

“Eat-ology” A Behaviour Modification Approach for Sustainable Weight Loss

Samra Abouchacra^{1*}, Satish Chandrasekhar Nair², Juma Musabah AlKaabi³, Abdishakur Abdulla⁴, Mazen Taha⁵, Mohamad Milad Ismail⁶, Mazen Askheta⁷, Thekra Abdul Salam Al Sayadi⁸, Durra Mohammed Al Baloushi⁹ and Oudi Abouchacra¹⁰

¹Consultant Nephrologist, Al Ain Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

²Director Medical Research, Tawam Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

³Endocrinologist and Vice Dean of College of Medicine and Health Sciences, United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, UAE

⁴Associate Director, Public Health research Center, NY University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE

⁵Gastroenterologist and Chair Department of Internal Medicine, Tawam Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

⁶Endocrinologist and Head of Department of Medicine, Al Ain Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

⁷General Internist and Diabetologist, Tawam Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

⁸Family Medicine Specialist, Al Ain Hospital, Al Ain, UAE

⁹Family Medicine Specialist, Ambulatory Health Services, Al Ain, UAE

¹⁰Chiropractor and Author of Eat-ology, Inspired Results Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE

***Corresponding Author:** Samra Abouchacra, Consultant Nephrologist, Al Ain Hospital, Al Ain, UAE.

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Abstract

Eat-ology is a novel eating behavior modification process, which addresses many caveats of today's calorie-restricting diets. It is aimed at achieving sustained weight loss through simple and easily applied essentials that tackle six critical areas of nutrition. This is realized by empowering individuals to align with their gastro-intelligence and restoring one's connection with self, hence enabling them to conquer “Munger”-based eating, address cravings, speedfeeding, overeating triggers and the underappreciated social influences promoting weight gain. By raising awareness to such eating errors and through converting them into essentials reinforced with practical exercises, long term adoption of these behaviour changes is facilitated hence supporting the maintenance of weight loss.

Keywords: Obesity; Weight Loss; Diets; Eating Behaviour; Food Habits

Introduction

Targeted efforts to combat obesity are not only meritorious but, certainly well justified given its substantial individual, social and economic impacts [1]. Though fortunately obesity-related complications can be reversed through control of body weight, however diets despite their variety and widespread prevalence continue to fail. Their most serious challenge is the inability to comply with the required dietary restrictions in the long term invariably leading to rebound weight gain; hence being counterproductive [2]. This raises concerns about specific issues in the nature of diets that make them unsustainable in practice as will be explored. Dietary prescriptions are far from being easily integrated into day-to-day life because they primarily instruct on what not to eat, portion and calories limitations that

are fixed, restrictive and depriving; features explaining their ineffectiveness. In fact, research on food restriction shows that it can negatively impact eating behavior, leading to greater desire and consumption of the deprived foods [3]. Furthermore, in the setting of strong environmental influences that promote overeating, dietary restrictions become more difficult to withstand and constitute a recipe for failure. Conversely what diets don't advise on are matters that are equally, if not more important. For example, dietary counseling does not provide the patient with strategies on addressing eating behavior patterns such as recognition of hunger and satiety cues, feeding pace, and coping with social influences that encourage overconsumption. The latter include social modelling, mirroring, facilitation and people pleasing behaviour [4]. These pitfalls of today's diets explain the paradigm shift in focus to modalities involving behaviour modification as vital approaches for effective weight reduction [2]. Accordingly, Eat-ology will be introduced, as a new methodology that transforms eating behaviour facilitating weight loss and its long term maintenance.

Eat-ology

Eat-ology is a simple process involving eating behaviour modification, which goes beyond calorie restriction and bridges many of the caveats in current diets. It teaches focused awareness, education and training encompassing six key areas of nutrition that are notorious for sabotaging weight reduction efforts. It helps individuals re-align with their body's gastrointelligence and facilitates the development of heightened awareness for internal cues to guide meal choices, timing and quantity of food consumed without cumbersome avoidance lists or calorie calculations. The underpinnings of this methodology is to help individuals uncover their own eating errors and acquire skills to convert these into eating Essentials. Re-enforced through practical exercises, this allows the long term adoption of the acquired skills.

Eat-ology Essential 1 addresses “when to eat ?”

The decision of when to eat is quite well developed in the newborn but seems to lose its effectiveness with age, whereby meal initiation becomes governed more by external factors⁵ rather than in response to hunger. Similarly, a clear “self-disconnect” becomes apparent with regards to the perception of hunger as many seem to localize it to sites outside the usual location for hunger pangs [5]; mistaking the “desire for food” for actual hunger. This Eat-ology principle focuses on imparting an appreciation for the body's innate gastro-intelligence and how it can be rediscovered. It teaches skills to recognize hunger cues through the identification of the “Tummy Talk Spot” indicating the physical need for fuel. Participants also receive training on how to differentiate between biological and psychosocial signals for food consumption; revealing their own specific meal frequency number which may differ from the thrice daily routine. Importantly, it allows hunger - rather than “Munger”- based eating; the latter indicating decisions to consume in response to the mental desire for food.

Eat-ology Essential 2 addresses “what to eat ?”

Food cravings are very common in the general population and even more frequently experienced by obese individuals [6]. This Eat-ology step instructs individuals how to differentiate internal vs external origins for their cravings. In addition, through a process called C.I.F, participants learn to incorporate cravings into one's intuition so that the meal may achieve balance by satisfying the body's needs as well as the mind's desires. In addition, focused training will be given on recognizing post-meal feedback, journaling and integrating it to guide future meal consumption. In this way, cravings are dealt with wholesomely and satisfactorily without the need for unsustainable restrictions or deprivations.

Eat-ology Essential 3 addresses “how to eat ?”

Speedfeeding is commonly seen in overweight individuals [5] and can promote overeating [7] because the satiety signal may be missed. Conversely, slowing the pace of consumption has been shown to be associated with reduction in meal size [8]. The basic training in this Eat-ology Essential focuses on raising awareness to one's rate of food consumption and emphasizing its attendant negative effects. Techniques to identify speed feeding triggers are shared as well as a step-by-step strategy to break food excitement referred to as “foodiction”.

By slowing the ingestion speed, this principle helps reduce the amount of food consumed as well as allows connection with the meal experience and heightened food enjoyment.

Eat-ology Essential 4 addresses “how much to eat ?”

Similar to hunger cues, satiety signals are also quite definitive in the neonates but become much harder to identify with age, with difficulties recognizing when to stop eating. In fact, the majority of overweight individuals stop eating only after experiencing significant physical symptoms of overindulging [5]. This Eat-ology Essential uncovers the main culprits for overeating and raises awareness for its physical and psychological cues. It also introduces a change in language which is needed replacing “I am Full” with “I Have Had Enough,” effectively changing the consumption target. In addition, simple strategies are taught to overcome overeating triggers and practice portion control through techniques such as “Formula 33” and “The Water Sandwich”. Paying attention to post meal feedback is again emphasized so that it can be incorporated for guiding the amount consumed at future meals.

Eat-ology Essentials 5 and 6 address “how to eat in pairs and in groups?”

Social influences on eating are prevalent both in intimate and distant relationships with perceived pressure to eat for pleasing others and an inability to refuse food offerings [5]. These can undermine the most well- intentioned weight loss program and can similarly interfere with implementing each Eat-ology Essential. Training for these two principles concentrates on raising awareness for this key aspect of nutrition as well as the concepts of social modelling, facilitation and mirroring. It also exposes how changes in dietary behaviour can affect social relationships compromising their long term adoption. In this step, each of the Eat-ology principles is re-examined within the setting of eating in pairs and groups. Techniques such as “Heart-to-Heart Conversation” and “Writing the Unwritten Rules” are imparted to ensure successful implementation of Eat-ology within the context of important relationships and conversely to use social influences advantageously without buckling under.

Eat-ology Essential 7 addresses “how to keep evolving with Eat-ology”

For successful implementation of behaviour changes as habits over time, they undoubtedly need to be easy, lend themselves to being applied continually and provide confidence in the expectation of reasonable and consistent outcomes [9]. These are the underpinnings of Eat-ology with the use of simple and practical principles which are further complemented in this final step with techniques that ensure life-long adoption. This is achieved through the 3 R's process which stands for “strengthening the Relationship with food”, “Reinforcing the lessons” and “Reset after committing an eating error”. The emphasis here is that Eat-ology is not an “All or None” phenomenon and one needs to identify and pay particular attention to their areas of challenge. In addition, deviation from the principles is expected as part of the dietary journey but exceptions must be chosen wisely. Furthermore, remembering that to “Err is Human” and that this will not undermine the entire process conversely, one needs to practice patience, reset and go back to Eat-ology step 1. The Eat-ology process is published in hard copy book with eBook, Kindle and audio versions. The principles are also taught in group workshops, individual coaching or online videos. In addition, there is an accredited certification program to become coaches, trainers and Eat-ologists. The Gulf Eat-ology Research Group (GERG) has undertaken a number of research initiatives with a randomized controlled trial underway comparing effectiveness of Eat-ology vs standard dietary counseling.

Conclusion

There are serious challenges to present day diets hindering their long term adoption. Focus has therefore been shifted to behaviour altering strategies for effective weight reduction. Eat-ology is introduced as a novel behaviour modification process which addresses many of the gaps of today's diets. This simple methodology is aimed at helping individuals uncover their own eating errors and acquiring skills to convert these into basic eating principles. Through practical exercises, Eat-ology helps individuals to re-align with their body's gastrointelligence, acquire a heightened awareness for cues guiding meal consumption and adopt effective skills for dealing with the

social influences. Through step-by-step progression, Eat-ology helps individuals transform their eating behaviour and expose their own unique way of eating, Essentially their own “diet”, which is fundamentally the only sustainable long term diet. All in all, the Eat-ology principles given their simplicity, can be easily learned and applied effectively for achieving and maintaining weight loss.

Declarations

Competing Interests Statement

Dr Samra Abouchacra and Dr Oudi Abouchacra are co-authors of a book called Eat-ology. However, there is no form of financial support received by or contributed to the submissions, publications or research studies and there was no other form of funding for the studies.

A manuscript from our group entitled “Get Lean and Go Green: Role for “Eat-ology” Behaviour Modification” has been published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care. This paper discusses obesity and global warming and briefly introduces Eat-ology within the context of weight loss for environmental sustainability.

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