

Satisfying the ghrelin goblin

A second reason why eating more fat helps you to lose weight is because, calorie for calorie, people on a fatty diet don't feel so hungry. We know this is true if you have a high-protein diet, because in 2011 Marks and Spencer paid for some research to be carried out on a range of high-protein foods they wanted to market branded as 'Simply fuller longer'. According to the *Daily Mail's* report on these trials, the subjects didn't feel particularly hungry in spite of cutting their calorie intake by 40%, because a diet containing a high proportion of protein-rich foods creates a feeling of fullness faster than one containing more carbohydrates or fat.

You may not be able to afford to feed a family regularly on Marks and Spencer's meals, but the fact is that obtaining your energy needs from protein and saturated fat rather than unsaturated fat and carbohydrates will satisfy your hunger for longer. This means you will end up eating less overall, so your food bill may be no more than it is now.

Since about 2005 there has been a lot of research into something called 'satiety', which in layman's language means 'feeling full'. It is gradually being discovered that a carbohydrate-based diet doesn't make us feel that we've had enough to eat, probably because it isn't the kind of diet our bodies have been made for. The British Egg Information Service, for example, lists five different trials that have compared the weight losses of people who eat egg-based breakfasts or lunches with those who eat typical weight-loss meals. In every case the egg eaters lost significantly more weight, because they felt full for longer. In one trial subjects who ate two eggs for breakfast every day lost 65% more weight than subjects who ate a bagel with the same number of calories!⁴³⁵

There was a very interesting BBC Horizon programme in 2014 that featured two doctors who were identical twins. One was put on a high-fat diet, and the other on a high-carbohydrate (sugar and starch) diet. The high-fat doctor, Xand van Tulleken, ate sausage, bacon and scrambled egg for breakfast, while the high-carbohydrate doctor, Chris, ate cornflakes, crumpets and jam. At lunchtime they were invited to eat as much as they wanted of the foods they were each allowed. Xand had had enough after consuming 855 calories but Chris, his identical twin brother, didn't feel satisfied until he had consumed 1,250 calories. The explanation given was that protein suppresses the production of ghrelin, which is the hormone that stimulates feelings of hunger, so Xand's protein-rich food satisfied him sooner and he didn't feel the need to eat so much at lunchtime. And he lost 2.5kg more weight than his brother did.

In 2010 Weight Watchers changed their approach to dieting with a new and apparently successful 'Pro Points' plan, in which greater emphasis is given to foods high in protein and fibre rather than foods which are low in calories and saturated fat.

Foods rich in protein are therefore the best choice for keeping your weight down. In fact if you have managed to lose some weight already then you can help yourself to keep it off simply by eating more protein! In Maastricht 148 middle-aged men and women lost weight over 4 weeks on a low-energy diet.⁴³⁶ After that they were encouraged to keep to the same

⁴³⁵ Van der Wal J S et al. *Egg breakfast enhances weight loss*. International Journal of Obesity, October 2008; 32(*10):1545-1551.

⁴³⁶ Westerterp-Plantenga M S et al. *High protein intake sustains weight maintenance after body weight loss in humans*. International Journal of Obesity, 2004; 28(1):57-64.

diet for another 3 months, with regular counselling sessions to keep them going, but during this period half of them were allowed to eat an additional 48gm of protein a day. They all regained some weight, as dieters generally do after their early efforts, but the people who ate the *additional* protein gained on average only half as much weight as the others did, presumably because they didn't feel so hungry. 48gm of protein is about what you'd find in four rashers of bacon, five large eggs, two cod fillets, or a small (190gm) sirloin steak. That's an awful lot of extra food to eat every day, yet it helped them to put on less weight than the 74 people who didn't eat it.

Unless you are a vegetarian, this is wonderful news! It means that if you eat eggs and red meat and chicken skin and full-fat cheese, and drink full-cream milk, you will almost certainly lose more weight than if you stick to skinless poultry, starchy foods and low-fat dairy products. Remember again that meat, eggs and full-cream milk are the kinds of food people ate in my childhood, when hardly anyone was overweight or obese. Personally, I started eating butter and drinking full-cream milk again when I was 67, and 5 years later I weigh about 6 kilograms less.