

Weight Loss Is Easier Without Snacking

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	United States	China
Percent of children who snack	91.0	11.0
Mean percentage of total energy from snacking among all children in sample	18.9	0.9
Mean percentage of total energy from snacking among children who snack	24.0	7.8

Table 1. Snacking behavior among children ages 6 to 11 years in China and the United States (3)

	HP snack	HC snack
Weight (g)	210	200
Energy (kJ)	971	996
Energy density (kJ/g)	4.6	5.0
Protein (g)	37.0	6.6
Fat (g)	6.0	6.0
Carbohydrate (g)	7.6	39.4

Table 2. Composition of high-protein (HP) and high-carbohydrate (HC) snacks (4)



Just say no to snacks!



Abstract

Bob Greene's Best Life diet is a lifestyle makeover consisting of three phases designed to help one confront eating problems and change overall habits to initiate and maintain weight loss. As part of the plan, Bob Greene encourages having at least one snack per day to control hunger. I hypothesized that encouraging snacking in the early stages of weight loss would not prove beneficial to dieters. Peer-reviewed sources provided multiple studies showing that snacking contributes to obesity. There were links between snacking and obesity in children and adults. Research showed that people did not eat any less at mealtimes if they had consumed snacks before. Therefore, snacks added calories to one's total daily consumption. The Best Life diet might be more effective if snacking was cut out of the diet to eliminate bad habits.

Introduction

Bob Greene's Best Life diet includes three phases which last a month or longer: The Rev-Up, the Switch, and Happily Ever After. It focuses on cutting "bad" foods from your diet, like soda, white breads and pasta, while adding exercise. The plan emphasizes a lifestyle change instead of a restrictive diet so that the weight loss can be maintained. Bob Greene has an exercise scale that instructs how much and how often to exercise based on one's level of fitness. The diet's gradual process is designed to allow one to lose weight and evaluate eating habits to make better choices(1).

Bob Greene allows and encourages healthful snacks while you are on the diet and even afterward. My hypotheses are that snacking puts one at a disadvantage both during a diet and while trying to maintain weight loss. This aspect of the diet may inhibit participants from losing as much weight as they could. While there are no scientific diet studies based on the Bob Greene Best Life diet, there are some available on snacking, which I evaluated for my research(1).

A major part of the diet is answering three questions: Why am I overweight? Why do I want to lose weight? and Why have I been unable to maintain weight loss in the past? Bob Greene comments on the connection between emotional- and stress-related eating and obesity, and believes that it is possible to lose weight and embrace the new lifestyle after understanding the problems one has had in the past. His plan advocates snacking in the beginning of lifestyle change to curb hunger and not to overindulge later. Studies have shown that snacking does not necessarily make you eat less at meals.

Two-thirds of adult Americans are overweight or obese (7). It is clearly difficult for people to maintain a healthy body weight. Bob Greene believes that to have a successful diet, participants must realize that they are making a significant lifestyle change. A possible change, yes; but significant nonetheless, and my hypothesis is that having participants snack when they want to— up to twice a day— makes it easy for them to revert back to bad habits. Bob Greene's diet would be more effective if he eliminated snacking until dieters were able to make good food choices and begin weight loss.

Method

I used information from Bob Greene's book, "The Best Life Diet," to gain an understanding of the guidelines for the diet. I researched multiple articles on the relationship between snacking and obesity from the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Results

Multiple studies connect snacking with obesity, and my research shows snacking as a hindrance to weight loss. A study found that "a snack consumed in a satiety state fails to prolong the intermeal interval and would thus tend to favor storage"(2). Participants in the study did not alter their eating habits regardless of whether they had a snack, which means the snacks were only additional calories preventing weight loss.

Results Cont'd.

One study called the snacking of US children "an important source of energy," although it related snacking to obesity because of the continuous snacking while watching television (3). Table 1 presents a study of Chinese and U. S. children, which ultimately found that the Chinese children were "less overweight, less active, and less likely to ingest calories as snacks that children in the US." (3) Table 2 shows the extreme difference in the amount of energy children can get from snacking. Obesity in childhood is known to lead to long-term adult obesity, as obese children are more than twice as likely to become obese adults than children of a healthy weight (4). This is related to the bad eating habits that children develop and keep as they grow older.

Results Cont'd.

Another study (REF) showed that girls, studied at ages 5 and 7, were two and a half times more likely to have Body Mass Index (BMI) values above average at both ages if they had high snack food intakes compared with those who had fewer. These studies show that high snack food consumption is correlated with obesity. Simply enough, those who snack more often are heavier than those who do not.

The content of snacks is also important. A study (2) found that energy and macronutrient intakes were not reduced by high-carbohydrate or high-protein snacks. During the days they snacked, the participants consumed more calories than they would have without the snacks because they ate the same dinner as they would have if they did not eat the snack. While high-protein snacks delayed the request for dinner, making individuals feel full for longer, they did not eat any less at dinner than they would have without the snack. Table 2 shows the nutritional differences of the high-protein and high-carbohydrate snacks. The key point of the study is that snacks increased the overall daily caloric consumption, leading to more storage of fat and weight gain. This study shows that when people snack, their energy intake does go up. People do not compensate by eating less at other meals. Snacking is also unrelated to physical activity in this study, so, on average, people who snack more and consume more calories do not burn them off through exercise. (4)

Discussion

The studies show snacking is a bad habit that prolongs obesity (4). In reading Bob Greene's book (1), it is not clear why he encourages snacking in the beginning stages of a diet and lifestyle makeover. The problem is not that Bob Greene's snack recommendations are unhealthy choices; rather, the ability to snack twice a day, as he recommends, adds unnecessary calories and makes it much easier for a dieter to slip up and consume more than was recommended. Professor Brian Wansink of Cornell University studies the psychology of snacking and has discovered that things as small as the size of an ice cream scoop or the name of a product influence what and how much we eat (5). People think they make about fifteen food choices per day, but the actual number is around 200. In addition, dieters have been found to overeat "low-fat" foods because they feel like these are guilt-free treats. However, many foods labeled low-fat are not significantly lower in calories than their richer originals (6). By consciously eliminating the choice of snacking and making smart food choices at meals, dieters can overcome these mental barriers to weight loss.

While allowing snacks in the diet may make it easier for people to begin, it also is likely to make it more difficult for them to succeed. My research provides support for taking out all snacks during the first phase of dieting, so participants learn to control their hunger and deal with cravings, rather than satisfying every urge. The scientific studies I found gave no support for Bob Greene's diet or for snacking to lose weight.

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