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Well Now

Your Student Health Center Newsletter

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The French Secret to Staying Slim



By Erin Teruya

Who has never heard of fat free food, eats buttery croissants and pastries for

breakfast every morning, and drinks almost twenty gallons of wine per year? Why, the average Frenchman, of course. Everyone knows that the French indulge daily in delicacies that we Americans reserve only for special occasions. Then why are they so slim?

According to Edward Dolnick's article "Le Paradox Français," only 143 out of every 100,000 middle-aged French men die each year of coronary heart disease, compared with 315 American men. Nutritionists have been perplexed with why the French can consume such a high-fat diet, drink gallons and gallons of wine per year, and still have the second-lowest rate of death from heart disease in the world. It seems too good to be true. The traditional French diet of delicacies goes against everything that American nutritionists have ever recommended. Their dilemma has been dubbed the French paradox.

More fruit and vegetables

Don't run out and eat all the fat you want just yet, though. The paradox is a little more complicated than that. The statistics may be misleading because what many Americans fail to

realize is that aside from all the wine and the butter, the French actually consume five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, as opposed to the three servings that most Americans consume daily. The French also eat more whole grains, which are rich in antioxidants and nutrients that can

combat cancer and heart disease. French consume smaller amounts of whole milk and red meat, which contain large amounts of dietary fats, as well as sugar. French dietary guidelines recommend using vegetable proteins instead of animal proteins, and eating wholegrain breads, vegetables, cereals, legumes, and dried fruits.

The French may consume more fat from cheeses, sauces, and pastries, yet they are still slimmer than many Americans. One theory points to their traditional eating patterns, eating three meals a day and not snacking.

They also eat their big meal earlier in the day, and are more active afterwards. This is in contrast to American eating habits of having the largest meal at dinner, and then going to bed.

The wine factor

French wine consumption is another factor, and studies have shown that one glass of red wine a day can actually be preventative against heart disease. That is not to say that two or three glasses would be more preventative, however. Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to liver disease.

Putting the French paradox into practice is a little difficult. Incorporating the good aspects of the French diet, like increasing your daily intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, probably would not hurt anyone. It might even be good for your figure.

An International View on Weight Loss and Body Image



By Vida Talebi

Which women are considered attractive in Uganda? "Women of substance," replied Tom Lwebuga, an international student at the University of Oregon, when I asked him about preferences of his countrymen.

"Men appreciate some flesh on women's bodies," he continued. "If a woman is skinny, she is probably from a poor family or she is not being well taken care of by her husband." In most African countries, Tom explained, men prefer women on the heavier side. He pointed out that he noticed many "obese" people upon arrival in the United States. This, Tom reasoned, had to do with the types of jobs, the economy, and the food in America. People in Uganda consume an adequate amount of vegetables, fruits and carbohydrates, and are simply more active. For example, the majority of people in Uganda travel on foot to get to their destinations. According to Tom, an active and healthy way of life prevents many Ugandians and other Africans from becoming exces-

sively overweight. Africans and Americans thus not only differ in the way they lead their lives, they also have different ideas of what constitutes an ideal body.

"Weight," a cultural concept

Yasmin Hariri, a student from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, voiced similar views about weight issues in America. "You have to be skinny here to be accepted . . . Coming to the United States has made me conscious of what I consume everyday, whereas back home the amount of calorie intake is not an issue at all. Most people in Dubai tend to be well proportioned. I guess it has to do with our active lifestyle there." By "well proportioned" Yasmin meant those people who are within their own "ideal" weight range according to their specific height and body type, an ideal that is tied to its cultural setting. "It all has to do with social acceptance," Yasmin said. Both Tom and Yasmin thought that Americans put high importance on what others think about them.

These ideas are of recent origin. Richard Chaney, an American professor of anthropology who has trav-

eled abroad extensively, argues that exercising was not an important issue in America 40 years ago, and, to those Americans who exercise, means shaping a body image proposed by the media. "It all has to do with consumerism and marketability," Chaney told me in an interview. In oriental countries, he pointed out, "people engage in Tai-Chi and martial arts which are just as active as any form of American exercising." In these countries, "the sole reason for these types of exercises is not to beautify the body. It is based on spirituality and being conscious of the mind and feelings."



Yasmin Hariri: "It all has to do with social acceptance."

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