What May Be Keeping You From Losing Weight?

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Weight gain is multi-faceted. It is not as simple as “calories-in versus calories-out.” If it were all about calories, then why is it that one individual can eat “whatever they want” and not gain weight while another “eats like a bird” and gains weight? Research is finding there is much more to the weight loss equation than just too much food and too little exercise. There is another factor that is linked to weight gain and obesity -- obesogens.

Obesogens are chemical compounds found in soaps, shampoos, saran wrap, plastic storage containers, food additives, pesticides, and many other places in our homes and environment. Obesogens disrupt the endocrine system by mimicking estrogen and throwing off the delicate balance of the endocrine system.

The endocrine system is made up of glands and organs that produce hormones. Hormones are chemical messengers that regulate growth, puberty, development, stress, sleep, metabolism, mood and many other body functions. The more you are exposed to obesogens, the more difficult it will be to lose weight.

The following excerpt from the article “*Why You Can’t Lose Those Last 10 Pounds,*” by Stephen Perrine and Heather Hurlock, outlines four simple laws of leanness to help reverse the effect of obesogens:

**Leanness Law No. 1: Know When to Go Organic**
The average American is exposed to 10 to 13 different pesticides through food, beverages and drinking water every day and nine of the ten most common pesticides are EDCs. But according to a [recent study](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAsnydmO8M5dUNMNQnEwCIapNhaU5/SIG%3D13j3h0i64/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/ehsehplp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/fetchArticle.action%253FarticleURI%3Dinfo%25253Adoi%25252F10.1289%25252Fehp.8418) in the journal [Environmental Health Perspectives](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAulHxMhhq6aw5G0HrF687JlNhaU5/SIG%3D11g9u27cr/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/ehsehplp03.niehs.nih.gov/home.action), eating an organic diet for just five days can reduce circulating pesticide EDCs to non-detectable or near non-detectable levels.

Of course, organic foods can be expensive. But not all organics are created equal—many foods have such low levels of pesticides that buying organic just isn’t worth it. [The Environmental Working Group (EWG)](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAg320xmfTFJf0RY1dP5SBgVNhaU5/SIG%3D10o9ibcvc/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.ewg.org/) calculated that you can reduce your pesticide exposure nearly 80 percent simply by choosing organic for the 12 fruits and vegetables shown in their tests to contain the highest levels of pesticides. They call them "The Dirty Dozen," and (starting with the worst) they are celery, peaches, strawberries, apples, blueberries (domestic), nectarines, sweet bell peppers, spinach, kale/collard greens, cherries, potatoes and grapes (imported). And you can feel good about buying the following 15 conventionally grown fruits and vegetables that the EWG dubbed "The Clean Fifteen," because they were shown to have little pesticide residue: onions, avocado, sweet corn (frozen), pineapples, mango, sweet peas (frozen), asparagus, kiwi fruit, cabbage, eggplant, cantaloupe (domestic), watermelon, grapefruit, sweet potatoes and honeydew melon.

**Leanness Law No. 2: Don’t Eat Plastic**
You’re probably already thinking, *Well, I don’t generally eat plastic.* Ah, but you do. Chances are you’re among the 93 percent of Americans with detectable levels of bisphenol-A (BPA) in their bodies, and that you’re also among the 75 percent of Americans with detectable levels of phthalates. Both are synthetic chemicals found in plastics that mimic estrogen — essentially, artificial female hormones. And like pesticides, these plastic-based chemicals trick our bodies into storing fat and not building or retaining muscle. Decreasing your exposure to plastic-based obesogens will maximize your chances both of losing unwanted flab and of building lean muscle mass. Here’s how: **1) Never heat food in plastic containers** or put plastic items in the dishwasher, which can damage them and increase leaching. BPA leaches from polycarbonate sports bottles 55 times faster when exposed to boiling liquids as opposed to cold ones, according to a study in the journal [Toxicology Letters](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DApSBIYisRgg2SdyMis3BTT1NhaU5/SIG%3D132j2tjsd/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505519/description%2523description). **2) Avoid buying fatty foods** like meats that are packaged in plastic wrap because EDCs are stored in fatty tissue. The plastic wrap used at the supermarket is mostly PVC, whereas the plastic wrap you buy to wrap things at home is increasingly made from polyethylene. **3) Cut down on canned goods** by choosing tuna in a pouch over canned tuna. And get any canned and jarred foods from Eden Organic, one of the only companies that doesn’t have BPA in its cans.

**Leanness Law No. 3: Go Lean**
Always choose pasture-raised meats, which, studies show, have less fat than their confined, grain-fed counterparts and none of the weight-promoting hormones. Plus, grass-fed beef contains 60 percent more omega-3s, 200 percent more vitamin E and two to three times more conjugated linoleic acid (a near-magic nutrient that helps ward off heart disease, cancer and diabetes, and can help you lose weight, according to a study in the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAoI3WtNeDYNkmEXUx1waZ.dNhaU5/SIG%3D10phafu91/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.ajcn.org/)) than conventional beef. If you must choose a conventional cut of beef, choose lean cuts like top sirloin, 95 percent lean ground beef, bottom round roast, eye round roast, top round roast or sirloin tip steak. Bison burgers and veggie burgers are also great substitutes when grass-fed beef isn’t available. And select sustainable lean fish with low toxic loads (**meaning low levels of toxins like mercury and PCBs**). A study in the journal [Occupational and Environmental Medicine](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAqtAZGEjfTx5ThAxodr0aslNhaU5/SIG%3D10o5shiu6/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/oem.bmj.com/) found that even though the pesticide DDT was banned in 1973, the chemical and its breakdown product DDE can still be found today in fatty fish. Bigger fish eat smaller fish, and so carry a much higher toxic load.

Avoid ahi or bigeye tuna, tilefish, swordfish, shark, king mackerel, marlin and orange roughy — and focus on smaller fish like anchovies, Atlantic herring and mackerel, and wild-caught Alaskan salmon. Choose farmed rainbow trout, farmed mussels, anchovies, scallops (bay, farmed), Pacific cod, Pacific Halibut, Tuna (canned light) and mahimahi. Also, when you cook the fish, broil, poach, grill, boil or bake instead of pan-frying — this will allow contaminants from the fatty portions of fish to drain out.

**Leanness Law No. 4: Filter Your Water**
The best way to eliminate EDCs from your tap water is an activated carbon water filter. Available for faucets and pitchers, and as under-the-sink units, these filters remove most pesticides and industrial pollutants. Check the label to make sure the filter meets the [NSF/American National Standards Institute](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DApME_3pVAyMFCOvr3f8NblpNhaU5/SIG%3D10o56eeec/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.nsf.org/)’s standard 53, indicating that it treats water for both health and aesthetic concerns. Try The Brita Aqualux ($28, [brita.com](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAtZ.4OQuRcU86sJcsSJ9185NhaU5/SIG%3D11q1ijek7/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.brita.com/products/water-pitchers/aqualux/)), Pur Horizontal faucet filter ($49, [purwaterfilter.com](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAtFKifBlBmifYgRaqmmetvVNhaU5/SIG%3D12dia0bbr/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.purwater.com/pur-products/%253Fgclid%3DCOmFq_L6xaICFUf75wodvw3jHA)) and Kenmore’s under-sink system ($60, [kenmore.com](http://us.lrd.yahoo.com/_ylt%3DAmmBYPPQ4znIqNQBVb2Hwb1NhaU5/SIG%3D13m8arreh/%2A%2Ahttp%253A/www.sears.com/shc/s/p_10154_12604_04238454000P%253Fkeyword%3Dunder%252Bsink%2526prdNo%3D3%2526blockNo%3D3%2526blockType%3DL3)). However, if you have perchlorate (**a component of rocket fuel!**) in your water (you can find out by asking your municipal water supplier for a copy of its most recent water-quality report) you’ll need a reverse osmosis filter. But for every five gallons of treated water they create per day, they discharge 40 to 90 gallons of wastewater, so make sure it’s necessary before purchasing one.