Want to Lose Weight? Don't Count Calories
Guest: Jonathan Bailor
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Jonathan Bailor is a nutrition and exercise expert and a senior program manager at Microsoft. He is the author of *The Calorie Myth: Eat More, Exercise Less, Lose Weight and Live Better*.

WOODS: *The Calorie Myth: Eat More, Exercise Less, Lose Weight and Live Better* is a very provocative title for a book. And I'll tell you, I personally know people who have been trying, or are trying, to lose weight with a calorie kind of paradigm. And I have to say, although I don't share their view, I can understand the superficial plausibility of that approach. Doesn't it seem sensible to say that there's some number out there, and if I take in more than I expend of that number, I will gain weight, and if I expend more than I take in, I'm going to lose it? What's the fundamental fallacy in that way of thinking?

BAILOR: You hit the nail on the head, Tom, when you said it's plausible, and that's why it's such a challenge to get rid of it. I like to call the calorie myth the "flat earth theory" of weight loss, because it's very plausible, and it's intuitively correct that the earth is flat. Look out your window. It looks flat. And, if it wasn't flat, wouldn't the bottom fall off? But once we understand science, we understand things like the laws of gravity. And we understand it becomes equally plausible to say that the earth isn't flat, and, in fact, that is accurate. The same thing applies with the laws of physiology and biology and neurobiology and gastroenterology. You start to see that, while it is plausible, and it is in fact accurate to say that, if you starve yourself, you will lose weight short-term, when you understand how your body actually works, you start to see the goal isn't short-term weight loss. Everyone has lost weight short-term. That's not the challenge. The challenge comes in when we look at the statistics and see that 95.4 percent of us gain all the weight back that we lost when we try to starve ourselves. The reason for this is that starvation actually works against biological law. It tries to fight against biological law. It's like trying to fight against gravity. You're going to lose eventually, because you're trying to starve your body. Once we actually understand the laws of our body, much like once we understand the laws of gravity, for example, we can actually work with our body, rather than against it, and start to achieve things that are seemingly impossible. For example, flight. One you understand how gravity works, you can crate an airplane. That doesn't try to defy gravity; it works with gravity. Similarly, once you understand how your body actually works, you can do the seemingly impossible, and that's eat more and exercise less, change the system itself, and help your body burn fat long-term, rather than store fat long-term.

WOODS: All right, let's talk in a minute about why we should think in terms of types of calories instead of calories per se. But I want to sort of jump ahead here, because I'm curious to know what you think about, say, some agency of the U.S. government telling us that there are so and so many calories we ought to be consuming per day. Is that a useless number, then, if we're not discriminating between good and bad types of calories, or is that still a useful baseline?

BAILOR: It's not a useful baseline. I'm not saying, and the research isn't saying, that calories don't exist. Calories do exist, and if you continuously overconsume calories, you of course will gain weight. It's just not a relevant measure. It's not the primary measure, and, in fact, when you use it as the primary measure, it is counterproductive, and for very simple reasons. Think just in terms of priorities in your brain: you either think in terms of calorie quantity, or you think in terms of food quality. If you think in terms of calorie quantity, you say things like, "I should drink this can of Coke instead of eating this avocado, because the can of Coke has half as many calories as the avocado." Whereas if you think in terms of food quality, you would say, "No, of course I should eat the avocado, even though it contains more calories, because it will provide an abundance of healthy things for me." And you know what? Those calories, since they are coming from healthy sources, will just fill me up and cause me to eat fewer calories later in the day, so it really doesn't matter, because my body will work to automatically balance calories for me when it's healthy, just like it does for everything else. For example, blood sugar, blood pressure—or what about every vitamin and mineral? Do we need to consciously regulate the amount of vitamin C or vitamin E or vitamin D, A? What about phosphorous, magnesium, potassium, zinc, all of those things? Imagine if we needed to consciously regulate them. We don't. That doesn't mean our body can't break down. It doesn't mean the number of milligrams of vitamin C you eat in a day doesn't matter. It just means that we can't have to consciously regulate them, and if we just focus on eating high-quality food, calorie quantity falls by the wayside, and slim and healthy become incredibly simple.

WOODS: You know, you say simple. I think the reason people have fallen into what you call the calorie myth is because it's so simple, because it's a number. It's one number, and if I just add up all the constituent parts of my diet, vis-à-vis this number, it will give me some answer as to how I'm doing in terms of food intake. What should people be substituting for this? Is there something they can substitute for that that's as simple as just this one figure?

BAILOR: Absolutely. If you cannot find what you're about to eat directly in nature, do not eat it. If you can, eat it whenever you're hungry, and stop when you're full. The reason that works, Tom, and the reason I can say that with absolute certainty, is we have the most definitive proof you could ever ask for. And this is not hyperbolic. Every single person who ever lived in any culture, anywhere on this planet, did exactly what I just described prior to the current three generations, and experienced a hundred thousand percent less incidences of diabetes, and the rates of obesity were sub three percent.

WOODS: Are white potatoes an exception to that rule?

BAILOR: White potatoes will not make you fat, if you eat all natural foods, and have only ever eaten all natural foods. The key distinction with things like white potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, et cetera, is we're comparing two different things when we have these nutritional arguments. One is, imagine a person who has only ever eaten things found in nature. Will that person get obese and diabetic from eating potatoes? No. That's one person. Now imagine another person. Imagine a person who has gone through the great nutritional depression, someone who was told that Wonder Bread was good for them, because it's low in fat. And someone who was told

that Coca-Cola was not bad for them because it only has 140 calories, and because of this, they've eaten these toxic substances for decades, and they've yo-yo dieted, and they're experiencing metabolic disregulation. What that actually means is they have inflammation in their brain, or around their hypothalamus. They have a disregulation of bacteria in their gut. And they have their hormones all out of whack. This individual has a broken metabolism for lack of better terms. The types of foods someone who has a broken metabolism needs to eat to heal their metabolism is different from the types of foods someone who is already healthy can eat and avoid disease, because one person's already good to go. The other person needs to go through a phase where they heal themselves. And then, once they're in that healthy state, types of foods they could eat, such as potentially rice, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, become broader and they could eat those foods.

WOODS: Now how does this apply to dairy products? Are you generally pro-dairy, and, if so, would you say that people need to be consuming raw milk, or at the very least, whole milk, so that it's as close to the natural condition as possible? Or do you not come down on that side?

BAILOR: Scientifically, there is no such thing as an essential dairy product. I mean, obviously, we don't need to eat dairy to be healthy. That said, blanketly saying all dairy products are toxic is inaccurate, in my experience. The research shows that, for dairy and for most other things, there are high-quality sources and low-quality sources. So we want to focus on dairy products that have the least hormones and, obviously, toxic things. And also dairy products—and this is a rule of thumb that we apply to all quote/unquote "food groups"—what provides us the most of what we need, essential amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, and the least of what we don't: say, sugar, for example. So if you look at milk, milk in an eight-ounce serving contains eight grams of protein, something that's essential for life, and twelve grams of sugar, something that is not essential for life. Contrast that to a Greek yogurt. Greek yogurt would contain twenty-four grams of protein in a serving, and about seven grams of sugar, so you're looking at a dramatically different ratio of things we need versus things we don't need. So with dairy, and everything else, you just want to choose quality sources, or the sources with the least toxins, and the most of what we need relative to the least of what we don't need.

WOODS: Now how does your general principle apply then to grains? You have in your book a foreword by Dr. William Davis, the author of *Wheat Belly*, and a lot of people have had a lot of success by cutting grains out of their diet, but couldn't we say that grains are naturally occurring?

BAILOR: Two things about the natural occurrence of grains: One, wheat is naturally occurring; bread isn't. So anyone who wants to just eat a bowl of wheat is someone who is in a much different position than someone who wants to eat a bowl of Cheerios. So, wheat is naturally occurring. Now, there's an additional challenge there. The wheat that we have in the United States, as anyone who is familiar with Dr. Davis' brilliant work will know, is chromosomally different than the wheat of biblical times. So it is not the same thing. It's not even the same thing as what our grandparents ate. It is literally a different food. Genetically, it is a different substance. So, when people say, "What about grains?" you have to look at two key things. One,

if you eat the grain as it exists in nature, that is very distinct from the way most Americans consume grains. Two, even the grain as it exists in nature, you have to say, “is that actually the grain or is it a hybridized genetic GMO mutant?” And if it is, then it's not a good call.

WOODS: All right, let me ask you a sort of controversial question. Do you think somebody can really thrive on a vegan diet?

BAILOR: I think there are high-quality and low-quality versions of any sort of diet. Can someone thrive on a vegan diet? It would be hard. No civilization who ever lived were vegans. A vegan diet without intervention, for example, cannot provide you with vitamin B12. And if you don't eat vitamin B12, very, very bad things happen. That doesn't mean you can't be healthy and be a vegan. It just means you're going to have to try harder and be a bit more militant to be healthy as a vegan.

WOODS: Let's talk about the part of your book that involves exercising less. Now some people love being in the gym all day and working out, but not everybody does. Not everybody has the time. And with this calorie model, people think, “Well, I need to be on the treadmill about eight hours to make up for that half a piece of cheesecake I had,” or whatever. Or even just to make up for the salad that I ate at lunch. What's wrong with that way of thinking?

BAILOR: Tom, once we understand the underlying biology—and that's really the key here—calorie math is math. It's not biology, and the human body doesn't follow algebraic laws. It follows biological laws. And, if you look at biology law, and actual science versus algebraic theories, saying I'm going to walk on the treadmill for four hours because that burns whatever—500 calories—and I ate 500 calories of cheesecake, so now I'm net neutral, is a bit like saying I just smoked a pack of cigarettes, so I'm going to go walk on the treadmill to cancel that out. Right? Or even for some listeners who may appreciate this, I sinned, so now I'm going to buy an indulgence and that will cancel out my sins. Like, that's just not how it works. And that's the challenge and the fundamental problem with these calorie myths—is it makes it seem like the body is this simple mathematical equation, which it's not. Coca-Cola is not bad for you because it contains 140 calories. If I just said, you're eating 140 calories, that doesn't tell me anything about health outcomes. I have to know the source of the 140 calories, and we all get this because we know, sure, calories give you energy. That's fine. But they don't provide you with essential nutrients and such that you need to heal your body. Coca-Cola is bad for you for reasons completely independent of its caloric intake. Therefore, if your approach to exercise is to cancel out calories, you may very well do that, but again, it's like trying to cancel out smoking by exercising. There is something totally non-caloric that we're missing completely, which is actually the cause—the cause—of obesity and diabetes.

WOODS: What do you think about the conventional approach to exercise that a lot of people take? “I have to do some strength training, and I have to do some cardio, and part of the reason I do the strength training is to look good, but the other part is that, if I have big muscles, then I will burn calories faster.” Is there any truth to that basic paradigm of cardio and strength training, or is the whole thing misplaced?

BAILOR: There's some truth, and there's some truth to all of this, Tom. That's why it's hard, because people like to think in terms of black and white, and it's either about calories, or it's not. It's difficult to communicate nuance, as you know, in our culture. And with a lot of these things, it's nuanced to the general calorie point. It's not that calories don't count. It's that you don't need to count calories. Those are very different statements, although they sound syntactically similar. When it comes to cardio and strength training, if you want to become better at doing cardio—aka, you want to become a better triathlete—the best way to do that is to do cardio. If you want to become stronger, the best way to do that is strength training. You have to look at the individual's goals. If the individual's goal is to say, "How can I heal the metabolic and neurological function which causes obesity and diabetes?"—we have to approach exercise in a unique way, because we have a unique goal. And the unique way we approach exercise in that context—where our goal isn't to become a better triathlete, it isn't to have bigger muscles, it's to cure a disease—we end up with much different approaches to exercise, much like if your goal was to become a better football player versus a better golfer, you would take a different approach to exercise.

WOODS: Now, in your book you are, in a way, like the Voltaire of all this research. During the Scientific Revolution, not everyone was reading the great scientists, but Voltaire would popularize it for the general public. You have basically synthesized an enormous amount of scientific research and packed it into this book.

My question, though, involves the fact that a lot of what you're saying in this book runs totally counter to the conventional wisdom and to what we hear from official sources. For example, the food pyramid has been around for quite some time, urging us that if we don't have our eight daily servings of macaroni and cheese, we're not doing it right; or the ideas of exercise that we hear; or we have to drink however many glasses of milk—and you're saying something rather different, or at least saying that the reality is more nuanced. How do you account for the disconnect between all this research that you're synthesizing on the one hand, and the exact opposite message that's being conveyed to the public on the other?

BAILOR: Tom, I'll give you a very short answer, and then I'll give you a longer answer. The short answer is money. The longer answer is the quote/unquote "traditional mainstream" institutions. So let's put these mainstream institutions into two camps. One is a mainstream institution that has no financial interest in any given recommendation. The other is a group of mainstream institutions that does. An example of a mainstream institution that has no financial interest in any set of recommendations would be the Harvard Medical School or the Harvard School of Public Health. And look up Walter Willet online. He is the Chair of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. Walter and his team have publicly denounced repeatedly the food guide pyramid. In fact, researchers at the Harvard Medical School have published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*—so we're talking about as mainstream and prestigious as you can get—that saturated fat has no relationship with the incidence of heart disease. This is published research by the Harvard Medical School in the *Journal of the American Medical Association.* No financial ties. What they're saying is

completely in line with what I say in the book. I'm just regurgitating what they're saying and making it simpler.

And then, let's go into the other arena. These are mainstream institutions that have financial ties to recommendations. For example, there is the United States Department of Agriculture. It's called the United States Department of Agriculture. It's not called the United States Department of Accurate Metabolic Science. Its interest is in promotion of a profitable agricultural industry. If you need to sell what America produces, you cannot say that any food is bad, because you've eliminated an industry. You have to say anything's okay as long as you don't eat too much of it, and therefore you bias toward calories. Or think about it in terms of these companies that put little endorsement stickers like little healthy hearts on cereal boxes. If they were to say that grain is not good for you, where do they get the hundreds of thousands of dollars they get from these companies to purchase their logo to put on their cereal boxes? And for exercise. Again, are the exercise recommendations coming from boards that are purely academic in nature, or are they from boards that have relationships to institutions which are betting on frequent and long-duration exercise? That explains the disconnect.

WOODS: Okay, that just blew my mind. I tend to be cynical about motives sometimes, whether it's business or government, but that explanation—that every time we criticize a particular kind of food or class of food we destroy an industry, so therefore we have to say everything's basically okay up to a point, and that in turn biases us toward the calorie explanation—just blew my mind. I never thought of that. That is absolutely brilliant.

Now I also want to ask you—I had this written down earlier, and I forgot to get to it. On the subject of exercise, I wanted to get your thoughts on CrossFit. There's a lot of controversy about that. Some people say this is the best thing since sliced bread. It's an exercise regimethat isn't totally artificial, like you're a hamster on a wheel. It involves doing things that might have some kind of remote connection to things you might do in your real life, but it's extremely intense and might not be for everybody. Do you think it's for anybody?

BAILOR: CrossFit has amazingly positive aspects to it, and like most things in life it can be used for good and it can be used for evil. Is the Internet good or bad? Well, it kind of depends on what website you go to. So, CrossFit—some things I really, really like about it. One, it embodies the principle that intensity, not duration—aka, quality not quantity—is the arbiter of exercise success. That is true and that is noncontroversial in the research, so CrossFit, with its focus on intensity, is brilliant. CrossFit with its focus on, I'm going to call it "female empowerment"—aka, females train the exact same way that males train, and they use heavy resistance and intensity—is amazing, because the females in this culture have been lied to more than anyone else and have been subjugated more than anyone else in this concept of, "shrink yourself and down and exercise more to shrink yourself, and eat less to shrink yourself." CrossFit says, "No, I want strong, powerful women who can contribute to this planet just like everyone else." And that's brilliant and awesome and I love it. And I'm so happy to be part of that generation. My mother tells me that she was taught when she was growing up that if she started sweating, she was working too hard. Like that was literally what she was taught. And I'm so proud to be part

of a generation that's saying, absolutely not. The females on this planet are just as capable and just as powerful as the males, and they need to train the exact same way. So that is brilliant.

With CrossFit and with anything else, we have to keep in mind that the most important thing, even above intensity, is safety. Because if you want to increase your health, hurting yourself does not assist in that goal. The ability to hurt yourself, if you do it improperly, is really not unique to CrossFit, though. So we really just have to keep in mind with any exercise routine, safety and sustainability is priority number one. So, just like jogging, or just like weight training or even Zumba, or karate or basketball could all contribute to injury, so can CrossFit. That's why it is really important that when you approach CrossFit or any other exercise routine, even above intensity, you've got to prioritize: do not hurt yourself. If you do CrossFit, just make sure that your wad or pod or whatever they call it has safety as priority number one.

WOODS: You know, Jonathan, I've written quite a few books myself and I was looking at your launch date for your book, December 31st, and I thought this publisher has no idea what they're doing, launching on December 31st. But that's brilliant. Right before New Year's resolutions. Is that why you're doing it?

BAILOR: Yeah. It is quite common for publishers in the health industry to take what will be their most influential title and just throw them into the arena on December 31st to help contribute to that New Year/New You, so there's quite a few health books being pushed at that time, and I'm very honored to have the opportunity.

WOODS: Well, I want to urge people to check out your book, *The Calorie Myth: Eat More, Exercise Less, Lose Weight and Live Better*. They can visit CalorieMythBook.com, and, of course, get the book on Amazon, first entering Amazon through our widget on TomWoodsRadio.com, of course. But is there anything else you want to promote?

BAILOR: Absolutely. Grabbing a copy of the book, especially before the 31st, is appreciated. And if you go to Amazon, that's much appreciated. If you go to CalorieMythBook.com, you can also buy these preorder bundles, and if you happen to buy a bundle, because you want to give a book to maybe some friends or family members who are struggling with their health or with weight loss, you also get a bunch of free bonus gifts for preordering. Because preordering is especially helpful for our mission. And our mission is to make healthy healthy again, and what I mean by that, Tom, truly—and this is non-debatable—as a culture, we are trying harder than ever to be healthy. And if you look at America compared to any other culture in the world, we're trying harder to be healthy, and we're doing worse. Intuitively, it just seems like there's something wrong there. You can't try harder and do worse. The reason that's happening is because we've been given the incorrect information. And we need to make healthy healthy again, and what I mean by that is, the steps you take to increase your health today may very well have made you less healthy. Think starvation, think chronic exercise, think eating artificial products rather than full-fat, whole foods. So we just want to get science up to speed with what the mainstream believes because there's been vast, vast technological progress when it comes to food and exercise, but we continue to be told the same theories we were told fifty years ago,

and that's wrong. And that's why we're trying harder and doing worse. And that's why we want to make healthy healthy again. So the easiest way to do that is to empower yourself with this proven science. And the easiest way to do that is to pick up a copy of *The Calorie Myth.*