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Diet Book Review: *Intuitive Eating*

Title:

Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program that Works. The authors are Evelyn Tribole, M.S. R.D. and Elyse Resch, M.S., R.D., F.A.D.A. Both of the authors are registered dietitians in private practice in Southern California. Evelyn Tribole has written five additional healthy food and nutrition books and was a national spokesperson for the ADA. Elyse Resch specializes in eating disorders, preventative nutrition and is a certified child and adolescent obesity expert.

Rationale/Claim:

Intuitive Eating is an anti-diet book. Its purpose is to get people out of the dieting mentality in order for them to take control of their eating and recognize their own body signals. The authors state that most diets don't work and people tend to fail miserably after dieting. Some people diet their entire lives, going off one diet and onto another – ultimately ending up with a negative relationship with food. Americans are bombarded so much by the media, diet books and fad diets that they no longer listen to their body's cues telling them what and how much to eat.

This book rejects all the negativity that diets instill within someone. It teaches that if you don't restrict food choices and you learn to recognize when you're hungry and when you're full, your body will naturally stabilize at its appropriate weight. This is an individualized plan since everyone has different food preferences and requirements. This book claims that if you don't restrict food and you listen to your body, you will naturally choose healthy foods and not binge on unhealthy food. Exercise and eating healthy will be something that your body wants to do because it will feel more energized, more active and more alive. Thus, eating healthy and exercising will cease to be a chore. This is not a diet book, but a change of mentality book. It emphasizes that people need to change their perception of food from being the enemy that causes weight gain to a welcome friend that fuels the body.

This diet works because it's not a diet at all but an intuitive eating process with no magic number or ultimate end goal. Mistakes will be made along the way but they are encouraged as they help you learn how to better tune into your body's signals. This book doesn't tell you what to eat or when to eat. It tells you that you're the master of your body and you're in control. Most diets have restricted food choices and other rigid rules for the participants to follow. However, it's been proven that with restriction comes cravings and binge eating. People will eventually end up eating the food that the diet forbids which will make them feel like a failure. A vicious cycle of dieting, failing and binge eating will perpetuate itself with the participants regaining any weight they've

previously lost plus more. Peace can only be made with food when one sees it as an ally and not the enemy. There are ten principles to the Intuitive Eating concept and the idea is that if you follow these principles, your relationship with food will change, you'll maintain a healthy weight and you'll no longer be burdened by restrictive diets.

There are several scientific studies scattered throughout the Intuitive Eating book that prove diets don't work, and are in fact counterproductive. The book cites a starvation study conducted by Dr. Ancel Keys during WWII which found that restricting food even in the most mentally and physically tough people will lead to splurging and overeating when they are finally able to eat food that previously wasn't allowed. This is true for most people. If they restrict the food that they wish to eat, eventually their primal drive to eat enough to fuel their body will build up so much that they will reject their diet and overeat. Another study mentioned was one led by Leann Birch, Ph.D published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It confirms that preschool-aged children have an innate ability to regulate their eating according to what their bodies need for growth. This ability is present in adults as well and a healthy body weight can be maintained if they just listen to their body signals. However, through years of dieting and trying to lose weight, our internal signals often get suppressed and ignored. Many people don't trust themselves enough to regulate what they put into their bodies so they look for a diet that will tell them what to do. It is proven that listening to our body cues will be beneficial and that is exactly what this book teaches people to do.

Overview of diet:

It would not be possible to calculate the kcals from this eating program as one could in a regimented diet. This method of eating is geared toward the individual and their body's response to fullness signals. The majority of the book deals with the emotions of how and why we eat and is attempting to change the way one thinks and their use or abuse of food. Through the author's guidance, they strive to teach you to regain the intuitive eating habits that you had as a child, but first they guide you through ridding your thoughts of the diet mentality.

It begins by summarizing the eating styles that encompass most chronic dieters; ranging from styles such as the unconscious eater to the professional dieter. Once one carefully reads these eating styles, they will find that they most likely fit into one or more of these categories. The book then summarizes the 10 principles of the program. These 10 principles are based in the common sense approach that many whom are chronic dieters try to avoid by finding the next "quick fix" diet. The titles of the 10 principles are what we know to be sensible patterns in food consumption such as "Cope with your emotions without using food" or "Exercise-feel the difference". The teachings of this book encourages one to listen to how their body feels. It teaches how to recognize what hunger feels like as opposed to boredom and how exercise, even activity not necessarily strenuous exercise, makes you feel.

Not until chapter 14 does the book begin to talk about nutrition; "gentle nutrition" it is called. The chapter begins by explaining what is meant by the term healthy eating. The number of servings per day in each food group and what constitutes that serving is discussed, as is fiber and its benefits and phytochemicals. They include a list of delicious

foods that contain a large amount of fruits and vegetables. The authors also address the issues of chocolate and fat free food consumption.

The book teaches that one must consume essential fat, carbohydrates, protein, a variety of foods and adequate energy to enjoy the feeling of fullness and satisfaction. If one were to assign kcals it would possibly be the equivalent of the Harris-Benedict equation times an activity factor. The micronutrient breakdown of the eating plan would also be individualized, assuming that the participants ate the recommended 3 meals plus 2 snacks constituting a variety of foods per day until they're satisfied.

Is it well-rounded and sustainable?

Yes, this intuitive eating is probably the most well-rounded and sustainable lifestyle choice anyone can make. Because no foods are restricted, quantities of foods aren't regulated, and no strict diet is enforced, people are able to make their own decisions and food choices. There is no goal weight that this book talks about people reaching. Every person has a different set point at which their body will feel most comfortable at, and this book says that if you practice intuitive eating, your body will naturally reach its desired weight. This book doesn't really talk about weight as being a goal though. It's mostly concerned with people's mindset and their relationship with food. Long-term maintenance is addressed and the authors do talk about the success of intuitive eating versus dieting. Most people who diet end up losing weight in the beginning but end up regaining that weight because they're so sick of the restrictions that they throw everything away and overeat. People who eat intuitively, however, do not feel guilty and out of control when they eat. Because they listen to their body, their weight is naturally maintained without them exerting any effort or worrying about the food they consume. It's a very natural and organic process that innately maintains a healthy body weight.

Behavior modification and exercise are addressed in the book. The authors stress the importance of rejecting the diet mentality by throwing out diet books and magazines that offer false hope of losing weight quickly and easily. They talk about how the number on the scale often dictates if someone is having a good or bad day so they suggest that you don't weigh yourself frequently. People who have been on diets their whole lives will have to change their behavior in that they are now free to eat whatever they want. This will take time and practice but once they get it, they will be free from the burden of the oppressive diet. A lot of times, food is used to bury emotion. People who practice intuitive eating realize that food will not make them feel better as they must get to the root of the problem in order for a resolution to be made. This would be a behavior modification for people trying to eat intuitively in that they must realize that eating to cope with their emotions is counterproductive and destructive. This book talks about exercise and says to forget militant exercise. It says that you shouldn't be exercising for the sheer calorie-burning effect, but rather because it makes you feel better. It suggests focusing on the positive effects of exercising and how it makes the body feel, like more energized, instead of just to lose weight. When people are not enjoying their workout or are doing it only to reach a specific goal, their exercise routine will not be maintained. But if you feel better when you exercise and are having a good time moving your body, you are much more likely to continue exercising and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Critical Comments:

- There is no way to calculate the kcal level of this diet since the amount of food eaten over a period of time is based upon the individual's perception of fullness. The amount of kcals consumed by 2 people of the same age, height, and weight and activity level may be quite different from one another. One can only assume that the amount of kcals they are consuming is equivalent to the Harris Benedict or Mifflin St. Joer equation times their activity level. This assumption can be made from the reports that people are happy with the amount of food they are consuming and not feeling as though they are starving through another restrictive diet.
- The point of this lifestyle change in the participant's perception of food is that they are able to eat any foods they choose, and are free to consume them guilt free until a rating of fullness satisfaction is achieved. The authors include a Hunger Discovery Scale from 1 to 10 with 10 representing a sick feeling from overfilling. The goal of this eating program is to begin eating when you feel biological hunger at a level of 3 or 4 and then stop at a level of 6 or 7. If your hunger is at a level 5 then you are not biologically hungry and one should look to other reasons for eating such as boredom. This Hunger Discovery Scale corresponds with the Fullness Discovery Scale; in the same manner as before one would learn to recognize their fullness on a scale of 1-10 and stop eating at a level of 6 or 7. You are learning to recognize your own personal satiety levels. If one feels hunger at a level or 3 or 4, then it is their decision to eat again to level 6 or 7, even if they just ate 2 hours ago. When one begins a lifestyle change such as this, hunger should not become an issue as it is with restrictive diets.
- Though impossible to calculate, one could assume that the body's needs are being met if they are consuming a variety of foods. If a participant had a special fondness for certain foods (like bread) they could easily reach a fullness level of 6 or 7 by exclusively eating that one food. This person might only consume simple carbohydrates, because no foods are restricted, at the expense of other nutrients. Beverages must also be taken into account as sodas contribute greatly to satiety and may make a person feel full at the expense of other vital nutrients.
- One can't judge if this diet is nutritionally adequate or balanced - it could easily be at either end of the spectrum. One would like to imagine that the participants would make wise food choices as the authors are there to guide them to do just that. But ultimately, the choices are at the discretion of the intuitive eater. If all aspects of the eating plan are followed, then one would have to assume that it is nutritionally adequate. The cost is no different than a regular trip to the grocery store. It may in the long run end up costing less for

food as one learns to choose more whole and less processed foods. Foods that are highly processed seem to be less expensive at first glance, but if the food costs are carefully calculated, the same food could be made from scratch at home for a fraction of the cost.

Overall conclusion:

In conclusion, we would recommend this book to most people. It is very important for people to be in touch with their internal cues and to learn to recognize why they're eating; whether they are actually hungry or not and to stop eating when they're full. This book focuses on helping people learn about themselves, respect their bodies and honor its signals. It treats the person as a whole, not just the disordered eating. It rejects the notion that society or friends and family should influence a person's self esteem and their eating patterns. This is not a diet, but rather a lifestyle change that one would not do for a short period of time and then try something else. There is no ultimate end weight or goal weight with intuitive eating. It is a way of life that is doable for the average person and easily maintained once you understand what the book is trying to teach you. However, we have a few doubts about this lifestyle, and feel that this way of living is mostly for people who have access to a reliable and safe food supply, have the money to purchase the food, have the knowledge of what constitutes the food and have adequate transportation to and from the food supply. Lack of serious medical conditions or contradicting side effects from medications also play a role in food choices.

Depending on certain disease states, this book would not be recommended because some foods may need to be completely avoided or limited severely within certain populations of people. If people do not have access or the means to acquire the food that their body wants, then their intuitive eating signals will have to be overridden and they will have to eat the food that is available and affordable for them. Intuitive eating is a fantastic idea but it won't be feasible or realistic for everyone. People who lack education may not be aware of the importance of nutrition and might not know what is considered healthy. As they respond to their hunger cues, they might decide to eat junk food to fill up their stomach and stop eating once they're full. It's also very hard to teach people how to feel their hunger cues and how to rate their hunger on a hunger scale. People need to be educated about nutrition and given the resources and tools to purchase and prepare healthy foods before they're fully able to make smart choices.

The only cause for concern that we see with this eating lifestyle is the freedom for people to eat whatever they want whenever they want. Informed people look to nutritionists to help keep their weight loss progress on track and some may want and need more guidance than this book provides. Even though the authors state that in the beginning people may overeat, as time goes on, they will realize that the food will be there when they are hungry and thus they don't have to overeat. This may not apply in every circumstance. Some people lack the innate ability to feel full and are not able to regulate how much they eat. Their primal drive to consume all of the food available to them takes over. Morbidly obese individuals have had plenty of access to food, yet intuitive eating doesn't seem to be realistic for them. Overall, within the general population, this is a very simplistic, yet realistic way of life. This book doesn't focus on

weight loss, it focuses on attaining a harmonious relationship between food and body and in the end this may be the only true sustainable solution.