

# Connecting the Dots

Can changing our thinking about calories, eating nutritious foods and exercising help curb diabetes and obesity?

November 14, 2014 By [Kate Ferguson](#)

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Real Health chats with Jonathan Bailor, a noted nutrition and exercise expert and author of *The Calorie Myth*.

## **What is “the calorie myth”?**

There are actually three: Calories are all that matter; that our body is a passive thing, [so] if we just calculate calories in and calories out, we can actively control our body’s composition; and that a calorie is a calorie regardless of its source. But a lot of research shows that this way of thinking is the cause of the record high rates of obesity and disease that we’re experiencing today.

## **What is your take on the idea that proper nutrition can be a cure for diabetes and obesity?**

I think that to reverse diabetes, obesity or any of these “diseases of civilization,” as they’re called, it’s quite complex, but it’s also quite simple. Take this simple statement: If we eat food and we move, we will avoid these diseases. This is not debatable because this was proven by every generation of humans who have ever lived, up until the current few. Humans are designed to move. So if we ate food and moved, we would experience what every other generation has experienced, and that is, essentially, the absence of the diseases that are killing us today.

## **What are some quality foods we should be eating to fuel and nourish the body so we can achieve a state of health?**

There are three primary food groups that we should be focused on. First and foremost, we should be eating non-starchy vegetables. Non-starchy vegetables are characterized as vegetables you can eat raw, such as leafy greens, mushrooms, carrots, peppers and cucumbers. These are all foods you would generally put in salads. These non-starchy vegetables should far and away make up the majority of the foods that goes into our bodies.

Next on that list, in terms of the volume of food that we’re consuming, are nutrient-dense proteins. These proteins are generally found in high-quality, hormone-free, humanely raised animals. They

include seafood and fish, such as wild-caught Alaskan salmon; grass-fed, hormone-free beef; free-range poultry; eggs; and even foods such as low-sugar dairy products (think Greek yogurt or cottage cheese).

Also on that list are two food groups that each individual needs to evaluate their tolerance for. The first is whole-foods fats. These are foods such as avocados, coconut, chia seeds, flax seeds and almonds: an entire food that is high in fat. These foods are generally also high in fiber. Notice that I'm not talking about eating oils; I'm not talking about eating deep-fried foods. I'm talking about whole foods that are also high in fat.

Finally, there are low-fructose fruits. These include berries and citrus, which are dramatically higher in essential vitamins and minerals, and lower in sugar, or fructose, than fruits such as grapes, bananas and apples.

### **Children have been hit pretty hard by obesity. What do you think is the best way for parents to address this problem?**

I think there are two really powerful things everyone can do. The first is to be the example of what we want to see. By this I mean if you don't want your child to smoke, you probably don't smoke around them, or you probably don't have cigarettes in the house, and you probably don't hang out in social settings where a lot of people smoke. Gandhi said, Let's be the change we want to see in the world.

The second thing is, I would encourage us to help our children to see how eating these whole foods can help them achieve what they want as a person and how eating packaged edible products hinders that. I think this is a much more effective approach than telling kids, "You can't eat this; you should eat that." Let's take the solution deeper and let's honor ourselves and see food as a tool we can [use to] further ourselves.

### **What do you think of the American Medical Association's determination that obesity is a disease, especially from a nutritional standpoint?**

From a purely science perspective, obesity is characterized by a set of metabolic markers that are as consistent as the metabolic markers that we use to identify diabetes, for example. Take hypothalamus inflammation, or certain states in the brain where the brain is no longer able to respond to certain hormones. If you look at the gut bacteria and gut flora makeup of obese individuals, they are characteristically the same, and characteristically different than non-obese people. The same thing applies to their hormone levels. So if we redefine disease as a consistent set of metabolic markers which when present result in a consistent set of symptoms, then it's absolutely accurate to call obesity a disease. We call diabetes a disease for those same reasons, and it's the same for hypertension as well.

### **So if obesity is a disease, does that mean it can be cured?**

Absolutely.

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