

Taking Sides #2

Can an Overemphasis on Healthy Eating Become Unhealthy?

Can eating healthy really become unhealthy? The term “negative nutrition” was created in the mid-1970’s which is when people were informed about certain foods that are bad for you and to limit or avoid eating them. Negative nutrition is a term that is used in the dietary world and means harmful foods and practices. It seems silly to think that people who watch the foods that they eat in order to lead a healthy life can actually lead to an unhealthy relationship with food, but truthfully sometimes even the most “healthy” looking people can be unhealthy from the inside. Before I explain why an overemphasis on healthy eating can become unhealthy I am going to briefly discuss arguments for both sides, then I will discuss why I agree that it can become unhealthy.

In an article published in *Today’s Dietitian* writer Lindsey Getz states that there is a fine line between incorporating healthy foods into your diet and eating nothing but healthy foods. Getz states that it is important for dietitians to inform their clients the value of all foods so they can gain a healthy relationship with food and it can also prevent them from taking healthy eating to dangerous levels. On the other hand, in an article published in *Consumer Health Interactive*, health and medical writer Chris Woolston states that the typical American diet is consuming too many calories along with too many foods containing trans fat, sugars, and also too large of portions. He states that we need to take control of our diets in order to become a healthy America.

I have actually struggled with having a healthy relationship with food since I was a teenager so I very much believe that an overemphasis on healthy eating can become unhealthy.

As a teenage girl I was probably only five or ten pounds overweight but was looked at as fat at times because of the way that everyone views beauty in today's society. I loved to eat, especially chips, cookies, cakes, and anything else that is considered unhealthy. As a teenager I also began a love affair with anorexia and bulimia which I was in an on and off relationship with until age 23. At age 23 after using laxatives I was very underweight at 112 pounds for being 5 feet 6 inches tall. I loved the way I looked but finally stopped because I began a relationship with someone who said they would leave me if I didn't stop. It was one of the hardest things that I ever had to do and I would be lying if I said I have never thought about doing it again since. Now that I am older instead of anorexia and bulimia I have actually struggled with a condition called orthorexia. I had never heard of this term until reading the article in *Today's Dietitian* written by Lindsey Getz but now know that this is my new "obsession".

Orthorexia is not an officially recognized disorder and is controversial in the medical world, some doctors and dietitians believe in the term and some do not classifying it with anorexia or obsessive compulsive disorder instead. No matter whether it is a recognized term or not orthorexia has real symptoms that can affect someone's health such as worry or anxiety about eating and can even lead to malnutrition. The article in *Today's Dietitian* states that unlike anorexia and bulimia, orthorexia is not about the desire to become thin but "a desire to eat a perfectly healthy or even 'pure' diet," (Deborah Kauffmann, RD, LDN). The article also states, "orthorexia could easily begin as simple healthy habits but then spiral out of control, the person takes something that's normally considered healthy and good for their body and takes it to the extreme, they wind up with disordered thinking and psychological torment..." (Sondra Kronberg, MS, RD, CDN). Orthorexia can start off as something that someone is controlling to something that is controlling them.

I will be completely honest, before reading these arguments about healthy eating I thought that I would definitely conclude that there was no way healthy eating could be unhealthy, boy was I wrong. I never thought that my current food habits could be a problem. My current food habits are running my life, I think about food a majority of the day. I know many people that are the same way, food is a huge topic. Most people I know are either on a “diet” or watching what they are eating, or don’t care what they are eating but are very overweight. My husband and I have been trying to eat healthy for the last 3 years and I now realize that it has gotten out of control on my part. I worry about all the ingredients in the foods that we eat, I take longer at the store to shop for food because I’m staring at ingredient after ingredient on the labels, I have taught my 10 year old daughter about the various “bad” ingredients and now she is very cautious of the foods that she eats, I try to buy “pure” and organic food as much as our budget allows, and much more. I never thought that eating for my family’s health could be actually damaging it instead.

In the article published in *Today’s Dietitian* Getz explains, “perhaps one of the most alarming trends associated with orthorexia is that children are picking up some of these tendencies...may instill a sense of fear in their children that...foods are ‘bad’ or scary things could happen if they eat them.” (Lindsey Getz). I never thought that my conscious eating habits could affect my children negatively. My 2 year old is too young to notice our eating habits right now but I have completely affected my 10 year old and now I feel horrible that I have done so. My daughter will not eat things with BHT, TBHQ, corn syrup, nitrates/nitrites, and many more foods with similar ingredients. My daughter also watches how much sweets or “bad” foods that she eats when in reality she shouldn’t worry about these things because it can lead to not only orthorexia, but bulimia and anorexia. Lindsey Getz explains, “parents should teach their children

about moderation. Frequently eating trans fatty foods...is not healthy behavior, but neither is becoming obsessive about avoiding them..." (Lindsey Getz). Right after reading the article written by Lindsey Getz in *Today's Dietitian* I made sure to talk to my daughter about food and our "unhealthy" eating habits. I told my daughter not to worry about food anymore and that anything she eats is just fine as long as it is in moderation.

We all need to create a healthy relationship with food and I believe that we can start to do this by letting go of the "good" and "bad" labels that have been put on foods. The food pyramid is a good model to follow for daily eating and overall health but I also think that we all should eat a piece of cake, a handful of chips, or a scoop of ice cream in moderation along with those foods listed in the pyramid. The article in *Today's Dietitian* is not saying that eating all "bad" foods like sugars and fats is good for you but eating them in moderation is fine for not only our physical health but our mental health as well. I believe that if we all create a healthy relationship with food then it will greatly help society as a whole. If we can create a healthy relationship with food we can stop stressing about what we are eating and finally enjoy it instead.