

MMI Podcast 3: Why Diets Don't Work

WS: Good afternoon, people! Welcome back to MMI podcast: Medicine & Wellness. This is Wingshin and I will be the host of this episode. Last week, we talked about the immune system, remember that? What do you think we should talk for this week? It's about why diets don't work? Right! Today we are honoured to have our guest speaker, Ms. Ceymone Ng here with us. Ceymone is a dietitian who graduated from International Medical University and had prior intensive clinical and community training in different settings and various health conditions. Let us welcome. Ceymone! Hello Ceymone.

Ceymone: Hello Wing Shin. How are you?

WS: I'm fine and so glad to have you here. Could you please introduce yourself to the audience?

Ceymone: Currently, a weight management dietitian repressing Nutrafit where we offer trusted, result-driven individualised consultation and corporate wellness programs improve and achieve overall health objectives. Do follow us on instagram @Nutrafitmy for weekly nutrition or diet facts.

WS: Don't forget to follow them on Instagram. Thank you so much for making time to enlighten us today. Before we start, I have a query. What's the differences between dietitian and nutritionist? What is the nature of your job?

Ceymone: Yes, there's some slight differences. The main thing is, for dietitian, we are qualified to diagnose eating disorders and we design diets to treat specific medical conditions. Whereas for a nutritionist, they mainly deal with general nutrition aims and behaviours. So they are mostly employed in schools, cafeteria, long term care and mainly health organisations whereas for a dietitian, we are qualified to work in a hospital or health clinics That's just the gist of what we do. There's more roles to that, but this is just a general idea.

WS: Oh I see. Thank you for the clarification and I can actually see that there's a big difference between these two professions. Without further ado, let's jump into the questions, shall we?

Ceymone: Sure. Let's go!

WS: Apparently, almost everyone adheres to the social norm of thinness. People are trying in several different ways to lose weight. So it's actually common to see that there are a lot of trendy diet plans propagating on the internet, like keto diet, warrior diet, intermittent diet etc. Could you please explain to us further about all these trendy diet plans, ceymone?

Ceymone: I agree with you. Everybody wants to look good and most of the time, it means to be thin, but there is a problem. We are eating more calories and obesity rates are increasing at a shocking rate worldwide. Because of this, weight loss and dieting have grown in the

market exponentially. From best selling books, diets, membership programs, powders, shakes and pills. All claiming to hold the secret to weight loss.

Fad diets is a diet popular at that time, similar to fashion, without being a standard dietary recommendation and often promising unreasonably fast weight loss and other health claims. Many of these diets you see in the market involve eliminating foods that contain necessary nutrients. Some diets encourage you to avoid an entire food group! Dozens of studies have been found that most people only lose a little bit of weight and often gain it right back.

Let me ask you, in your lifetime. How many times have you tried dieting ?

WS: Countless times.

Ceymone: I believe many people have tried their own way of dieting and there are many diets to choose from. New ones are coming out all the time, claiming to be the latest and enough scientific proof to show significant results. But for the most part, it's like fashion. They just come back again and again.

WS: Totally agree. As we all know, healthy weight loss doesn't happen overnight, it takes time and effort to see results. In your opinion, how do these diet plans affect our health in the long run? What are the pros and cons of these diets?

Ceymone: Most of the time, these diets are not entirely backed up with enough research. There are diets based on your body such as the blood types but there is no strong evidence to support those diets either. Science has also discouraged the concept of detox because our bodies have evolved to do a great job of removing all these harmful toxins on its own. Diet supplements specifically in the form of pills are barely regulated and certain active ingredients have found to cause liver disease and heart attacks.

Now, let's look at diets which are categorized as Low Carb diets. The very famous Ketogenic diet and the Atkins diet claimed that by cutting carbs, dieters eat more food high in fat and protein and still lose weight. Then we talk about the Paleo diet, our paleolithic ancestors didn't actually eat like that, there is a lot of evidence that they eat grains, wheat and rye. Looking at Low Fat diets, just because you see it on the label that says "low fat" doesn't mean it's healthy. It could be packed full of added sugar and calories. Indeed these studies have shown these diets can help for weight loss in the short term because it was found that weight loss was attributed to the very basic concept of overall calorie deficit.

In 2018, Dr Christopher Gardner and his team conducted a study to look at two really popular diets (Low fat vs low cho). So they didn't tell them on the calories they should restrict, they just told them to focus on avoiding foods that are high in fat and high in carbs and eat enough to feel full. And the results were almost identical. They have concluded that some people did lose a lot of weight but most did not.

In extreme cases, there was this famous weight loss TV show called the biggest loser, contestants were in the obese class 3 (BMI >40). It was the perfect study for the researchers to know the effects of short term rapid weight loss. So they studied them 6 years after the competition, on average they have regained $\frac{2}{3}$ of the weight they have lost.

So why did diets work for some people and some did not? Well, it's one simple answer. Diets don't work because most of us cannot stick to them. But many of us see it as a personal failure, because that's how normally diets are being marketed, they claim drastic weight loss that it is easily achievable. It is a constant battle. The dieting industry pushes us to cut calories while the food industry pushes us to eat more calories. Hence, there is a lack of adherence and proper knowledge towards a healthy diet and more food available to satisfy our cravings.

WS: I would like to know if all these diet plans are suitable for everyone? What if they have an underlying disease is it a good way for them to lose weight?

Ceymone: There are such diets that show significant improvement on certain diseases. For instance, the Mediterranean diet has shown protective vascular effects in population-based studies and intervention trials. The diet is rich in fruits and vegetables, olive oils, dairy products, legumes, grains with minimal amounts of saturated fats, meats and poultry providing a healthy balance of omega 6 & 3 fatty acids. Most recent research and in recommendation by the American Heart Association has shown this diet lowers risk for cardiovascular diseases.

Ultimately, to give it to you straight, there's no one magic diet that can help everybody to do it. Even to those who have underlying diseases such as obesity, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, heart diseases, renal failure, cancer etc. This requires the guidance of a certified dietitian to manage these diseases. As we are trained to treat and manage certain chronic diseases through evidence based medical approach. Then we create individually tailored nutrition plans for the patient.

WS: It seems like there isn't one "perfect" diet for everyone, owing to individual differences in genes and lifestyle. In this case, could you please suggest some general simple tips & strategies to lose weight?

Ceymone: Make small changes to prevent excessive weight gain. It is important to set a realistic and achievable goal to attain that can be maintained over time. I believe we are all bombarded with different diets and options to choose from. It is important to work together with a dietitian or a nutritionist to break down the options to find the most suitable plan and set a realistic weight loss goal for the individual. We have to understand weight management is not a short term program, it is a lifelong journey. When a person gains weight, it is over a period of time. It's not like you ate an extra burger then the next day you gained a kilo. It's over months or years of excessive eating that caused the weight gain. So when we look at weight loss, it's the same thing. We have to see the changes over time. -The emphasis of eating whole foods. While some whole foods may contain high calories but they are nutrient dense and more filling. Because while you are eating a complete meal with all macronutrients which will ultimately contain micronutrients, fibers and antioxidants that can help with weight loss and improve overall health. Hence focus on the overall quality of your diet rather than single nutrients or foods. -Modify your lifestyle by cultivating healthy habits. Make small efforts to change your environment. Not only just changing your diet. Your

mental health and physical health are very important too. Slot in some time to burn the calories, have a healthy support system (friends and family) in your weight loss journey. Don't overwhelm yourself with drastic changes. Take it one step at a time. Cultivate one new healthy habit first, then move on to the next one.

WS: I've really learned a lot from this conversation about why diets don't work and how to make it work. Thank you so much Ceymone. Before we end the episode, what would be your takeaway message for our audience?

Ceymone: I have prepared 3 takeaway messages for you all.

1. Regardless of whichever diet you choose to follow. The key in dieting is to find the diet that you can stick to, so it's no longer a diet. It's just how you eat.

2. Change your relationship with food. Eat in moderation. Know what are the types of food good for your body. Make small changes in your daily meals. For instance, instead of eating fried chicken everyday, maybe reduce it to once a week. Replace chips to fruits.

3. At the end work towards a healthy lifestyle or flexible eating with the 80/20 rule. Meaning 80% of the time you focus on consuming whole and natural foods, then 20% you can allow yourself to have the leeway for your favourite unhealthy foods. However, this is not a scientifically proven ratio to provide the best health benefits. It is the essence of the concept where you have the flexibility to the choice of food you eat. Always look for healthier options, at the same time, don't be afraid to indulge in ice cream or cake with your friends and family.

You might be wondering "wow this dietitian is encouraging you to eat sweet foods and fried food?" Well yes, you are not entirely healthy if you strictly eat steam and bland foods and not enjoying them at all. Remember your mental health is a part of health too. Being too strict on yourself ruins your relationship with food so it's okay to occasionally enjoy that slice of cake or have a cup of your favourite boba because eating can only be healthy if it's sustainable and consistent over a lifetime. At the end of the day, the kilo is only a number. we have to look into our health in a more holistic approach.

WS: Thank you for your valuable insight and advice, Ceymone! It has been wonderful having you on the podcast.

Ceymone: Thank you for having me too! It's always a pleasure.

WS: We would also like to thank our audience for tuning in. Like and share this podcast with your friends if you found it useful. Don't forget to follow and rate our podcast on Spotify and iTunes. If you have any feedback for us, you can message us through MMI Malaysia's Facebook page. Stay tuned for our next episode of MMI Podcast: Medicine & Wellness! Take care and stay safe! Till then!

