



The Lesser-Mass Diet

If eating bread is wrong, I don't want to be right (borrowed— and mangled—with apologies, from Luther Ingram's 1972 hit song "If Loving You Is Wrong, I Don't Want to Be Right"). This philosophy has led me to fail at the Atkins Diet and other popular weight-loss schemes that demonize carbohydrates while encouraging you to eat all the meat and cheese ("These are a few of my favorite things"—from another song—oh, forget it) you can possibly keep down.

How can carbohydrates, with the general formula of $C_m(H_2O)_n$ consisting only of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen, with the same 2:1 hydrogen/oxygen ratio as water, be bad for you? It's like saying that munching on handfuls of carbon nanotubes and washing them down with refreshing water is unhealthy. (Don't pretend like you've never tried it. It's the guilty pleasure, the dark, unspoken passion, of materials scientists worldwide, as reported in the June 2012 issue of *Scientific Cuisine*.)

My failure at the low-carb diets, and—let's be honest here—every other type of diet, has led me to the invention of the "Lesser-Mass Diet," or the "LMD" as it is known to its adherents (admittedly just me at the moment). The simple premise here is that, when faced with the choice of two edible objects, you should always choose the one with the lesser mass. After all, you can't possibly put on more weight than the total weight of the food you consume, so eating that two-ounce candy bar must be better for you than that one-pound head of lettuce. The same applies to the slice of pepperoni pizza versus two apples, or the jar of peanut butter versus the 55-gallon drum of salad.

This last line may have tipped you off to the beauty of the LMD: you can always specify the supposedly healthier choice in quantities large enough to ensure that it outweighs the unhealthy choice, as perceived by conventional wisdom. Should you crave a whole meat-lover's pizza, just crank your comparison up to a bag of apples. If you want to scarf down a 55-gallon drum of peanut butter—and who could blame you?—bump the quantity of salad up to a truckload. In LMD, this is known as the "Heavier Than Thou" principle.

To the doubters among you, I can confirm that I have followed the LMD for the last 20 years, and am nearly in perfect shape, if you believe, like the ancients, that the sphere is the perfect shape. (Plato would no doubt have had his favorite character, Socrates, say that I participate in "sphereness." And if Socrates had insisted on imbibing a drink that weighed less than hemlock, perhaps a dry martini, no olives, he might have lived to philosophize another day.)

In the interest of full disclosure, I have gained 40 pounds over 20 years on the LMD, thank you very much. A recent calculation of my body mass index puts me firmly in the middle of the obese category—incidentally, the most popular and growing category in many parts of the world. And who doesn't want to be popular? Just one of the side benefits of the LMD.

I can hear some of you asking "What kind of diet is that, where you end up obese?" I refer you to the online Merriam Webster dictionary's definition of a diet as (a) "food and drink regularly provided or consumed" or (b) "habitual nourishment," which surely describes the LMD, especially the "habitual" part. Note that I never claimed that LMD was a "weight-loss" diet, which comes under the dictionary's definition part (d) "a regimen of eating and drinking sparingly so as to reduce one's weight." I hope you do not feel misled.

In any case, recent research continues to show that humans have a weight "set point" to which they inevitably return after a period of dieting and weight loss, and that this set point may actually creep up a little after each cycle of weight loss and weight gain. Thus, I would probably weigh the same whether I had spent the last 20 years on a see-saw of weight-loss diets or by following the LMD. I believe the LMD has provided a more enjoyable path to the same point—extra-extra-large.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a vending machine full of junk food to empty and consume, which I would heartily choose over a trainload of celery any day.

Tim Palucka