The Real Reason 97% of Diets Fail (It's Not Your Willpower) Transcript

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Introduction: Why Calorie Counting Fails

If you've ever If you've ever counted calories, counted calories, weighed every gram of weighed every gram of food, starved yourself food, starved yourself on 1,200 calories on 1,200 calories a day, and still gained the weight a day, and still gained the weight back, you back, you should hear this. It should hear this. It was never your was never your fault. I'm Dr.

fault. I'm Dr. Ergin, and today I'm going to Ergin, and today I'm going to explain why almost explain why almost every every every calorie-counting diet is calorie-counting diet is doomed to fail, doomed to fail, why your body is why your body is deliberately fighting deliberately fighting you, and I'll name the three you, and I'll name the three real reasons for real reasons for your hunger that your hunger that have nothing have nothing to do with to do with math. By the end of math. By the end of this video, you this video, you will understand why will understand why the advice to “eat less and the advice to “eat less and move more” is move more” is some of the worst advice some of the worst advice ever ever ever given to given to overweight or overweight or prediabetic patients. And we'll talk about what prediabetic patients.

The Problem With Dieting Advice

And we'll talk about what actually actually actually works works works. Let's start with a. Let's start with a number that should number that should shock you. When shock you. When researchers researchers researchers look at look at people who lose weight people who lose weight by by by restricting calories alone, the long-term success rate long-term success rate —that is, —that is, achieving a healthy achieving a healthy weight and maintaining it —is about 1–3%. This means that 1–3%. This means that 97 to 99 out of 100 people who 97 to 99 out of 100 people who try to lose weight try to lose weight through dieting through dieting will fail. They don't will fail. They don't just have just have difficulties, they completely fail difficulties, they completely fail.

.. Now stop and Now stop and think about this for a think about this for a moment. If the drugs moment. If the drugs helped only 2% of patients, they would be patients, they would be immediately removed from immediately removed from sale.

sale. sale. To continue prescribing them would be considered negligence. But negligence. But when it comes to weight loss advice, we've weight loss advice, we've been prescribing the same been prescribing the same ineffective ineffective ineffective treatment for 50 years. Reduce your treatment for 50 years. Reduce your calorie intake. And calorie intake. And when it doesn't work, we when it doesn't work, we blame the blame the blame the blame the patient. We say patient. We say they lacked they lacked discipline. We say that they did not they did not strive enough for the result.

strive enough for the result. This is not science. This is This is not science. This is victim blaming victim blaming disguised as disguised as medicine. So, here's the medicine. So, here's the main question main question I want you to I want you to think about. How can you think about. How can you get 97% failures get 97% failures if the advice itself is not if the advice itself is not wrong? This is wrong? This is impossible. If almost impossible. If almost everyone fails everyone fails at something, the problem is not at something, the problem is not with the individual.

with the individual. The problem is the The problem is the instructions they were instructions they were given. Imagine a given. Imagine a class. If one student class. If one student failed the exam, failed the exam, maybe he didn't study his maybe he didn't study his lessons. But if 70 out of 100 lessons. But if 70 out of 100 students failed, you students failed, you don't blame don't blame each child individually.

each child individually.

Root Cause Thinking and the Fat Thermostat

You pay attention to You pay attention to the teacher, the material, the the teacher, the material, the entire system. In the entire system. In the United States United States today, approximately today, approximately seven out of 10 adults are seven out of 10 adults are overweight overweight overweight or obese or obese. These are not 70. These are not 70 isolated cases of isolated cases of lack of lack of willpower. This is a systemic willpower. This is a systemic error in the advice error in the advice we have all been given.

A question that no one A question that no one asks. In medicine, there is a asks. In medicine, there is a method for finding method for finding the root cause of a the root cause of a the root cause of a problem. You problem. You ask "why" ask "why" three times. Let's three times. Let's do this with do this with weight gain. Why did you gain weight gain. Why did you gain weight? Because you weight? Because you consumed more consumed more calories than you calories than you burned. That's true, burned. That's true, but it's a superficial but it's a superficial answer. It's like answer. It's like saying the Titanic saying the Titanic sank because it hit an sank because it hit an iceberg. Technically iceberg. Technically correct, but correct, but not helpful at all. So, not helpful at all. So, we ask again: why did we ask again: why did you consume more you consume more calories than you calories than you burned? Because you burned? Because you were hungry. Now were hungry. Now we are getting closer to the we are getting closer to the point. The third "why".

point. The third "why". Why were you even Why were you even hungry? Here's the question hungry? Here's the question that really that really matters. This is something that no matters. This is something that no one in the diet one in the diet industry wants industry wants to answer. Because the honest to answer. Because the honest answer is not that answer is not that you lack you lack willpower. The honest answer is that it's hormonal.

hormonal. hormonal. Your body has a “ fat thermostat,” and you fat thermostat,” and you don’t control it. don’t control it. Here is a concept that Here is a concept that completely changed my completely changed my approach to treating approach to treating patients with patients with prediabetes and prediabetes and obesity. Your obesity. Your body doesn't just body doesn't just passively store passively store everything you eat. It everything you eat. It actively regulates actively regulates the amount of fat the amount of fat you have. Just like you have. Just like your house regulates its your house regulates its temperature with a temperature with a thermostat thermostat. Think about it.

. Think about it. No wild animal No wild animal becomes morbidly becomes morbidly obese. A lion in the obese. A lion in the wild never wild never swells to swells to three times its weight. Because three times its weight. Because if that happened, he would if that happened, he would n't be able to hunt and would n't be able to hunt and would die. Even die. Even bears that bears that accumulate accumulate accumulate huge reserves of huge reserves of fat before hibernation fat before hibernation do so for a do so for a reason. Their reason. Their body consciously body consciously increases its internal increases its internal fat rate as fat rate as winter approaches. And winter approaches. And then lowers it then lowers it in the spring. This is a in the spring. This is a controlled controlled controlled process, not a process, not a coincidence. Humans coincidence. Humans have exactly the have exactly the same mechanism. If same mechanism. If your fat thermostat your fat thermostat goes up, two things automatically happen. Your hunger two things automatically happen. Your hunger increases, so you eat increases, so you eat more, and your metabolism more, and your metabolism slows, so slows, so you burn less.

Your body will Your body will fight to protect fight to protect this higher fat level, no matter how hard you, no matter how hard you try to try to will yourself. This is why will yourself. This is why crash diets crash diets fail.

fail. If you simply If you simply cut calories without cut calories without considering why considering why the norm has increased, the norm has increased, the body reacts by the body reacts by increasing hunger and increasing hunger and slowing down slowing down slowing down metabolism. You are metabolism. You are not struggling with food. You not struggling with food. You are fighting your own are fighting your own physiology, and it physiology, and it always wins.

Hormones, GLP-1, and the Three Types of Hunger

So what actually So what actually raises this raises this thermostat? Hormones. thermostat? Hormones. Insulin is the main one Insulin is the main one. Give someone. Give someone insulin and they will gain insulin and they will

gain fat. Point. This is not fat. Point. This is not an opinion. This is basic an opinion. This is basic endocrinology that endocrinology that we see every day in we see every day in diabetes clinics. Cortisol, the. Cortisol, the stress hormone, also increases stress hormone, also increases it, which is why chronic it, which is why chronic stress and poor sleep are stress and poor sleep are so strongly linked so strongly linked to weight gain.

Note that none of Note that none of these factors these factors contain calories. contain calories. Meanwhile, hormones like Meanwhile, hormones like GLP-1—yes, the same GLP-1—yes, the same pathway as in Ozempic— pathway as in Ozempic— turn down this turn down this fat thermostat; This is fat thermostat; This is why these medications work, not as a magical, not as a magical calorie blocker, but calorie blocker, but because they because they suppress the suppress the suppress the internal internal internal hunger signal. This is the hunger signal. This is the most important lesson most important lesson from the entire from the entire GLP-1 revolution. To GLP-1 revolution. To lose weight and maintain lose weight and maintain it, you need to it, you need to reduce your reduce your hunger, not just hunger, not just restrict calories.

If you only fight If you only fight calories while your calories while your internal thermostat is internal thermostat is set to set to high, you high, you will lose will lose will lose every time. Three types of every time. Three types of hunger that hunger that no one talks about. Here's what no one talks about. Here's what I wish I wish every every prediabetic patient understood before prediabetic patient understood before visiting the doctor.

There is not just one There is not just one type of hunger. There are three of them, and type of hunger. There are three of them, and each requires a each requires a completely different completely different approach. The first is approach. The first is homeostatic starvation. Your regular. Your regular physical hunger, physical hunger, regulated by the regulated by the same fat same fat thermostat thermostat thermostat we just talked about. This is we just talked about. This is hunger, which hunger, which is controlled by insulin is controlled by insulin and cortisol. The second is hedonistic is hedonistic hunger. Hunger hunger. Hunger caused by caused by caused by pleasure, not pleasure, not need. No one need. No one eats dessert because they're starving after a hearty dinner.

after a hearty dinner. You eat it because it's You eat it because it's incredibly delicious and incredibly delicious and causes a causes a dopamine release. This is completely dopamine release. This is completely normal in normal in small amounts. The problem is that ultra-processed ultra-processed food companies have actually food companies have actually broken this mechanism.

They remove protein They remove protein and fat—two and fat—two nutrients that nutrients that trigger satiety hormones—and replace them with replace them with textures, flavors, textures, flavors, and sugar combinations and sugar combinations designed to designed to maximize maximize maximize pleasure while pleasure while minimizing satiety.

That's why you can That's why you can eat a whole packet of eat a whole packet of chips or cookies chips or cookies without even noticing, without even noticing, but you're unlikely to be able to but you're unlikely to be able to eat a second helping of eat a second helping of steak. One has a steak. One has a built-in built-in stop signal. The other was stop signal. The other was specifically specifically specifically designed designed designed not to have it. And this is where not to have it. And this is where things get things get serious. In some serious. In some people, this people, this hedonistic urge hedonistic urge develops into a develops into a real food real food addiction.

addiction. addiction. Approximately a quarter to Approximately a quarter to a third of people a third of people struggling with obesity struggling with obesity meet meet meet clinical criteria for clinical criteria for food addiction food addiction according to according to validated tests. And as with.

Naked Carbs and Meal Order

And as with nicotine, alcohol, nicotine, alcohol, or any other addictive substance, addictive substance, the plant or the plant or product itself is not the product itself is not the problem. The problem is what problem. The problem is what happens happens happens during their processing and during their processing and refining.

refining. refining. Tobacco leaves are not Tobacco leaves are not nicotine cigarettes. nicotine cigarettes. Poppy flowers are not Poppy flowers are not morphine. And potatoes are not Pringles. It is the not Pringles. It is the processing that creates this processing that creates this addictive effect.

If you have a true If you have a true food addiction, food addiction, the advice to "just eat in the advice to "just eat in moderation" is as useless as moderation" is as useless as telling telling telling an alcoholic to "just an alcoholic to "just have one drink." have one drink." You wouldn't You wouldn't say that. So say that. So stop telling stop telling yourself that about yourself that about ultra-processed foods. The third type is. The third type is conditional hunger. Hunger conditional hunger. Hunger caused solely by caused solely by habit and environment.

habit and environment. You sit down in front of You sit down in front of the TV and the TV and suddenly want suddenly want chips. Not because chips. Not because the body the body needs them, but because needs them, but because the brain has learned: the brain has learned: TV equals a TV equals a snack. This is pure snack. This is pure Pavlovian Pavlovian Pavlovian conditioning. And this is conditioning. And this is incredibly powerful, incredibly powerful, because habits don't because habits don't require willpower require willpower once they're formed.

once they're formed. Good news? You Good news? You can can can reconfigure this reconfigure this very mechanism very mechanism to your advantage. Why " naked" carbohydrates naked" carbohydrates harm blood sugar levels harm blood sugar levels. For my. For my patients with patients with prediabetes, the prediabetes, the prediabetes, the next part is of next part is of utmost importance. There is a concept I. There is a concept I call "naked call "naked carbs." carbs." Refined carbohydrates eaten eaten eaten alone, such as white alone, such as white toast with jam or a toast with jam or a muffin with coffee. Here's how muffin with coffee. Here's how it works it works physiologically.

physiologically. physiologically. Carbohydrates are simply Carbohydrates are simply chains of glucose that chains of glucose that are broken down and are broken down and absorbed into the bloodstream.

The speed of this The speed of this absorption is absorption is crucial. A “naked” carbohydrate, “naked” carbohydrate, pure refined pure refined starch or sugar without starch or sugar without anything else in anything else in the stomach to the stomach to slow it down, slow it down, is absorbed almost is absorbed almost instantly, causing a instantly, causing a spike in spike in glucose, followed by a spike in spike in insulin. And insulin. And remember, insulin is the hormone that is the hormone that signals your body signals your body to store fat.

Compare this to Compare this to consuming the same consuming the same number of calories in number of calories in the form of steak and the form of steak and eggs. Protein and fat eggs. Protein and fat significantly slow down significantly slow down stomach emptying.

So instead of a stream of So instead of a stream of glucose entering the glucose entering the blood all at once, blood all at once, it enters there it enters there gradually. Smaller gradually. Smaller glucose spike.

glucose spike. Smaller Smaller Smaller insulin spike. And, insulin spike. And, critically, you critically, you actually feel actually feel full after eating because full after eating because proteins and fats proteins and fats activate activate activate satiety hormones, which satiety hormones, which pure pure pure carbohydrates do not. There is carbohydrates do not. There is actual research actual research on this. When people on this. When people consume vegetables and consume vegetables and protein before protein before carbohydrates within the carbohydrates within the same meal, same meal, rather than the other way around, their rather than the other way around, their insulin response insulin response is reduced by 20-30%.

is reduced by 20-30%.

Fasting and the Limits of Exercise

Same food, same Same food, same calories, just a different calories, just a different order, and the order, and the hormonal hormonal hormonal result is completely result is completely different. If you have different. If you have

prediabetes and you remember nothing prediabetes and you remember nothing else else else from this from this video, remember video, remember this. Eat proteins and this. Eat proteins and vegetables first. Save vegetables first. Save the starch or bread the starch or bread for last and for last and watch what watch what happens to your happens to your energy and energy and food cravings after the meal.

Why fasting is Why fasting is not extreme. This is the not extreme. This is the basic state of the basic state of the body. Now body. Now let's move on to the second let's move on to the second "golden rule".

"golden rule". Stop eating Stop eating constantly. It sounds constantly. It sounds almost too simple, almost too simple, but it may be the but it may be the most most most underrated underrated underrated tool in tool in modern medicine.

modern medicine. Think about the word " breakfast" (English breakfast – "to break – "to break a fast"). You a fast"). You can can can only break a fast only break a fast if you were if you were fasting in the first place.

fasting in the first place. Every religious and Every religious and cultural tradition in cultural tradition in human history has had human history has had some form of some form of fasting. This is not fasting. This is not some new some new biohacking trend. You could biohacking trend. You could say this is say this is the oldest and the oldest and most proven most proven health advice, dating back thousands of, dating back thousands of years. Whereas years. Whereas calorie counting calorie counting as a concept has as a concept has only been around for about 50 years.

Fasting affects Fasting affects all three types of hunger all three types of hunger simultaneously. It simultaneously. It interrupts conditioned interrupts conditioned hunger, breaking hunger, breaking the habit of eating every 3 the habit of eating every 3 hours. It reduces hours. It reduces hedonic hedonic hedonic eating eating eating by removing constant by removing constant opportunities opportunities opportunities to snack. And, to snack. And, surprisingly, over time it surprisingly, over time it reduces reduces reduces homeostatic hunger. Most people. Most people believe that if you believe that if you stop eating, you will stop eating, you will get hungry and get hungry and eventually start eventually start overeating. But overeating. But in reality, your body in reality, your body learns to better extract learns to better extract energy from its own energy from its own stored fat, which is actually what it needs for this actually what it needs for this. And as. And as this pathway this pathway is used more is used more is used more efficiently, your efficiently, your baseline baseline baseline hunger level decreases.

hunger level decreases. Patients constantly Patients constantly tell me that once tell me that once they get into the they get into the rhythm of rhythm of time-restricted eating, time-restricted eating, their appetite is their appetite is smaller than ever. It's smaller than ever. It's not that not that their stomachs their stomachs have shrunk, it's that have shrunk, it's that their hormones their hormones have readjusted.

have readjusted. Physical exercise is Physical exercise is good for health, good for health, but ineffective for but ineffective for weight loss. A short weight loss. A short but important digression, but important digression, because patients who because patients who are trying to are trying to are trying to overdo their diet ask me about it all the time. Is it possible to ask me about it all the time. Is it possible to lose weight lose weight through through through exercise alone? Technically yes, but it's extremely, but it's extremely inefficient. And here is the inefficient. And here is the real mechanism.

real mechanism. It's not so much about It's not so much about directly burning directly burning calories. Intense calories. Intense exercise increases exercise increases sympathetic nervous sympathetic nervous system activity, which dramatically system activity, which dramatically suppresses appetite, suppresses appetite, similar to how similar to how stimulants have stimulants have stimulants have historically caused historically caused weight loss as a weight loss as a side effect. But there is a side effect. But there is a nuance. Your body nuance. Your body adapts to adapts to regular exercise, regular exercise, becoming more efficient.

becoming more efficient. This is actually a sign of This is actually a sign of good good cardiovascular fitness, a cardiovascular fitness, a lower resting heart rate lower resting heart rate, a, a calmer calmer calmer physiology, but it physiology, but it also means that over also means that over time you burn time you burn fewer calories fewer

calories doing the same doing the same work. Studies of work. Studies of total total total energy expenditure show that energy expenditure show that it stabilizes at it stabilizes at around 2,500 around 2,500 calories per day, calories per day, no matter no matter how much extra how much extra exercise you add, exercise you add, because the body because the body actively resists actively resists endless endless endless energy burn.

energy burn. Exercise is Exercise is essential for your essential for your heart, longevity, heart, longevity, mental health, mental health, and and and insulin sensitivity. Please insulin sensitivity. Please continue to continue to do them. Just don't do them. Just don't expect that a expect that a treadmill alone can treadmill alone can fix the effects of fix the effects of poor nutrition.

poor nutrition. 30 minutes of moderate 30 minutes of moderate exercise burns exercise burns about as much as two slices of bread. two slices of bread.

Environment, Mindset, and Practical Steps

The math is simply not The math is simply not in your favor unless you in your favor unless you change your change your diet first. The environment diet first. The environment you are in you are in resets your resets your hormones. Last hormones. Last moment. And, frankly moment. And, frankly, one that, one that most doctors most doctors completely ignore.

completely ignore. Your surroundings and Your surroundings and environment have a environment have a much greater impact on your weight much greater impact on your weight than than any eating plan.

any eating plan. Think about it. Think about it. Take a person from Take a person from Japan, where Japan, where obesity rates are among the obesity rates are among the lowest in the world, and lowest in the world, and transport them to a transport them to a major American major American city. Over the course of city. Over the course of several years, several years, her risk of obesity her risk of obesity increases significantly. A couple of increases significantly. A couple of generations later, their generations later, their descendants have the same obesity levels as everyone else obesity levels as everyone else around them. Their around them. Their genetics haven't changed at all genetics haven't changed at all.

.. Their environment has changed. Or Their environment has changed. Or look look look directly at directly at your your your social circle. social circle. Studies Studies Studies show that if show that if your close friend is your close friend is obese, obese, obese, your own risk of your own risk of obesity increases by obesity increases by more than 170%. This is not a more than 170%. This is not a condemnation. This is social condemnation. This is social modeling. If everyone modeling. If everyone around you considers around you considers snacking, huge snacking, huge portions, and portions, and ultra-processed ultra-processed ultra-processed foods to be foods to be completely normal, completely normal, your brain will also your brain will also gradually gradually gradually rewire itself rewire itself rewire itself to what is the norm.

Do the opposite. Surround yourself with people Surround yourself with people who walk a lot who walk a lot, choose, choose salads, and don't salads, and don't snack between snack between meals, and it meals, and it will become your new will become your new normal without any normal without any conscious effort. That is why conscious effort. That is why mindset mindset mindset matters much matters much more than is commonly more than is commonly believed, and changing believed, and changing mindsets is entirely mindsets is entirely achievable. This is not achievable. This is not just a vague just a vague concept of concept of concept of self-help. I'll give self-help. I'll give you a personal you a personal example of how this example of how this works. For years, I didn't works. For years, I didn't perceive sugar as perceive sugar as something dangerous. He something dangerous. He was just sweet and was just sweet and nice. When I nice. When I realized that in realized that in large doses, sugar large doses, sugar acts as a mild acts as a mild metabolic toxin, metabolic toxin, my intake dropped my intake dropped by 70–80%. Not because I was by 70–80%. Not because I was forcing myself forcing myself to hold back, but because I to hold back, but because I no longer wanted no longer wanted him the way I used to. That's the difference the difference between self-limitation and a between self-limitation and a real change in real change in mindset.

mindset. mindset. Self-limitation Self-limitation Self-limitation means you are means you are constantly fighting with constantly fighting with yourself. Changing your mindset yourself. Changing your mindset means that the urge means that the urge disappears on its own.

disappears on its own. So what does this mean So what does this mean for you? If you are for you? If you are prediabetic, overweight, prediabetic, overweight, or have or have failed every failed every diet, I want you to diet, I want you to take away take away three concrete steps from this video, three concrete steps from this video, not abstract not abstract inspiration. First: inspiration. First: stop treating stop treating all calories the all calories the same. A calorie in same. A calorie in broccoli and a calorie in a broccoli and a calorie in a sugary drink sugary drink cause completely cause completely different hormonal different hormonal responses.

responses. responses. Prioritize protein, Prioritize protein, natural fats, and fiber-rich vegetables, and fiber-rich vegetables, and eat them before eat them before refined refined refined carbohydrates, not carbohydrates, not after. Second: give after. Second: give your body real your body real breaks from eating. You don't breaks from eating. You don't need to do need to do anything anything anything extreme.

extreme. extreme. Even a consistent 12–16- hour overnight hour overnight fasting window, if fasting window, if followed, followed, followed, resets your resets your hunger hormones better hunger hormones better than any than any calorie counting.

calorie counting.

Third: ruthlessly

Third: ruthlessly analyze your analyze your environment. What is the environment. What is the norm in your kitchen, in your, in your social circle, and in your social circle, and in your daily routine, daily routine, quietly controls your quietly controls your hormones every day. Change what surrounds you, and surrounds you, and behavior change behavior change will happen almost will happen almost automatically.

automatically. It's not about willpower. It has It's not about willpower. It has always been that way. If always been that way. If you have you have failed before, it is only because failed before, it is only because you were given the you were given the wrong wrong wrong tool, not because there is tool, not because there is anything wrong with you.

So, adjust your So, adjust your hormones, curb your hormones, curb your hunger, and your weight hunger, and your weight will normalize by will normalize by itself. If this itself. If this has changed your perspective on has changed your perspective on weight loss and weight loss and blood sugar, blood sugar, be sure to be sure to be sure to subscribe, because subscribe, because next week I next week I plan to break down exactly how plan to break down exactly how insulin resistance builds up silently for years before a blood test detects it. And about early blood test detects it. And about early warning warning warning signals that almost signals that almost no one checks.

no one checks. See you in the See you in the