

Why You Can't Lose Those Last 10 Pounds

by: Stephen Perrine and Heather Hurlock 7/23/10

On May 11, the White House announced it was targeting a new threat to America's health and security. It wasn't some rogue nation or terrorist organization, or a newfound disease or environmental threat. It was a class of chemicals that are making Americans fat. They're called endocrine disrupting chemicals, or EDCs. And chances are you're eating or drinking them right now.

The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity released a report called "[Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation](#)." In the report they list endocrine-disrupting chemicals as a possible reason for increased obesity in the country and describe how scientists have coined a new term for these chemicals — "obesogens" — because they "may promote weight gain and obesity."

What does this mean for you? It means that weight gain is not just about calories-in versus calories-out.

No, America's obesity crisis can't entirely be blamed on too much fast food and too little exercise. We have to consider a third factor: the obesogens. They're natural and synthetic compounds, and many of these chemicals work by mimicking estrogen — the very hormone that doctors DON'T want women taking anymore (as a large clinical trial linked hormone therapy to increased risk of heart disease, breast cancer, stroke, blood clots and abnormal mammograms).

Why traditional diets don't work anymore

Because high school biology was likely a while back, here's a quick refresher: The endocrine system is made up of all the glands and cells that produce the hormones that regulate our bodies. Growth and development, sexual function, reproductive processes, mood, sleep, hunger, stress, metabolism and the way our bodies use food — it's all controlled by hormones. So whether you're tall or short, lean or heavy — that's all determined in a big way by your endocrine system.

But your endocrine system is a finely tuned instrument that can easily be thrown off-kilter. "Obesogens are thought to act by hijacking the regulatory systems that control body weight," says Frederick vom Saal, Ph.D., curators' professor of biological sciences at the University of Missouri. That's why endocrine disruptors are so good at making us fat — and that's why diet advice doesn't always work — because even strictly following the smartest traditional advice won't lower your obesogen exposure. See, an

apple a day may have kept the doctor away 250 years ago when Benjamin Franklin included the phrase in his almanac. But if that apple comes loaded with obesity-promoting chemicals — nine of the ten most commonly used pesticides are obesogens, and apples are one of the most pesticide-laden foods out there — then Ben's advice is way out of date.

The obesogen effect is the reason why traditional diet advice — choose chicken over beef, eat more fish, load up on fruits and vegetables — may not work anymore. This is why we're calling for a New American Diet.

See, while digging up all of this research on obesogens we've discovered some good news: There's no reason why all of our favorite foods — from steak to burgers, from pasta to ice cream — can't be part of a reasonable weight-loss program. We just need to get rid of old thinking. We can reverse the obesogen effect if we simply adopt these four simple laws of leanness:

Leanness Law No. 1: Know When to Go Organic

The average American is exposed to 10 to 13 different pesticides through food, beverages and drinking water every day and nine of the ten most common pesticides are EDCs. But according to a [recent study](#) in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, eating an organic diet for just five days can reduce circulating pesticide EDCs to non-detectable or near non-detectable levels.

Of course, organic foods can be expensive. But not all organics are created equal—many foods have such low levels of pesticides that buying organic just isn't worth it. [The Environmental Working Group \(EWG\)](#) calculated that you can reduce your pesticide exposure nearly 80 percent simply by choosing organic for the 12 fruits and vegetables shown in their tests to contain the highest levels of pesticides. They call them "The Dirty Dozen," and (starting with the worst) they are celery, peaches, strawberries, apples, blueberries (domestic), nectarines, sweet bell peppers, spinach, kale/collard greens, cherries, potatoes and grapes (imported). And you can feel good about buying the following 15 conventionally grown fruits and vegetables that the EWG dubbed "The Clean Fifteen," because they were shown to have little pesticide residue: onions, avocado, sweet corn (frozen), pineapples, mango, sweet peas (frozen), asparagus, kiwi fruit, cabbage, eggplant, cantaloupe (domestic), watermelon, grapefruit, sweet potatoes and honeydew melon.

Leanness Law No. 2: Don't Eat Plastic

This ought to be a no-brainer. Indeed, you're probably already thinking, *Well, I don't generally eat plastic.* Ah, but you do. Chances are that you're among the 93 percent of Americans with detectable levels of bisphenol-A (BPA) in their bodies, and that you're also among the 75 percent of

Americans with detectable levels of phthalates. Both are synthetic chemicals found in plastics that mimic estrogen — essentially, artificial female hormones. And like pesticides, these plastic-based chemicals trick our bodies into storing fat and not building or retaining muscle. Decreasing your exposure to plastic-based obesogens will maximize your chances both of losing unwanted flab and of building lean muscle mass. Here's how: **1) Never heat food in plastic containers** or put plastic items in the dishwasher, which can damage them and increase leaching. BPA leaches from polycarbonate sports bottles 55 times faster when exposed to boiling liquids as opposed to cold ones, according to a study in the journal *Toxicology Letters*. **2) Avoid buying fatty foods** like meats that are packaged in plastic wrap because EDCs are stored in fatty tissue. The plastic wrap used at the supermarket is mostly PVC, whereas the plastic wrap you buy to wrap things at home is increasingly made from polyethylene. **3) Cut down on canned goods** by choosing tuna in a pouch over canned tuna. And get any canned and jarred foods from Eden Organic, one of the only companies that doesn't have BPA in its cans.

Leanness Law No. 3: Go Lean

Always choose pasture-raised meats, which, studies show, have less fat than their confined, grain-fed counterparts and none of the weight-promoting hormones. Plus, grass-fed beef contains 60 percent more omega-3s, 200 percent more vitamin E and two to three times more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA, a near-magic nutrient that helps ward off heart disease, cancer and diabetes, and can help you lose weight, according to a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*) than conventional beef. If you must choose a conventional cut of beef, choose lean cuts top sirloin, 95 percent lean ground beef, bottom round roast, eye round roast, top round roast or sirloin tip steak. Bison burgers and veggie burgers are also great substitutes when grass-fed beef isn't available. And select sustainable lean fish with low toxic loads (**meaning low levels of toxins like mercury and PCBs**). A study in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* found that even though the pesticide DDT was banned in 1973, the chemical and its breakdown product DDE can still be found today in fatty fish. Bigger fish eat smaller fish, and so carry a much higher toxic load.

Avoid ahi or bigeye tuna, tilefish, swordfish, shark, king mackerel, marlin and orange roughy — and focus on smaller fish like anchovies, Atlantic herring and mackerel, and wild-caught Alaskan salmon. Choose farmed rainbow trout, farmed mussels, anchovies, scallops (bay, farmed), Pacific cod, Pacific Halibut, Tuna (canned light) and mahimahi. Also, when you cook the fish, broil, poach, grill, boil or bake instead of pan-frying — this will allow contaminants from the fatty portions of fish to drain out.

Leanness Law No. 4: Filter Your Water

The best way to eliminate EDCs from your tap water is an activated carbon water filter. Available for faucets and pitchers, and as under-the-sink units, these filters remove most pesticides and industrial pollutants. Check the label to make sure the filter meets the [NSF/American National Standards Institute's](#) standard 53, indicating that it treats water for both health and aesthetic concerns. Try The Brita Aqualux (\$28, brita.com), Pur Horizontal faucet filter (\$49, purwaterfilter.com) and Kenmore's under-sink system (\$60, kenmore.com). However, if you have perchlorate (**a component of rocket fuel!**) in your water (you can find out by asking your municipal water supplier for a copy of its most recent water-quality report) you'll need a reverse osmosis filter. But for every five gallons of treated water they create per day, they discharge 40 to 90 gallons of wastewater, so make sure it's necessary before purchasing one.