

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / Moment 107 - Why Counting Calories Doesn't Work: Tim Spector

One of my friends is a prolific calorie counter and you know he eats a lot of Domino's pizzas he only listens to this podcast he's gonna know exactly he's gonna know that I'm atting him he eats Domino's pizzas all the time he eats like a real you know processed food diet but then says to me it's all about calorie counting now will do you respect friend he's never but it's not necessarily worked for him in terms of the goal that he's set himself so when I was reading about your view on calorie counting in your book spoon fared it was I screen-shotted it this morning and sent it to him and I said I said you are a bullshitter that's what I said and we had a good laugh about it this morning but what is your view on calorie counting in this idea that we can you know weight loss or being healthy is just about having a calorie deficit it's complete nonsense thank you I will clip that and send it to him there's never been any long-term study showing that calorie counting is an effective way to lose weight and maintain weight loss after you know the first few weeks so yes very strict calorie counting if you deprive yourself for a few weeks you will lose some weight but even if you're successful your body's evolutionary mechanisms will make you hungry and hunger every week you go by where you're depriving yourself of energy your body will go into sort of shut down mode your metabolism slows down so you're not expending those calories and inevitably I'd say more than 95% of people will go back to their baseline and many go above it they rebound back if they're doing this this style of calorie restriction now calorie counting is a part of that some people try and say okay I'm not going I'm not going a dramatic diet but I'm going to just try and reduce by 10% my calories in the day which in the old theory was supposed to make you lose weight well it's virtually impossible even professionals to count calories and because they're not very accurate for a start everything on the packet you have to weigh everything and in restaurants now we're supposed to have these calorie counts they're plus or minus about 30% because the portion size makes such a huge difference to it that it's it and it's been shown in the US to be a worthless exercise anyway so you can't count them going in you can't really count your metabolism going out either we're all incredibly different you know your friends probably been told 2,500 calories is what he's allowed well that's an average but it doesn't mean it's related to him my average is much lower I mean I tested it so everyone is an individual and this is another thing we need to move away from this one-size-fits-all guidelines but I think more importantly is that the whole calorie counting assumption means that it doesn't matter what format calorie is it has the same effect in your body therefore whether you're cutting out fat calories or carb calories or you know low calorie sodas or whatever it is it's going to be fine but we now know that's not true and there's several science experiments which now absolutely nail that one was in America where they gave people identical meals for two weeks in a sort of enclosed semi-prison and one was homemade and one was ultra processed both identical calories macros the same the group with the ultra processed

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foods over it by about 200 calories every day they kept coming back to the buffet for more okay so yes the same calories but the effect on the body meant they were hungrier why is that we don't know for sure it could be that those chemicals in the ultra processed foods affect the gut microbes and they then send signals to the brain saying eat more this isn't a natural you know this is a really weird chemical I was doing something weird to me I'm producing something weird in exchange it could be they get absorbed much quicker so you get a big sugar rush and you know the nutrients get in to your body in a way faster than they should do in nature and so your brain doesn't have time to say I'm full normally takes 20 minutes or so to get that fullness or you know it so it could be the matrix of the food it could be the chemicals in the food it could be its effect on the gut microbes but it also could be things like your sugar spikes so in the Zoe predict studies where basically we've given now 50,000 people in the US and the UK the same foods at the same time same time of day everyone's got these muffins we show that people one in four people who have these muffins and are wearing it we wear glucose monitors which tells you for two weeks every what's happening your glucose one in four people get a real sugar dip three hours later so this is where you get your rise in sugar which is normal and then as it comes down it goes below baseline but only in one in four people and when that happens those people end up overeating the next meal and during the day they feel more tired more hungry that's this the sort of 11 o'clock slump if you like if you've had a carby breakfast some people feel that others don't and what's really interesting is that so one in four people eating an identical muffin of identical calories will then overeat by this you know another 10% that day so you can see how that just blows the calorie idea out that the calories in equals calories out everything's the same and and the third thing is that ultra processed food says it has the calories that's equal to the whole foods but often they don't account for the fact that it's ground up it's highly refined and so if you take like almonds or something like this they use might use ground almonds and you compare ground almonds to whole almonds there's perhaps 30% less available calories in the whole almonds than there is in the other ones so the whole thing is a complete nonsense and it's there because the food industry wants you to focus on the calorie the fat content sugar so you don't have to think about the quality of the food and it's something that they can control very easily get their profits higher keep adding stuff to the product that's synthetic when we know that a lot of things they're adding are harmful for our gut microbes so that the artificial sweeteners are harmful the the glues they stick the foods together the emulsifiers some people react quite a lot to those and they cause problems so the whole thing is like this giant camouflage and that's that's really one thing I'm you know it might probably my number one bugbear is to get people to see the light stop obsessing about calories and start thinking about food much more as quality and what it does to your body quality food what is quality food in your definition of the

phrase it's the opposite of ultra processed food which is whole food which is made with from the original ingredients of plants many plant-based but it's not exclusively that contains all the nutrients that those those plants produce without it being stripped away or boiled up or highly pressurized deformed and so they have to add in back those nutrients so you know it's things in their pure form so it's it's nuts it's seeds it's it's grains that haven't been ground up super finely it's all the amazing plants and fruits and vegetables that we've got they they're healthy foods but you know it's it's not straightforward yes I've got this list of ten superfoods it's it's understand that many foods that you know are healthy for us most of them are in their in their original form berries nuts virtually every vegetable is healthy for us if it's in that original form it's only because we've we had to learn to preserve things we had to do trickery to make you know margarines and things that with chemistry that we've moved away from that but you know going back you know olive oil for example is a great example of something that the vilified often because it has lots of fats in it and you know certainly I was told men oh the Mediterranean they have they have olive oil and everything it's horrible it's all fatty turns out that's that's a perfect you know it comes from the olive the good stuff extra virgin olive oil has very little done to it and that is a good healthy quality food but it can be refined you can take that and you can keep refining it you can take corn on the cob as an example and then you know and then you've got I don't know tortilla chips or something down the other end is which bears or corn flakes which bears no resemblance to the original and they're all versions on the spectrum God it's so confusing you know because what you've said to me is you know based on research and studies but then when I go to a supermarket labeling even I just thinking then corn flakes I think I grew up thinking corn flakes were healthy because it says corn in the title you know what I mean and it's and when you're trying to navigate I was just thinking if I'm going down an aisle now hearing what you've just said that that quality food is food that is not ultra processed and kind of resembles its original form when you walk down the aisle in the supermarket everything is trying to pretend that it's good so how do I know what is good I mean I can go to the vegetable aisle and I can say okay that looks like a cabbage looks like no one's messed with that there's been no study done on that to it hasn't been through a laboratory but how do I like I'm in an aisle tomorrow how do I know what food is good and what is not well you've said the first thing if it's not in a package you're pretty sure it's good okay so if it's concealed in some package that's got you know happy children and signals of vitamins in it that should be a warning sign you know the more they have to advertise the food and say what its additives are and everything the more you should be wary about it the number of ingredients is another pretty good sign so once you get over 10 particularly if there's lots you've never heard of you wouldn't find in your kitchen you should also be wary that that is ultra processed food

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anything that says low calorie that says means they've had to add in lots of artificial sweeteners or protein extracts or something else is also a big danger sign low in fat means they've replaced the natural fat with something else that's cheaper and these are all warning signs you know and you know you take breakfast cereals and I used to I used to eat lots of breakfast cereals I was brought up on them highly sugary stuff and then I thought I was being healthy when I moved to Moosley's and Pasha Pasha stuff but actually when you still you know that appearance of healthiness it's still got lots of additives in it it's still got lots of sugar in it it's just and those cereal packets have added vitamins in it but they're often in a very poor form I did the experiment once where I took some cornflakes or special care I can't remember that said has added iron and if you mix it up you can put a magnet on it you can get off the iron filings they're so cheap that they just added to tick a box saying it has iron but they don't get into your body or do anything so anything that's got these things added with this in it low in this is a sign that they're obscuring the quality of the product so it's you know but there's a lot of brain you know we've had been brainwashed for years and decades in this and you know I was as well as a doctor you know I should know better and yet I've completely changed my seven two of my meals completely so I've gone from having Moosley with low fat milk and an orange juice and a cup of tea because I did you know I started doing these tests for Zoe I found out that gave me a massive sugar spike and it was a terrible way to start the day and I got these dips at 11 o'clock to a high full fat yogurt nuts seeds a few berries and never have orange juice that's on my that's a really unhealthy drink for everybody and I have lots of black coffee which I now know is good for me so that's totally different I changed my lunch for at least 10 15 years when I got in the house I was having a hospital lunch which used to be in the canteen then it was Marks and Spencer's got a healthy looking sandwich with brown bread sweet corn and tuna and a smoothie you know little bottle and that gave you a massive sugar spike and I wouldn't have known that and I was told that should have been a healthy thing to eat so you know there's there's general rules but also there are specific rules and this whole idea of individuality is coming in so it could be that you could you might be fine on that don't know I was very annoyed because when I started we were starting doing this testing for Zoe I had all these spare kits and I gave my wife one as well and we sit down and she's French Belgian and loves croissants and so we'd have croissants each mine would shoot up she had no change at all in her her sugar which is really annoying yeah so but it also brings brings home the fact that you know everyone loves simplistic rules but you can only get so far with them you have to start experimenting yourself and see what works for you and not just take everything for granted and that's really the that's the whole essence of really you know setting up this personalized nutrition research and Zoe and everything else but on top of this general advice about changing a

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whole idea of food I think because I think they do go hand in hand that if you realize there are these individual differences you realize it's not as simple as you've been told it's not but fats are evil it's not the calories are bad you know it's it's much more nuanced