

Paella, Pintxos & Protein

Part 1

While I was away in Bilbao recently I made a lot of interesting observations on the Basque way of life. As I wandered the streets and admired the many sights the city had to offer I noticed that there are an awful lot of slim people there.

This got me wondering about their lifestyle and what they did to stay in what looks like a reasonably good shape. I then was informed that Spain has one of the highest child obesity rates in the world! That as you can imagine was a massive surprise to me.

So after spending 10 days in the beautiful Basque country (think the west of Ireland with more mountains and the heat on!) I have weighed up the pros and cons of eating like our European neighbours.

First off here are what I consider the main causes for this dramatic rise in childhood obesity.

On every street and in almost every type of shop you can find sugar filled pastries of all kinds. The most popular one is called a Palmera. A Palmera is a heart shaped pastry covered in chocolate. You can get them filled with cream or jam and covered in coconut too.

I was informed that these are what a lot of kids are eating for breakfast and mid morning snacks. What happens when you eat a lot of fast digesting sugary foods? You get FAT!

Sugar, and I'm not just talking white sugar granules I'm talking most starchy carbohydrates, causes your body to produce too much insulin which will make you store body fat no matter how many calories you eat. It makes you crave more sugars and stimulants, it depletes your energy, it gives you mood swings, and bottom line sugar SCREWS UP your body.

When I say sugar I mean all sugars. These include: Refined breads, artificial sweeteners, white pasta and rice, high fructose corn syrup, glucose, fructose and more. They all do the exact same thing when they enter your body.

If you take just one thing from this article please let it be this; sugar, refined carbohydrates, high glycemic carbs and starchy carbs are all the same and are the cause of obesity in this world. If you want to drop body fat then don't eat these. It really is as simple as that.

Ok rant over 😊

Another thing that stood out is how long a gap they have between meals. If I'm a kid in Spain, and I eat a Palmera at 10, then an hour later I'm going to be craving something else because my blood sugars will be low and I need energy.

But, I have to wait until 2 to get my lunch. So my body will simply use the quickest available energy source it has – MUSCLE.

If you've read my other articles you'll know how important muscle is. Simply put:

YOUR MUSCLE = YOUR METABOLISM

The less active your muscle is then the lower your metabolism will be

If these kid's bodies are constantly depleting its muscle stores then they'll have a very low metabolism and that means that the calories they consume will pile on as fat more easily than if they had a faster metabolism.

So that's what I consider to be the main causes of Spain's child obesity problem. Sounds a bit simple and it is!

But there's one major problem for us. Our eating habits are far worse than theirs and we are steadily getting fatter and fatter and more and more unhealthy here in Ireland

What can you do about it?

Well like I promised I said I was going to discuss the pros as well as the cons.

As I was staying with Anna's (my girlfriend) family I got to experience the true lifestyle lived by a Basque person. And I noticed one thing very, very quickly, they eat a lot more protein than we Irish do. Now when I say a lot I mean a lot!

They would eat a tuna salad with a meat / fish dish.

Tortilla de patata (Spanish omelettes) are full of protein and you can get them everywhere. They are known as pintxos (pin-chose) or tapas in the south, and are usually filled with tuna or Serrano ham – again more protein.

The portion sizes are huge! When it comes to protein that's a good thing, most of the people I encounter don't eat nearly enough protein. In Spain though, it's different. I ordered a steak in one restaurant and out came a succulent 750grm steak. I couldn't believe my eyes a 28 ounce steak for 22 euro!!

It took me about 45 mins but I finished it – there was no way I was leaving that table with any steak still on my plate!

Protein is responsible for keeping your muscles active if you don't know why that's a good thing then go back and look at the top of the page. By eating adequate protein you keep your muscles and lose body fat. How much protein do you need?

Well if you want to lose weight then the best most effective results come from eating 1gm of protein per lb of body weight up to 250grms. So if you are 10 stone / 140lbs then 140grms of protein is ideal and will supply your muscles with all they need to keep strong and active. Plus protein is highly thermogenic which means it raises your metabolism every time you eat it. It's a fat burner without the side effects!

Part 2 coming soon...