter Truth, 2009). If you look at any box of processed food, be it ketchup, bread, and even healthy sports bars, sugar is on the top of the list for ingredients. Is this the reason binge eating and craving sweets has become so common for our modern way of life? Obesity is rapidly climbing to be the number one killer in the globe with one third of the worldwide population being considered overweight or obese, and we've seen rates double in the last forty years. (Chooi, 2019) Food companies spend billions of dollars marketing (Bruno, 2017) their over processed, sugar addicting, food subsidies to the consumer stomach as we buy into it with our mouths wide open. Wouldn't the chronic disease epidemic and the doctoral prescription to pop another pill and ease the pain for the day make the average person curious about what's really

going on? Or are we too blinded by the societal norms to realize that your Diabetes (Reiter, 2017) and IBS never used to be the standard since we were now so busy chasing a life of constant comfort and looking for that “dream lifestyle” to think that our diet and stress level might have something to do with it? According to Dr. Libby Weaver we are “living too short and dying too long,” (Weaver, 2018) translating to, yes, our life expectancy is greater than it’s ever been, but our bodies are giving up on us far before our death. As chronic disease becomes more prevalent among the younger population she might be right. As we become more educated and with more studies coming out, the people are turning to alternative methods to deal with chronic pain, disease, and their mental illness.

Awareness

My step into holistic medicine and integrative nutrition started with the work of MD Kelly Brogan in search of my own answers to mental health problems. In her book, *A Mind of Your Own*, she brings together the idea that food, toxic chemicals, along with a stress filled, sedentary, over worked lifestyle was wreaking havoc on our emotional and physical states. She states that symptoms of mental illness are not chemical imbalances in the brain, (of which no study has proved that depression is a symptom of a chemical imbalance in our brain) but rather, our so-called illness is a screaming cry for help from our bodies saying, we are sick and inflamed from our consistently poor lifestyle choices. Women particularly are experiencing symptoms of depression at twice the rate of men, with one out of seven being medicated! (Kelly Brogan MD, 2016) If our medications haven't been proven to help reduce our symptoms, and in some cases may make it worse, (with depression and anxiety being a symptom of the prescription) what would be the purpose of taking it other than for the pharmaceutical companies to make millions of dollars? In general, most doctors and nurses are not taught about diet, nutrition and its impact on our health. Instead they are given a list of medications that may or may not influence a symptom and taught how to do surgeries and give anaesthesia. If I break a bone or cut my leg open a hospital is the first place I'll be heading to. But in terms of looking at things from a bigger view point, the doctors is not the

one who heals the bone and makes the tissues grow back together. They may set things back in place and give you stitches to help the healing process, but your cells and your body does all the real work. Joshua Rosenthal like to say this with, “Given half a chance, the body will heal itself, by itself.” (MScEd, 2014)

Starting in the 1900’s Health and Human services began releasing their nutritional guidelines onto the world. And most of us are relatively familiar with the diagram of the food pyramid; grains and starches on the bottom, fruits and vegetables, then animal products, and sugar and oils to top it off. But take into consideration that this is a political document rather than a document of nutritional standard. (MScEd, 2014) Face it, every economy has some form of financial benefits to its people eating their wheat, meat and dairy. And the push to eat local vegetable is great, except in most northern hemispheres local consists of land grown foods that aren’t as flavourful as others that are expensively imported in or hydroponically grown in green houses. At the end of the day standards are great, but for most they still aren’t hitting the nutritional mark and educating the people enough to encourage them to eat whole, real foods that are going to help reverse our chances of illness and disease (Katz, 2019). If you really want to see the health of your community, all you need to do is look at your traditional meals and what they incorporate.

Inflammation and the Microbiome

In my studies and practices I have discovered the world of inflammation and the microbiome with their close links to disease and emotions. Often referred to as the buzz words of the decade, most are still uneducated about the importance and their role in your day to day life. Many are familiar with the terminology referring to the gut microbiome, but it stretches far beyond your internal organs, working out to your skin, the microbes of the food we eat, and the water we drink. Simply put your microbiome is the cellular structure that takes in the world around us. If you consider the fact that we are only ten percent human according to our DNA, while the rest of us is a conglomeration of microorganisms and bacteria (Pershouse, 2016) we are much less ourselves than we realize. We may be feeding and caring for our physical and emotional selves, but what about the other ninety percent of us that we don't even realize we are? These bacteria that comprise our bodies are present and at work from before we are born, and the effects of a nonvaginal birth (c-section) and lack of breast feeding have been shown to significantly reduce the number of beneficial bacteria in our microbiome compromising our immunity. (Pershouse, 2016) And it's often made even worse by the over use of anti-biotics during our life span. Anti-biotics work by killing off bacterial cells. When you have an infection, they will shut down or kill the bacteria that are causing the infection.

The only problem with this, is that it kills off all the beneficial bacteria as well. This means you are far more vulnerable after a round of anti-biotics for more harmful bacteria to invade your system. (Nicholas Bokulich, 2016) And let's not forget that ninety percent of serotonin (the relaxation hormone) is found in the gut. In fact, eating carbohydrates releases serotonin to the brain, and that's why too many carbohydrates will begin to make you sleepy. (MScEd, 2014) Let me state that again in a different way. Your dietary intake has a direct effect on your hormones! (Can you hear me from the back?) For many with mood disorders our serotonin levels and number of beneficial bacteria in the gut is incredibly low. (MScEd, 2014) Simply changing your diet to feed the microbes in our gut will drastically change our hormones and in turn our moods. So how do we do this? By eating prebiotic foods like raw vegetables and fruits! Gut microbes feed off the fibre and nutrients the plants have harvested from the sun and earth. The more natural energy your cells get from plants the healthier they are. Many people will also benefit from directly restoring their bacteria by consuming probiotics as well in the form of non-pasteurized, naturally fermented foods like yoghurt, sauerkraut, and even some beers from your local brewery. Although these are great, sometimes the easiest option can be to get a quality bottle from a health food shop or wellness provider since some of the most beneficial strains of bacteria, like *S. Boulardi*, are not as easily accessed in your common fermented foods.

Celiac, Gluten, and Food Sensitivities

What lead me to Kelly's book in the first place was my familiarity of food sensitivities growing up. With a sibling who struggled through college to discover she had celiac disease later in life, my symptoms didn't seem to different. Although I do not put myself in the celiac category, I noticed a change in my emotions centred around Gluten and inflammatory foods. Gluten shows up with many different names but is essentially a protein present in all wheat derived grains. Basically it is what gives bread its doughy texture, and is used as a thickener, colour additive, and flavour enhancer. (Biesiekierski, 2017) Celiac Disease is when the gluten protein is damaging to the villi in the small intestine. The Villi are what help to absorb vitamins and nutrients to the blood stream creating energy for the body. When they are damaged and can't function properly you have a wide range of over 200 symptoms that will affect the whole body; malnourishment, stomach pains, anemia, teeth and bone disorders, and mood swings just to name a few. It is also often genetic and can be tested for. Gluten sensitivity is still being discovered with the gluten protein, while not as damaging to the villi, weakening the intestinal lining and gives way to holes letting out particles of food and other materials into our systems giving way to inflammation. It is often diagnosed with testing to eliminate celiac disease and gluten allergies, along with an elimination diet to determine if gluten is the main cause. An Elimination Diet, a major component in Dr Brogans book, consists of

clearing all potentially allergen and inflammatory foods. This includes all animal products, and all grains. What makes grains and animal proteins a source of inflammation is the how the microbiome and the persons immunity reacts; making each one of us even more unique in that perspective. Dr Brogan's work relates inflammation to depression as a lack of pain receptors in the brain, your brain can't feel the inflammation present, so it reacts in a different way. When stressed, cortisol (the stress hormone) levels raise, but cortisol is also an inflammation deterrent. If your cells lose their sensitivity and become immune to cortisol's messages to the nervous system, you are left with a body in a constant state of inflammation. (Kelly Brogan MD, 2016) Inflammation has many faces and it also shows up in almost every chronic disease from heart failure, arthritis, ADHD, diabetes, and cancer.

Conclusion

So, if you give into eating that doughnut on your way to work or class first thing in the morning, consider the consequences it could have on your personal and professional life. They are loaded with sugar, flour, dairy and eggs, all potential components for creating an inflamed body. Within an hour you will most likely be craving another doughnut from the blood sugar spiking, and then, drastically falling. The empty carbohydrate intake will likely make you drowsier than you already are, while your cells become weaker from the lack of nutrients your microbiome can't digest and send to them along with the tears in the intestinal lining from the gluten giving you digestive discomfort first thing in the day. Your joints may become stiff and sore from the inflammation it causes, and you're more likely to catch your co-workers cold from the stress it causes your body.

Ways to decide if any of these are factors for you are simple enough to do at home. Food journaling is a great tool to keep track of cravings, food intake, water intake, and, when you eat versus when symptoms show up. An elimination diet takes time and some effort but is a simple professional tool to help self-diagnose and give yourself answers without the cost of a doctor visit that may or may not be productive in getting answers. Also remember, just because something is advertised as healthy doesn't necessarily mean it is. I encourage you to read labels and see for yourself just what exactly is in your

food and explore what's best for your microbiome, your body, and your personal mental health.

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