



Can oatmeal make you fat? You betcha!

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One of the most persistent areas of concern we encounter as NLP coaches is the matrix of issues surrounding weight loss, diet and food as it relates to overall wellness.

There are, of course, many causes of obesity, binge eating and other nutritional disorders, but part of the problem in modern America would appear to be mislabeling of certain foods as healthy when in fact they are not.

We do not mean mislabeling in the strictest sense -- all major food packagers adhere to government mandated labeling standards -- but rather the mis-appropriation of the perception of healthfulness attached to certain foods that ARE healthy in their natural form, but not-so-much as they are served to us in processed form.

The evolution of oatmeal is a prime example of how an inherently healthy food can become adulterated almost beyond recognition.

Oatmeal is a prototypically American breakfast food which is perceived almost universally as natural and healthful. Generations of American children -- now adults with their own children and grandchildren -- have grown up on the advertising of oatmeal giants like the Quaker Oats Company.

Oats and humans have a long history together, with oats having been a part of the human diet since the Bronze Age in Europe. The plant is easy to cultivate, is hardier than most other cereals such as wheat, rye or barley, and can be grown in virtually any temperate climate.

Actual oatmeal is the polar opposite of prepared / processed foods. Real oatmeal does not contain ingredients or additives: it is simply a grain.



Oats are very nourishing -- they are packed with thiamine, iron and dietary fiber -- and this nutritional superstar is inherently low-calorie, is inexpensive, is easy to cook and has numerous demonstrated health benefits such as lowering cholesterol levels.

But the fast food colossus McDonald's and the genius of American marketing have teamed up to create what might seem impossible: fattening oatmeal, available both in restaurants and in your own kitchen!

Beginning with McDonald's, a simple question arises: how has McDonald's managed to create a fattening version of oatmeal? In a word: additives and serving defaults.

McDonald's advertises its' "bowl full of wholesome" as containing "100 percent natural whole-grain oats", "plump raisins", "sweet cranberries" and "crisp fresh apples". Yes, to an extent (how fresh are those apples by the time you eat them?), but that is only part of the picture.

McDonald's oatmeal is usually served containing "cream" -- which contains seven ingredients, only two of which are dairy -- and a substantial amount of brown sugar is automatically added unless the customer requests otherwise. Even the oatmeal itself is listed as having numerous "ingredients" including, rather bizarrely, "natural flavor".

What is the result?

Prepared and served in the typical McDonald's manner, your "bowl full of wholesome" contains more sugar than most standard sized candy bars and only a handful fewer calories than their cheeseburger or Egg McMuffin -- which is probably not what you had in mind when making the "healthy" choice at breakfast!

But McDonald's is not alone in adulterating the noble oat.



Quaker Oats Company -- a part of the multi-national Pepsico -- now manufactures and distributes a breathtaking array of oatmeal products, all of which are considerably more expensive than the natural oat, which has always been one of the least expensive grains.

Quaker still markets simple, natural unadulterated oats, but its' derivative products are a different matter, and contain a dizzying array of artificial ingredients, sugar and -- strangely -- less fiber.

For example, Quaker Strawberries and Cream Instant Oatmeal does not contain either strawberries or cream but artificial flavorings and synthetic substitutes for both -- and has over ten times times the sugar and only half the fiber of Quaker's original natural product, Old Fashioned Oats.

Why do people eat synthetic versions of oatmeal?

Some argue that instant versions of oatmeal prepared at home -- or buying oatmeal at McDonald's -- is more convenient than preparing traditional natural oatmeal, but this is a very weak argument.

Traditional oatmeal is one of the easiest foods to prepare -- just boil water -- and can even be consumed raw after just a few minutes soaking. In the time that it takes to wait, order and pay for your bowl of oat-sugar at McDonald's you could have made a nutritious bowl of natural oats flavored with fresh fruit in your own home -- and put away the dishes from the night before!

The real reason many Americans are consuming these fattening oatmeal concoctions is -- it would appear -- for the sugar. Simply put, these fattening versions of oatmeal are sweeter and, therefore, more consistent with the sugar-laced diet that Americans have become accustomed to.



For those trying to lose weight -- or maintain weight loss that they have already achieved -- excessive sugar is an enemy, and making your breakfast into a candy-bar fest is a mistake.

Changing yourself begins with changing your mind -- and shopping habits!

Next time you're at the grocery store buy yourself a carton of Quaker Old Fashioned Oats: it's inexpensive and jam-packed with nutrients and fiber.

Not sure how to make this healthful breakfast food taste great? Check out:

http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes_menus/collections/healthy_oats_recipes

Not just oatmeal-in-a-bowl, but heart-healthy, oat-filled muffin recipes, granola recipes and more. These healthy oat recipes will get you started on the road to better health -- and weight loss!

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