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Section C

Reasons we are losing the weight battle

MICHAEL NOONAN

As we age, there is a tendency for our weight to increase, and obesity is becoming epidemic. I have seen so many patients struggle with the battle to lose weight, mostly unsuccessfully. There is a simple reason so many of us are losing this battle: We have been given bad information. But this is starting to change, at least partially.

The "experts" have told us for years that the primary driver for obesity is calories. Just eat fewer calories, and burn more of them by exercising, and that will fix the problem. So it should make sense to avoid the most calorie dense foods: fats. This thinking has led to an explosion of fat free foods, to the point is it difficult to find, for example, yogurt that is made from whole milk.

The reason I put the word experts in quote marks above is because their advice is wrong — and much of it is influenced by the food industry. Our weight is not a simple math equation of unburned calories getting converted to fat. Our weight is regulated, just as our blood pressure and blood sugar are. And like with those other bodily functions, for many of us the system that regulates our weight is seriously out of whack.

The problem starts with a hormone imbalance that many of us trigger every day — actually, every meal. Eating grains, sugar and other refined carbs causes our blood sugar to go up enough to trigger an insulin response. Insulin is a fat storage hormone, so the sugar that is eaten primarily gets converted to fat. It also prevents our bodies from accessing stored fat, even when we exercise. A meal that does not trigger insulin will not be stored as fat, and afterwards it is easier for our bodies to access stored fat to burn it for fuel. When insulin is triggered by every meal, fat storage becomes the norm.

The new FDA dietary guidelines finally address sugar consumption; they suggest that added sugar — not including the sugar that naturally occurs in foods — supply no more than 10 percent of our daily calories.

To put this into perspective, the average adult American is suggested to consume about 2,000 to 2,400 calories per day, so added sugar should account for no more than 240 calories.

Sugar provides 4 calories per gram, so that means 60 grams per day would be the maximum. But currently the average American's sugar consumption is more than double the new recommendations. According to the *Center for Science in the Public Interest*, the average American teenage boy consumes about 135 grams of added sugar a day.

For example, a common breakfast of one cup of "healthy" low fat Banilla (banana and vanilla flavored) yogurt has 35 grams of sugar by itself — more than half the daily dose.

Add to this a large glass of orange juice, which has up to 50 grams of sugar in a tall glass, and this puts you way beyond that suggested limit- and it isn't even time for your " energy drink," which you will need in a few hours, because of the excess sugar in your system. This adds 27 grams of sugar for a small 8-ounce can.

You will likely need another one a few hours later to recover from the sugar crash you get from that can.

Compare that to having a glass of water — zero grams of sugar — and a cup of regular yogurt, which has no added sugar, and only 12 grams of natural sugar. Put in ½ cup of blueberries, which would add 4 grams of sugar, again naturally present in the food. For your energy boost, add a cup of tea or coffee, with a single spoon of sugar, at 4 grams. This is a diet our bodies can handle, even thrive on.

Another way that our bodies naturally regulate our weight is through our appetites. When we eat, we feel full. But sugar inter-

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TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Inn Along the Way organizers tour their property in Damariscotta recently, where they hope to develop a "pocket neighborhood" of small, handicapped-accessible homes. The property includes 38 acres and a farmhouse with a barn.

Pocket neighborhood

Ambitious elder community planned for historic farm

Inn Along the Way organizers (from left) Barbara Burt, Sherry Flynt and Suzy Hallett tour their property recently.

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

DAMARISCOTTA — When dairy farmer David Chapman died five years ago at the age of 94, none of his heirs wanted to take over the rambling 19th century house, the three-story barn and milking parlor, the rolling fields and productive woodland where his family had lived for nine generations.

Though the historic property is just a stone's throw from busy Route 1 and surrounded by small businesses, the family was also unwilling to sell it for commercial development.

"My father-in-law had the chance to sell it once for over a million dollars," said John Gallagher, 66, who is married to Chapman's daughter. "It would have been flattened and turned into a big box development, and no one was willing to see that happen."

One family member moved in briefly to provide maintenance and general caretaking, but for the most part, the old farm — in what may be the nation's oldest community — sat empty while the family, and the community, fretted over its future.

But now, with the vision and support of local residents, a grassroots nonprofit group has purchased the Chapman farm for $500,000 with funds all raised over the past year from local donors. Plans are under way to develop the property into an innovative, affordable housing community for older adults and seniors.

Inn Along the Way is a registered 501(c)3 organization founded by a small group of area women with connections to local hospice and other end-of-life services. Board president Sherry Flint, 58, who lives in the village of Pemaquid, said the area needs more housing for aging residents. Existing options range from full-care nursing facilities to assisted living centers and subsidized housing, she said, but she envisions something different.

"We are not here to recreate what is already being done, and done well," she said. "We want to be the missing link."

Flint's vision for the project, while still in the free-form stage, includes several clusters (she calls them "pocket neighborhoods") of small, residential cottages where independent older adults can live long-term, playing an active role in the community and aging safely in their homes with friends and neighbors looking in on them. She also sees a handful of short-term "respite cottages" for seniors who need intensive personal care; a separate inn for visiting families and the traveling public; a teahouse, cafe, gift shop and community center in the old farmhouse; an arts center in the old barn; extensive gardens for produce and flowers; and a network of public walking trails.

Key to the project's mission is its commitment to attract and serve average-income, local residents. Sliding-scale rents in the residential cottages will help keep the community as affordable and inclusive as possible, Flint said, and more active, physically able residents will be able to further offset costs by working in the revenue-producing cafe, inn and arts center.

"And we know we'll always have to do some fundraising," she said. She's confident that local philanthropy, family donations and private foundation money will keep the project in the black.

Flint says she has visited many planned communities around the country, taking lessons and ideas away from each. Inn Along the Way is loosely modeled after the Brookwood Community, a faith-based residential community in Texas for developmentally delayed adults that includes staffed residences, on-site employment opportunities and public attractions such as a high-end cafe, shops, gardens and an elegant wedding venue to attract visitors and their checkbooks.

Many of Inn Along the Way's supporters are affiliated with religious and spiritual traditions, Flint said, but the project itself is not.

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The art of coming home to an empty house

JULIE HARRIS

I don't know why Fridays are the worst; the house is just as empty every other day of the week. But the feeling of dread that starts as a seed when I leave work on Fridays grows into a boulder that lodges solidly in my gut the closer I get to home. I know what I will find there.

Everything just as I had left it.

The TV or radio will be on low for the dogs that wait patiently in their crates for me to return home. There's quiet. No sounds of human life. None of the warmth to which I had become accustomed when my husband, Jim, was alive. Just a cold wall of silence.

I purposely will sit in my vehicle in my garage, engine off, and listen to the audio book in the vehicle's CD player until I can focus on what I have to do once I get inside and not on who isn't there.

Most of the time, I focus on the dogs. I think about getting them outside, and where my Brittany dog Thistle's squeaky tennis ball might be so I can toss it for her. I try to remember how much water I had left in my dog Quincy's pail so I will know how desperate he might be to relieve himself. (He tends to drink all of the water I put in the pail in his crate.) I think about timing for the dogs' dinner, and what tasks await me that evening. I think about laundry, and paying bills and vacuuming and the dog groups I participate in, and anything I might have coming up during the week.

And, in line with my New Year's resolution to replace negatives with positives, I try to focus on how warm home can feel when the dogs are free of their crates, a scented candle burns in the kitchen, dinner is on the stove and household chores are underway.

Anything to avoid the feeling of loss that I dread most.

But no matter how much I try to distract myself, that final moment of entering my house that is devoid of other humans is always the same: A cold that has nothing to do with temperature; an emptiness that has nothing to do with how much stuff I have; a feeling of death that has nothing to do with breathing.

When Jim was alive, I would open the back door and step into the sounds of televisions in the living room and kitchen not on the same stations, each trying to out-shout the other. Our Brittany dogs Sassy and Bullet would greet me because there was no need for them to be crated; Jim was home.

The house would smell of cooking food, wood smoke and cigarettes that Jim wasn't supposed to be smoking in the house. There might be laundry going and the dishes would be done. It would feel warm and alive and was bursting with the energy of things he wanted to tell me about his day

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Grassroots volunteers help seniors stay in their homes

7 RIVERS REGULARS

Members of the 7 Rivers Regulars, a community-based volunteer group that provides free home weatherization and safety improvements, pose at a job site near Bath.

BY MEG HASKELL
BDN STAFF

Up in Aroostook County, volunteers grow fresh fruits and vegetables that feed northern Maine seniors all year long. Out on Swan's Island, a one-person nonprofit provides essential home and health support services, at no charge, to older residents — year-rounders and summer folk alike. And in the Bath area, a group of can-do folks have teamed up with the local housing program to make free home weatherization and safety improvements for elders in their community.

All across the state, in fact, Mainers are rolling up their sleeves in support of aging friends, family members and neighbors. Volunteerism is nothing new, but as individuals and communities around the state search for ways to help a growing population of older residents thrive in their own homes, technology helps share the ideas that work.

"Our goal is to increase the collective impact of local aging-in-place initiatives," said Jessica Mauer, executive director of the Maine Association of Agencies on Aging. "It is important for individual volunteers and community groups to know they are not alone, they don't have to reinvent the wheel."

In April 2015, Mauer met with colleagues in New Hampshire and Vermont to lay the groundwork for the Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging. The new organization maintains an online clearinghouse for exchanging information about volunteer-based programs that are keeping elders safe in their homes in each state.

Mauer said Maine, with its oldest-in-the-nation median age of 43.5, has been a leader among states in developing private, nonprofit programs to support seniors in their homes, especially those who are low-income and living in isolated rural areas. Vermont and New Hampshire have more recently turned their attention to the issue, she said.

The three northern New England states share more than geographic proximity. Vermont has the second-highest median age in the country, Mauer said, and New Hampshire the fourth. All three state populations are largely rural, white and low-income, too.

"We have more in common than not; we can learn a lot from each other," Mauer said. "People are hungry to talk with each other."

Already, the organization has hosted a series of free, online presentations, or webinars, highlighting similar issues and projects in the three states. The first, offered last August, featured a presentation by the Frameworks Institute on how to shape public

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