



Nutrition Matters: Separating Trends From Fads

THIS 2013 IDEA WORLD FITNESS
CONVENTION™ PANEL
TACKLED THE BIGGEST
ISSUES FOR AMERICAN
FOOD, NUTRITION
AND DIETS.

While flavor-of-the-month fads fire our imaginations before they flame out, genuine trends reflect changes in our eating patterns that can influence just about every facet of a health and fitness program.

A panel discussion at 2013 IDEA World Fitness dived into some of the hot-button dietary topics that are on Americans' minds at the moment. Panelists delved into the protein craze, GMOs, plant-driven diets, cooking for kids, and the eating habits of Millennials, to name a few.

PANELISTS

- Moderator: **Sandy Todd Webster**, editor in chief of *IDEA Fitness Journal*
- **Jess Kolko**, RDN, LD, dietitian and nutritionist with Whole Foods Market
- **Teri Gentes**, speaker, educator, nutrition coach and author
- **Lourdes Castro**, MS, RD, professor, chef and cookbook author

Here's an edited transcript of their discussion:

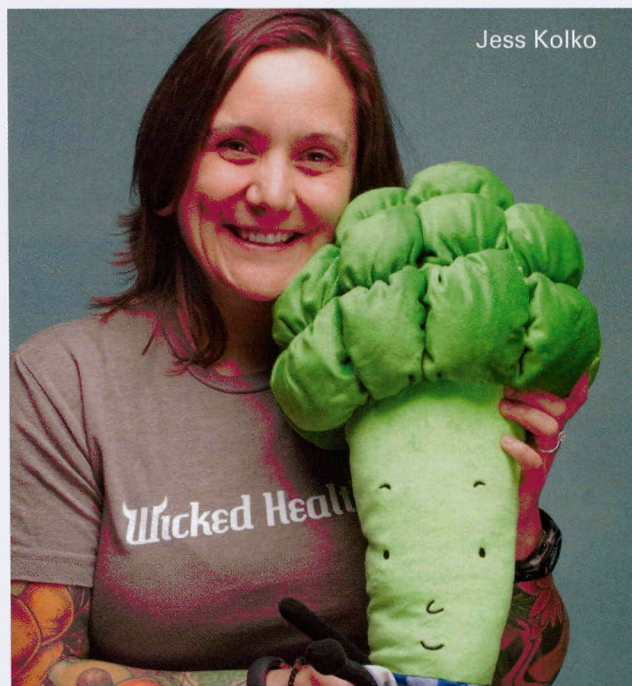
PLANT-BASED DIETS (VEGETARIAN, FLEXITARIAN, VEGAN EATING)

Sandy Todd Webster: Books, studies, media, and campaigns such as "Meatless Mondays" have greatly influenced a move toward plant-based eating. Whole Foods Market has adopted Rip Esselstyn's "Engine 2 28-Day Challenge" for its own employee wellness model. Do you think plant-based eating is here to stay? Will it supersede our meat-eating culture?

Jess Kolko: At Whole Foods Market, we believe a whole-food, plant-based diet is the most health-promoting diet. Rip Esselstyn is the founder of the "Engine 2 Diet," a 28-day diet challenge he sets out in his book [*The Engine 2 Diet* (Grand Central 2009)]. It's totally vegan—no oil and 100% plant based. The whole thing started as a bet in his firehouse. One of his buddies had cholesterol over 300, and in 30 days it dropped down to the 190s. So it was a huge transformation, and that type of diet has definitely taken hold at Whole Foods Market. We have a weeklong immersion program for our team and 8 weeks of education seminars for Whole Foods plant-based diets.

I think it's going to take some time for our general American population to start seeing the benefit of it, but people who weren't eating kale 5 years ago are now eating kale.

Teri Gentes: I totally agree. We're seeing the benefits of going plant based, and the research shows that our animal-focused dietary approach is behind all of our most degenerative diseases. Our body doesn't absorb excess protein, so we burden our internal organs [by consuming too much]. >>



Jess Kolko



Teri Gentes



Lourdes Castro



“I think it’s going to take some time for our general population to start seeing the benefit of [plant-based eating], but people who weren’t eating kale 5 years ago are now eating kale.”

—Jess Kolko

Lourdes Castro: There will always be people who eat animal protein, but I do feel that what is changing is the ratio of animal protein to vegetables on the plate. People are now willing to shift things around a little bit. I do believe that kale and other vegetables are much more a part of our daily diets.

Kolko: While we’re on this topic, I want to dispel the myth that plant foods don’t contain all of the proteins we need. They all are complete proteins; they just contain the essential amino acids in lesser amounts. We tend to eat two to three times the amount of protein that our body can actually use. For my last Ironman®, I was completely vegan. I actually felt a lot better than I normally did when supplementing with protein powders.

GLUTEN-FREE IS STILL GOING STRONG

Webster: We’re past “fad” and well into trend. Is this just great marketing, or are the throngs of people who feel they are gluten sensitive or gluten intolerant really benefiting from this style of eating?

Gentes: The gluten-free food craze out there is not necessary. It’s kind of like organic—just because something is under the umbrella of “organic” doesn’t necessarily make it a healthy food. Gluten-free foods, the processed ones, are exactly that, and what do we know about processed foods? They’re not the route to take.

Celiac disease and gluten intolerance are very legitimate. But we have to be mindful of the options out there, because not everything deemed gluten-free is good for you.

Kolko: You can be gluten-free and have a very health-promoting diet, or you can be gluten-free and be eating cookies and crackers and chips all day long. I didn’t think gluten intolerance was a legitimate thing until I had a friend with celiac disease; now I am very sensitive to it.

Gentes: Our wheat today is a lot higher in gluten than it ever was because we have seen modification of our wheat. In addition, wheat products often appear in some form—cereal, muffins, bread, pasta, baked goods—at most, if not all, of our meals. This excess consumption increases our risk of developing an intolerance or allergy.

Castro: If something happens to be gluten-free naturally, then that’s great, but there are a lot of gluten-free products that, like the gluten-free breads or things of that nature, are actually higher in calories. Just because something is gluten-free, there’s a health halo around it, and I don’t buy into that.

**“‘High in protein’ is the new ‘low-fat,’
and I don’t believe that that is necessarily
where [we should be going].”**

—Lourdes Castro

PROBIOTICS/PREBIOTICS (FERMENTED FOODS, SUPPLEMENTS)

Webster: Gut health seems to be getting more attention, as do products and food prep that support it. How can fitness pros guide clients who have questions about this?

Castro: From a culinary perspective, fermented foods are incredibly trendy. I live in Brooklyn, and there are a lot of food trends happening there. Kimchi, sauerkraut, anything that’s fermented is now on trend.

Gentes: Kombucha, miso, some of our fermented soy products—for those who can consume them—can help to promote healthy gut bacteria.

Castro: There is something to be said about probiotics. They can help your digestive tract, your flow.

Gentes: Again, our food is so processed and our growing processes are so different—we will probably start hearing more about soil-based organisms as well. Years ago, when you had a garden it wasn’t quite as stripped of its full spectrum of minerals as our gardens tend to be nowadays. When we add fertilization to our gardens, we are typically adding four or five nutrients, as opposed to our full spectrum of vitamins and minerals. If you’re composting and putting nutrients back into your soil, the food that grows in it has naturally occurring bacteria.

Today we sterilize everything. We have such germ phobia that we have created a need for healthy bacteria because we’re constantly killing it in our own bodies. We absolutely need probiotics.



THE PROTEIN CRAZE

Webster: Like the fat-free, sugar-free and gluten-free marketing crazes we’ve seen for many years, food manufacturers have now caught on that putting the word “protein” on food labels offers a health halo effect that sells product. Protein is being touted mainly as a fat burner/weight loss bullet. Don’t most people get adequate protein in their diets without adding more? Are there significant ramifications from increasing protein intake? What can personal trainers tell their clients about protein to set them straight?

Kolko: As I said earlier, we definitely eat more protein than our bodies can handle. The ramifications are that we tax our organs, livers and kidneys. I had a friend, a very competitive CrossFit® guy, who put himself in a state of rhabdomyolysis from overconsumption of protein and heavy exercise. That was a real shocker, to see a 27-year-old in the hospital for a week trying to recover his kidneys.

Castro: I think now you see breakfast bars or you see other things marketed as being high in protein, and then people are making the assumption that they’re healthier for them. You don’t have an insulin response to protein, so people can eat a protein meal and not necessarily have that issue an hour later where they might feel jittery or whatever the case is.

Mixing your nutrients—having some fat with some greens, for example—is better in terms of absorbing your vitamins, but mixing your nutrients can also be good for slowing your digestion, which will keep your blood sugars level and a little bit more stable.

Some people might think they should have some protein in their diet in the form of lean meats, and that’s fine. But I think the craze is really focused on processed foods, like breakfast bars or the functional foods that people are going for, believing that these are going to be healthier for them than something else. If they are having more protein and let’s say fewer carbs, then they might be having less fiber, and that might affect their GI as well, which some people don’t really factor in.

Webster: So it sounds like the message here is to be wary of labels on processed foods that are screaming “protein” all over them.

Castro: “High in protein” is the new “low-fat,” and I don’t believe that that is necessarily where [we should be going]. >>

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Webster: Are whole foods gaining ground on “processed” foods? The natural structure of food is magical, whether it’s the natural fat and protein in eggs, beans or seeds; the fiber and carbs in fruits and veggies; or the amount of antioxidants in a fruit versus a powder of extracted antioxidants. Our bodies just seem to perform better when we consume whole foods, rather than pieces, parts or processed products. Will this change the way “Big Food” operates? With a lack of basic food literacy in this country, is this type of eating sustainable except in the educated minority?

Kolko: Yes, I think the whole-food way of eating is going to be the next big thing. It already is. I think it’s going to be a trend in our country, and I think nutrition education needs to follow with that. I think we need to access nutrition education in our schools much, much more than we do now, because kids are being fed crap at school. Once they have access to a salad bar, once they have access to nutrition education, they make good decisions. I think that it’s super-important to start with our kids and with our teachers as well. We need to educate our teachers on healthy eating so they can model that behavior to kids in schools.

I think it is going to take a really long time to change the processed-food industry, especially the bigger agricultural conglomerates. They’re already kind of scared. They’re really against GMO labeling. They’re really against sugar labeling. So it’s going to take some time to move the industry, but there are so many small companies that are really, really about whole foods—not “Whole Foods Market,” but whole foods—and we promote those companies.

Gentes: We vote with every dollar or every bite—you’re either for something or against something. If you stop buying all of the overprocessed foods, the food manufacturers have to respond.

Castro: I think that the message is out there. Irrespective of your socioeconomic background, most people who say “health food” know that it’s fruits and vegetables. But what do they do with these fruits and vegetables when they get them?

I teach a lot of food science classes. The kids are very educated, some of them from very good families, and they have no idea how to actually make stuff. That passing down of culinary traditions kind of died on the vine in our generation because now we are eating out more or we are buying things that are semiprepared for us. The paradox is that the food deserts are in places where people know how to cook and the whole foods are more available in places where people don’t know how to cook.

[So the challenge is] not only how do you teach people to take care of their bodies through exercise, but then how are they going to make this food for themselves? What are their cooking abilities? What do their kitchens look like? And how much time do they have, and how do you make all of that work?



“We vote with every dollar or every bite—you’re either for something or against something. If you stop buying all of the overprocessed foods, the food manufacturers have to respond.”

—Teri Gentes

GMOS, OMG!

Webster: More than 6 million Californians voted for Proposition 37, a ballot measure that would have required the labeling of GMO foods. Though the measure failed to pass, the real win was that food companies saw that people want foods and supplements with ingredients that their bodies recognize naturally. Now there is a brouhaha regarding Monsanto GMO-corn test fields having polluted adjacent non-GMO fields. Whole countries have canceled their grain import contracts with the U.S., with more cancellations likely to happen. Whole Foods has made a major commitment to GMO labeling of all products it carries by March 2018. Jess, can you tell us more about this? Other thoughts?

Kolko: The GMO project is for verification of GMOs in conventional foods that are grown with traditional fertilizers and pesticides. We are also working with all of our meat suppliers and chicken farmers to make sure all of our animal products are [from animals] fed non-GMO feed, which is a huge undertaking. All of our suppliers are superexcited about it.

We’ve gotten lots of criticism, and we’ve gotten lots of praise, but we tend to just throw ourselves into the mix and try to really change the landscape of food.



“We are working with all of our meat suppliers and chicken farmers to make sure all of our animal products are [from animals] fed non-GMO feed, which is a huge undertaking. All of our suppliers are superexcited about it.”

—*Jess Kolko*

Gentes: If you're not too sure what GMO is and how it impacts our health, there's a great DVD you can Google called *Genetic Roulette*. It will really help you understand the impact of everything from the neurological disorders to the health conditions and agricultural impact of GMO foods. CenterForFoodSafety.org has a really great GMO booklet that explains all the different GMO foods from baby formulas, fresh produce and meat products, plus protein powders that have been genetically modified or contain

GMO ingredients. Another site is TruthAndLabeling.org on MSG and GMO foods. Those are really good tools to give your clients.

Kolko: The Non-GMO Project also has a website where you can verify foods. They're broken down by category of food, by [product name] and by brand. The site is www.nongmoproject.org.



TEACHING AMERICANS HOW TO COOK AGAIN

Webster: We are on the third or fourth generation of Americans who are pretty clueless in regard to working with “scratch” ingredients in the kitchen. Knowledge of working with fresh, raw ingredients is the basis for good health. People don't have to cook a scratch meal every night, but every healthy meal starts with knowledge of its ingredients. How do we bring this back?

Castro: I have had students who get very nervous when they are about to start a process, because they don't want to mess it up. And God forbid you all go to Whole Foods and spend \$100 and then go home and the cooking is a disaster. It can be very demoralizing.

Time is really the issue. People have fun in the kitchen once they get over “having to do something.” If you do it as a family, you might have fun doing it if you don't have the time clock on you. So how do you organize yourself so that you have your meals planned in advance, your ingredients in the fridge, and then the time and the presence of mind to get it done? I think that is the challenge more than anything else.

Gentes: Hopefully we will continue to see more community programs created. There are more and more of them happening, and I think we all learn by doing. So when you see something happen in a community, tap into it, let your clients know about it, or perhaps start your own cooking program with simple, mini workshops featuring easy-to-make recipes and a hands-on approach that provides opportunity for practical application.

What's happening in schools is great. Some daycares actually have kids out gardening. That's what you want to tap into, and hopefully we can get a little bit more of that happening in communities. If the demand is there, the supply starts happening.

Webster: One quick idea is to bring in a local chef or dietitian to teach a cooking class. You can either charge a nominal fee per head or do it as a community service/business-building project. It will build community among your members or clients, and it can be organized as a fun, productive learning experience. It's a teaching



opportunity where they can see firsthand how easy the food is to prepare, but more importantly, they can taste how delicious home cooking can be. Emphasize to the chef or the RD [that he or she should] showcase easy, approachable recipes that can be made in a manageable amount of time with readily available ingredients. It could be a whole new profit center or service to offer your clients.

Gentes: It also helps overcome the challenge that you can't really give clients dietary specifics. If you have someone come in and show them how to make a healthy meal, that's a way to guide them on how to make healthier choices.

Kolko: It can even be a skill-share situation as well. I'm sure some of you have clients who are super into cooking and others who are not. So have [a client who is into it] share the spotlight with a dietary expert.

Gentes: It's a trade-off for skill sets.

Kolko: Exactly. Because I think that when you are learning from your peers, there's more of an "Okay, I can do this" attitude. Getting groups of people together to cook multiple meals and share them is another great way to do it. So you know, four or five people get together, they cook a bunch of healthy things, and they each get to take home some of everything that is made. That's a fun way to do it too.

"One of the strategies I've heard is to give [kids] a choice ... Give them two choices ... and they can pick one of them."

—Teri Gentes



KILL THE KIDDIE MENU

Webster: Except for babies, should there be such a thing as "kid food"? Many experts hold that from the time of their first bite, kids should be socialized with the same foods adults are eating. That means early and frequent exposure to a variety of tastes and textures, as well as whole foods versus "kid-ified" parts.

Castro: Portion sizes need to be adjusted, so I think that's one kiddie aspect of it. One thing I will say, just as background: The younger you are, the more your taste buds are in tune. As you get older, your taste buds start diminishing, and as you get more elderly, they really get diminished, which is why food starts tasting bland.

So when you are serving bitter greens and the like, it should be expected that kids are going to have a reaction. It's not that they are picky eaters. There should be an expectation that there's going to be some push-back on bitter, possibly sour, foods.

Kolko: Don't make the dinner table a battlefield either. I think it should be a place of community and a place of sharing and a place of openness and honesty. When exposing kids to a food, you may need to expose them to it 15 or 20 times before they like it or understand it. The more you can get your children in the kitchen, the better. I definitely don't think kids should be eating differently than adults.

Gentes: One of the strategies that I've heard is to give them a choice: "You can have this or this." Not, "You can have anything." Give them two choices that you would like them to make, and they can pick one of them.

Someone gave me this great metaphor: "Do you get your kids to bed on time? Why can't you also get them to eat more healthful meals?" You are the parents, and they need your guidance. So it is really important to take a stand as a parent. Not forcing things, but finding them something they want while keeping their meals in the spectrum of nutritionally dense foods that are beneficial for their health.

MILLENNIAL INFLUENCE ON FOOD

Webster: Generation Y is close to 30% of the U.S. population, larger than the Baby Boomers by 6% or so, and a force to be reckoned with on many fronts,





“Emphasize to the chef or the RD [that he or she should] showcase easy, approachable recipes that can be made in a manageable amount of time with readily available ingredients. It could be a whole new profit center or service to offer your clients.”

—Sandy Todd Webster

including food. Millennials are 18- to 34-year-olds. They believe in authenticity in food. They're not interested in fat, sugar, salt—they want experience, diversity, ethnic food. They enjoy cooking, but they only know a few dishes and say they don't have time. What are you seeing from Gen Y?

Castro: I do think they understand there's an authentic aspect to cultural foods. They want to cut the B.S. with pan-Latin, pan-Asian and that kind of stuff and really get to very specific flavors.

Millennials were brought up as negotiators. (When I was growing up, you just ate what you got. There was no negotiating with your parents.) They go to restaurants and negotiate with the server and the kitchen, and they negotiate with themselves that they're going to be vegetarian part of the time and they're going to be flexitarian or whatever.

Kolko: It's also a generation of instant gratification. If it's not right there, right now, it's too late. It's really important to get them in the kitchen.

I think their interest in the authenticity of food can [link] back to getting people in the kitchen. So you want to learn how to cook Thai food? Okay, let's do it. You love Thai food? Let's cook it. I think that is a way to rein them in, in terms of getting them back into the kitchen and into a more healthful lifestyle.

EAT LIKE A CAVEMAN? GOING PALEO, PRIMAL OR BOTH

Webster: Ancient-diet aficionados believe that a return to an ancient diet can reverse a host of common health problems. To differentiate between Paleo and Primal: Paleo

has no grains but is high in animal protein, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats. The diet eschews all dairy.

Primal allows organic dairy, preferably raw. It encourages consumption of large amounts of saturated fats, found in animal meats, dairy products and coconut oil. Saturated fat would be a natural part of the diet for cavemen because they ate the entire animal, including organ meats and bone marrow.

Where are we going with this style of eating?

Gentes: To compare food today with the way it was back then is impossible. A caveman's lifestyle was totally different. As far as consuming animal products, it didn't always happen. It's more likely that [cavemen] were chased than they were the ones chasing or hunting; they mostly foraged for plant-based foods.

If you do any true research, you will see their fiber intake was massive compared with what we eat today. So I read Paleo as another version of a high-protein diet.

Kolko: Also, people use Paleo or Primal as an excuse to eat bacon, but if you look at the way Robb Wolf prescribed the Paleo Diet, it's supposed to be 35% animal protein with the rest being fruits and veggies. People aren't necessarily doing that.

If it is laid out appropriately, it can be a healthful diet because you are actually looking at what you are putting in your body. It's a mindful approach to eating if you are doing it the way you are supposed to be doing it.

Castro: I think that it is no different in approach than a vegan diet. You need to be smart about it, and there are different ways of doing it. On the plus side, it should be a nonprocessed diet, which I see as a positive. If you are eating lean meats and seafood and that kind of stuff coupled with fruits and vegetables, I can't see anything wrong with that.

What food and nutrition trends are you interested in exploring, and why are they important to you? Share details with editor in chief Sandy Todd Webster at swebster@ideafit.com. ■

Copyright of IDEA Fitness Journal is the property of IDEA Health & Fitness, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.