

Good Calories, BAD CALORIES: A Review
Long Life Magazine, 2008
David Center

[Good Calories, BAD CALORIES: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Diet, Weight Control, and Disease](#) (New York: Alfred A. Knoff) is Gary Taubes' third book. Taubes is a highly respected author of books and articles on science for the lay reader. He is also a correspondent for *Science* magazine. He has won three Science in Society Journalism awards from the National Association of Science Writers and is the only print journalist to have done so. Mr. Taubes spent five years locating, acquiring, reading and synthesizing all the data available on the relationship between diet and health. His review covers over one hundred years of medical and scientific literature. His book discusses what he found and what he concluded. The book spans 600 pages and includes 147 pages of notes and references. Mr. Taubes has done his homework and has provided ample documentation for anyone who wants to examine the evidence.

This is a well-written book and a compelling read. The most surprising thing to come out of reading this book was the recognition that nutrition advice dispensed by the medical community and by such governmental agencies as the FDA is largely based on medical dogma not on medical science. To use a popular phrase the advice dispensed is "politically correct" but not scientifically valid. Taubes relates how nutritional advice came to be dominated by dogma through the efforts of several dominant characters in the field of nutrition research. These "players" depended less on evidence and more on the force of personality and political maneuvering to get their ideas enshrined as fact. Some of these dogmas are so widely accepted as fact that they are almost never questioned. Perhaps the most widely held piece of nutritional dogma is that obesity, cardiovascular disease and many other health problems are caused by fat in the diet. Taubes finds little evidence to support this widely believed idea. Taubes argues that the evidence clearly supports a major role for carbohydrate in both obesity and chronic diseases.

What are the major conclusions reached by Taubes in his extensive review of the evidence on diet and health?

1. Dietary fat makes no significant contribution to the development of chronic diseases.
2. The higher the [glycemic](#) index of carbohydrates the greater is their negative impact on health.
3. Sugar, especially sucrose and high fructose corn syrup are among the worst dietary culprits.
4. Refined carbohydrates make a bigger contribution to the development of chronic diseases than any other dietary factor.
5. Obesity is not due to over eating or sedentary behavior.
6. Extra calories do not make us obese and exercise does not produce long-term weight loss.

7. Fat accumulation and obesity are caused by an imbalance in hormonal regulation, which in turn is precipitated by too much carbohydrate, especially refined carbohydrates in the diet.
8. Insulin is largely responsible for regulating fat storage and when insulin levels are chronically elevated we accumulate fat.
9. High [glycemic](#) foods are a major contributor to chronic elevation of insulin levels, which over time can make us fat and make us susceptible to a wide range of chronic diseases such as arteriosclerosis, diabetes and many cancers.
10. Heavy carbohydrate consumption actually increases hunger and decreases both metabolism and physical activity.

Taubes indicates that some of us are more or less susceptible to problems caused by carbohydrate consumption than others due to genetic differences in insulin regulation. However, a large portion of the human population is at greater risk from consuming large quantities of carbohydrates, especially refined carbohydrates, than from consuming fatty foods, including those with significant levels of saturated fats.

The above review hardly does justice to this information dense book. If you want a well-informed alternative view of the role of diet on health and thus longevity, you should read Gary Taubes' book for yourself.