

Everything I Know About Dieting I Learned on the "Leeza" Show

by Dave Barry

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One recent Tuesday morning I was flipping through the TV channels at a brisk, businesslike, no nonsense pace, looking for "Rocky and Bullwinkle," when I found myself caught up in a fascinating installment of Leeza Gibbons' talk show, "Leeza." The theme of the show was: "Women Who Cannot Correctly Spell Their Own Names."

No, seriously, the theme was: "Superstars of the Diet Wars." This was a debate among top diet experts who felt so strongly about the correct way to lose weight that at times they came close to whacking each other over the head with their competing diet books.

Dieting was not always so complicated. Thousands of years ago, there was only one diet book, entitled "Don't Eat Too Much." It consisted of a big stone tablet on which were chiseled the words "DON'T EAT TOO MUCH!" It did not sell well, because nobody could lift it, on top of which everybody back then was busy with other concerns, such as not starving.

In modern America, however, food is abundant everywhere except aboard commercial airplanes. Dieting has become a huge industry involving many complex theories that can be confusing to the average layperson sitting on the Barcalounger, trying to decide whether to open a second bag of potato chips or simply eat the onion dip right out of the tub. So let's review the History of Modern Diet Science:

The first big advance came in 1895, when a food researcher named Dr. Wilbur Calorie made the breakthrough discovery, while working late one night, that he could no longer pull his pants up past his thighs. After spending many hours in the laboratory squinting at fudge, Dr. Calorie concluded that people gain weight because certain foods contain tiny invisible scientific units that became known, in honor of their discoverer, as "Wilburs."

No, sorry, I mean "calories." For decades, everybody operated on the Calorie Counter Theory of dieting, which basically states that you should never eat anything that tastes good. Then along came a new theory, the Evil Fat Theory, which states that you CAN have calories, but you should NOT have fat; this resulted in the multibillion dollar Low Fat Things Industry, which gave us low fat brownies, low-fat Milk Duds, low-fat cows, low-fat cologne, the cast of "Friends," etc.

But there is ANOTHER major theory that says you can eat all the fat you want, but you CAN'T have carbohydrates; that you can snork down an entire pig for breakfast but eat

a single Froot Loop and YOU will bloat out like a military life raft. The Evil Carbohydrate Theory is extremely hot at the moment, as is evidenced by the top-selling diet books, which include "Carbohydrate Beaters," "Carbohydrate Busters," "Carbohydrate Whackers," "Let's Poke Carbohydrates in the Eyeball," "Carbohydrates Kidnapped My Wife" and "Fight Carbohydrates through Sorcery the Harry Potter Way".

So it's hard for a dieter to know what to think, which is why it was so helpful for the "Leeza" show to hold a debate among the leading diet experts, including several medical doctors, several people with scientific initials after their names, and of course Suzanne Somers, who may yet win a Nobel Prize for her work on the ThighMaster, and who is now a top diet authority with a book out. It is only a matter of time before she thinks seriously about running for president.

So anyway, the diet experts debated their theories, and Leeza walked around frowning with the deep concern that talk-show hosts feel about everything. The audience provided feedback by holding up cards that said YES on one side and NO on the other. (At one point an expert mentioned the first law of thermodynamics, and Leeza asked if anybody knew what that was, and the audience consensus was NO.) In between there were numerous commercials, most of which were for law firms that want to Fight For You, although there was also a thought-provoking one for a toilet cleanser.

Anyway, I watched the expert's debate for an hour, and here's what I learned:

- The (pick one: low-calorie; low-fat; low-carbohydrate) diet really works!
- Whereas the (pick one: low-calorie; low-fat, low-carbohydrate) diet will probably kill you.
- Suzanne Somers, in all objectivity, thinks you should buy her book.
- If you are a human being of any kind, you should file a lawsuit, because YOU HAVE MONEY COMING!
- Speaking of. TV attorneys, toilet bacteria grow like CRAZY.

So there are the facts, consumers; it's now up to you to make an informed decision. Remember. It's YOUR body. And, as such, it wants a chili dog.