

Spin unbalances diet

Staying slim is a simple equation of energy in and energy out, writes **Stephen Downes**

DIETS are bunk. They're promoted by a rabble of mostly cynical and greedy folk who use them to acquire vast amounts of either notoriety or money. Like these carpetbaggers, we know diets are not inherently practicable. At best, they're short-term. In the long term, nobody is going to stop us eating — in a gastronomically wealthy society such as ours — what we feel like, when we want it.

What I've just written is, of course, premised on the common misunderstanding of what the word "diet" means. Because it doesn't mean what we think it means — eating to lose weight — at all. It has been corrupted by the weight-loss industry to sell its wares more easily.

The old Greek word "diet" implies far more than what we fork (some would say pitchfork) between our lips.

It means a "way of living", which embraces a far broader notion. Our diets should comprise when we get up and go to bed, how often we think hard and how often our minds are out of gear (thinking uses energy), whether we walk up stairs or take a lift and whether we wear too many or too few clothes. All these things contribute to the life equation that affects our weight: energy in should equal energy out. Too much of the former and we'll get fat (and, in our society, the latter is largely irrelevant).

I hate getting smug and personal but gimme a sentence here. People look at me

and say, "You're a food writer. How do you do it?" And I go, "Bloody hard work!" Before my back gave in, I ran.

Although not a natural swimmer, I now lap with a vengeance a local pool. I don't like it but I have to do it. Energy in should equal energy out.

I'm disappointed with the CSIRO, where my long-gone dad once fractioned his assays, or whatever they do there. It has backed the Total Wellbeing Diet, whatever that is. In a few months we may no doubt



Weigh up the consequences: Eat for your lifestyle

add it to an interminable list of failed weight-loss fads. The thing is that humans, like other animals, are supposed to hunt their protein, dig for their roots, forage for their seeds and climb trees for their fruit. And if we no longer do that we'd better find something else to do to use up the energy those activities required. Energy in; energy out.

If you want a model, cop the French, who eat full-fat cheeses and cook with butter. But they also have a diet.

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