

August 12, 2015

Peter Whoriskey of WaPo who was last in Pickings June 1st when he reported on new research on salt, is back again popping bubbles. Turns out what the government nutritionists were telling us about the critical importance of breakfast is bogus. Fancy that, the government got something wrong!

Researchers at a New York City hospital several years ago conducted a test of the widely accepted notion that skipping breakfast can make you fat.

For some nutritionists, this idea is an article of faith. Indeed, it is enshrined in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the federal government's advice book, which recommends having breakfast every day because "not eating breakfast has been associated with excess body weight."

As with many nutrition tips, though, including some offered by the Dietary Guidelines, the tidbit about skipping breakfast is based on scientific speculation, not certainty, and indeed, it may be completely unfounded, as the experiment in New York indicated.

At 8:30 in the morning for four weeks, one group of subjects got oatmeal, another got frosted corn flakes and a third got nothing. And the only group to lose weight was ... the group that skipped breakfast. Other trials, too, have similarly contradicted the federal advice, showing that skipping breakfast led to lower weight or no change at all.

"In overweight individuals, skipping breakfast daily for 4 weeks leads to a reduction in body weight," the researchers from Columbia University concluded in a paper published last year.

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WSJ Editors write on more government incompetence; this time the EPA.

'Ghostbusters' has been playing again on cable, so we are reminded that the villain of that movie classic was a bully from the Environmental Protection Agency. He broke the ghost-containment grid and all hell broke loose. So who you gonna call today when the E-men dump three million gallons of toxic slurry down the rivers of the West?

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Jon Gabriel writes one for the "normal" guy. That would be our fav - Scott Walker. *Despite what The Donald and Jeb! and Carly said in last week's debate, Scott Walker's closing statement tackled an even larger elephant in the room: "I'm a guy with a wife, two kids, and a Harley. One article called me 'aggressively normal.'" The Wisconsin Governor's detractors aren't as euphemistic. Let's face it: Scott Walker is B-O-R-I-N-G.*

He brags about the bargain rack at Kohl's. He spends his Sunday mornings at church and his Sunday afternoons watching the Packers. He live-tweets his haircuts and getting the oil changed in his Saturn. His only unhealthy obsession seems to be an addiction to hot ham and rolls after church. (He really loves hot ham.)

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This isn't the first time a politician listed "aggressively normal" as a selling point. In 1920, America's political climate was in even greater tumult than today's. President Wilson had fundamentally transformed the federal government into an oppressive entity that regularly jailed detractors, instituted a then-unimaginable level of regulation, and created the first income tax. Our battered soldiers returned from the charnel houses of Europe to find an executive branch pushing for an even more robust internationalism. By the time the president was incapacitated by stroke (a fact hidden for months), most Americans had had enough. ...

Walter Russell Mead writes on Trump. He closes with a few 'graphs on the farce we endure during the election season.

... Trump is a sham, of course, but for many Americans in 2015 the whole political process is a sham. Trump, however, is an entertaining sham, and some voters think that if the establishment is going to screw you no matter what you do, you might as well vote for the funny one.

So it doesn't matter that Trump's positions (insofar as he has taken any) are unpopular, or that he is so obviously and outrageously a member of the economic elite that has so many Americans riled up this year—indeed, it may help him. Donald Trump is living large, which is how many Americans wish they could live.

In part, also, Trump's popularity is the result of harmless good fun; our two-year presidential electoral cycle is a ridiculous spectacle and the reporters and pundits who discuss the horse race in such diligent detail are chasing will o' the wisps and wasting time. Many of the people who answer the polls that get analyzed to death in long, thumb sucker pieces aren't thinking seriously about how they will vote more than a year from now. You can also tell a pollster that you plan to vote for Trump simply, as George Wallace used to put it back in 1968, to "send them a message." Trump offers average Americans the chance to pull the Establishment's chain, and then watch the wonks and the pundits jerk and squeal. This is a lot of fun for the tens of millions of people out there who think the whole political class consists of high-minded incompetents and unprincipled parasites.

Nihilistic populism, that is, can also be a powerful phenomenon.

Washington Post

[The science of skipping breakfast: How government nutritionists may have gotten it wrong](#)

by Peter Whoriskey

Researchers at a New York City hospital several years ago conducted a test of the widely accepted notion that skipping breakfast can make you fat.

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A closer look at the way that government nutritionists adopted the breakfast warning for the Dietary Guidelines shows how loose scientific guesses — possibly right, possibly wrong — can be elevated into hard-and-fast federal nutrition rules that are broadcast throughout the United States.

This year, as the Dietary Guidelines are being updated, the credibility of its nutritional commandments has been called into question by a series of scientific disputes. Its advisory committee called for [dropping the longstanding warning about dietary cholesterol](#), which had long plagued the egg industry; prominent studies contradicted the government warnings about the dangers of salt; and the government's longstanding condemnation of foods rich in saturated fats seems simplistic, according to critics, given the ever more intricate understanding of the nutrition in fatty foods.

The Dietary Guidelines are important because they shape the contents of school lunches and other federally subsidized programs, and because amid widespread obesity, so many people look to them for sound eating advice.

[\[Read: Fish oil pills: A \\$1.2 billion industry built, so far, on empty promises.\]](#)

The notion that skipping breakfast might cause weight gain entered the Dietary Guidelines in 2010, during one of the reviews conducted every five years by experts to update its findings.

In preparation, a government-convened panel known as the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee collected research on skipping breakfast. Some of it did, indeed, suggest that breakfast skippers may be more likely to gain weight.

One of the key pieces of evidence, for example, examined the records for 20,000 male health professionals. Researchers followed the group for 10 years and published results in 2007 in the journal *Obesity*. They showed that after adjusting for age and other factors, the men who ate breakfast were 13 percent less likely to have had a significant weight gain.

“Our study suggests that the consumption of breakfast may modestly lower the risk of weight gain in middle-aged and older men,” the researchers said.

The advisory committee cited this and similar research, known as “observational studies,” in support of the notion that skipping breakfast might cause weight gain. In “observational studies,” subjects are merely observed, not assigned randomly to “treatment” and “control” groups as in a traditional experiment.

Observational studies in nutrition are generally cheaper and easier to conduct. But they can suffer from weaknesses that can lead scientists astray.

One of the primary troubles in observational studies is what scientists refer to as “confounders” — basically, unaccounted factors that can lead researchers to make mistaken assumptions about causes. For example, suppose breakfast skippers have a personality trait that makes them more likely to gain weight than breakfast eaters. If that's the case, it may look as if skipping breakfast causes weight gain even though the cause is the personality trait.

In analyzing the results of observational studies, scientists make statistical adjustments to adjust for the potential confounding factors that they can measure — age, alcohol consumption, exercise, employment, and the like. Breakfast skippers in the health professionals study, for example, tended to drink more, smoke more, and exercise less. The scientists adjusted their statistics accordingly. But the adjustments are imprecise, and there is no guarantee that the groups are not different in some other unmeasured way.

Relying on observational studies has drawn fierce criticism from many in the field, particularly statisticians.

S. Stanley Young, former director of bioinformatics at the National Institute of Statistical Sciences has estimated that for observational studies in the medical field, “over 90 percent of the claims fail to replicate” — that is they cannot be replicated later by more exacting experiments.

“Wow. Is this really science?” he said during a talk at the Sigma Xi, the science research society. “Every observational study could be challenged.”

Because of the weaknesses in observational studies, many scientists prefer true experiments, or randomized controlled trials, which they often say provides the “gold standard” in evidence.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines committee did cite one randomized controlled trial on the question of breakfast. That experiment, conducted on children in Mexico, “found no relationship with breakfast alone” and weight gain, according to a committee summary.

But the committee looked beyond that trial and gave weight to several observational studies.

“Modest evidence suggests that children who do not eat breakfast are at increased risk of overweight and obesity,” the advisory committee said. “The evidence is stronger for adolescents.” As for adults, the evidence was described as “inconsistent.”

It was hardly a ringing endorsement of what might be called the breakfast hypothesis, but it was enough to get the federal agencies who write the guidelines — the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services — to buy in. The breakfast recommendation and the link to obesity became part of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, under its advice for losing weight.

“Eat a nutrient-dense breakfast,” it said. “Not eating breakfast has been associated with excess body weight, especially among children and adolescents. Consuming breakfast also has been associated with weight loss and weight loss maintenance.”

Asked how the government could recommend daily breakfast as a means of losing weight given the contrary evidence, Angela Colson, a spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Human Services, did not answer directly. Instead, she pointed by e-mail to pages in the introduction of the Dietary Guidelines that in broad terms lists the types of evidence that were taken into consideration.

Linda Van Horn, a professor of nutrition and preventive medicine at Northwestern University, was chair of the 2010 advisory committee. She explained in an e-mail that the amount of evidence available at the time was “limited” and that more research has been conducted in the intervening five years. She maintained, too, that the contents of breakfast foods may be especially good for you.

“Regardless of the evidence though, it might be important for you to recognize the value of eating breakfast due to its frequent inclusion of higher fiber containing foods,” her e-mail said. “As you are no doubt aware, Americans eat only about half of the recommended amount of dietary fiber.”

The notion that eating breakfast was good for losing weight was not new — a year before the Dietary Guidelines, the popular WebMD site featured an article called “Skip Breakfast, Get Fat.” But the federal adoption of the idea gave it added prominence. In the months after the guidelines release, the notion was picked up in newspapers around the country.

The Tampa Tribune offered this advice to men trying to lose weight: “Lots of guys skip breakfast. Don't.”

The Baltimore Sun said “Eating breakfast is an important strategy for weight control.”

And in Salt Lake City, the Deseret Morning News reported that “Breakfast might actually be the most important meal of the day and eating it regularly can help a person to lose weight.”

The trouble with all these pronouncements is, aside from raising doubts about the credibility of other dietary advice from the government, that they might actually cause people to eat breakfast when they otherwise wouldn't, potentially leading to weight gain.

David Allison, of the University of Alabama-Birmingham, has become one of the leading critics of what he sees as the misuse of nutritional research. He recently compiled a list of the randomized controlled trials that investigated links between breakfast and obesity.

He found five, including a variety of different breakfasts, and none offered clear evidence that skipping breakfast leads to weight gain. (The New York research was funded by Quaker Oats, a unit of Pepsi Co, though the results could hardly have been what the breakfast food company would have hoped for.) Mostly, it seemed, skipping breakfast made no difference. A sixth study, published this month in *Obesity*, also showed no differences in weight loss between those who ate a breakfast and those who skipped, though subjects who had a high-protein breakfast gained less body fat.)

Allison attributes the widespread adoption of the breakfast hypothesis at least in part on researchers who read too much into observational studies, and wrongly ignore the stronger evidence from the randomized controlled trials. In addition, he speculates that there “maybe some sense that eating breakfast is ‘moral’ and ‘upstanding,’” and that makes people more willing to believe it's good for you.

When in the coming months the government unveils the 2015 Dietary Guidelines, it is unclear the advice on breakfast and weight gain will be included. The 2015 advisory committee issued a report that steered clear of the subject of skipping breakfast and weight.

“I just don't think it surfaced as a priority question,” said Barbara Millen, president of Millennium Prevention, a life sciences start-up company, and chair of the 2015 advisory committee. “The sentiment was we don't have to say anything further about it. We didn't want to focus on a laundry list of foods and meals. We were focusing on overall dietary patterns.”

WSJ - Editorial

Mine Busters at the EPA

Who you gonna call when the green police unleash a toxic river?



Yellow waste water that had been held behind a barrier near the abandoned Gold King Mine is seen in the Animas River in Durango, Colorado on August 8

‘Ghostbusters’ has been playing again on cable, so we are reminded that the villain of that movie classic was a bully from the Environmental Protection Agency. He broke the ghost-containment grid and all hell broke loose. So who you gonna call today when the E-men dump three million gallons of toxic slurry down the rivers of the West?

Last week an EPA hazmat team hoped to inspect an abandoned Gold Rush-era mine near Durango, Colorado, and the backhoe digging out the collapsed cave entrance breached a retaining wall. The blowout spilled the contaminated sludge that had accumulated for nearly a century in the mine’s tunnels into a creek that is a tributary of the Animas River, flowing at a rate of 740 gallons a minute.

The plume of lead, arsenic, mercury, copper, cadmium and other heavy metals turned the water a memorable shade of yellow-orange chrome. The sludge is so acidic that it stings upon touch. Colorado, New Mexico and the Navajo Indian reservation have declared states of emergency as the contamination empties into Lake Powell in Utah and the San Juan River in New Mexico.

The ecological ramifications are uncertain, though the San Juan is designated as “critical habitat” for the Colorado Pike Minnow and Razorback Sucker fish. The regional economy that depends on recreational tourism like rafting, kayaking and fly fishing has been damaged. Drinking water is potable only because utilities closed their intake gates, but pollution in the

water table has deprived farmers and rural residents of a source for wells, livestock and crop irrigation.

For 24 hours the EPA failed to warn state and local officials, who learned about the fiasco when they saw their river become yellow curry. The EPA's initial estimate of the leakage was exposed by the U.S. Geologic Service as three times below the real rate. The agency hasn't explained the cause of the accident.

Yet the demands for reparations and the media outrage are notably muted. President Obama hasn't budged from his vacation golf rounds. Imagine how the EPA and the green lobby would be reacting if this spill had been committed by a private company. BP could have used this political forbearance after it failed to cork a busted oil well a mile below the sea after the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Naturally, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, known as the Superfund law, gives EPA clean-up crews immunity from the trial bar when they are negligent. Yet the Durango blowout was entirely avoidable.

In an Aug. 8 "incident report," the EPA notes that "the intent of the investigation was to create access to the mine, assess on-going water releases from the mine to treat mine water, and assess the feasibility of further mine remediation." In other words, the mine was plugged, and the EPA was excavating in search of some notional make-work problem to solve. Where were Bill Murray and Harold Ramis when we needed them?

Low levels of mining waste seep from thousands of used-up 19th-century projects beneath the Western states, but the counties around Durango have resisted declaration as Superfund sites. Perhaps they recall the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) saga in New York, where the EPA forced [General Electric GE -2.02 %](#) to dredge the Hudson River. The operation increased PCB pollution that was long deposited in sediment and had been harmless.

The world is a resilient place—the Gulf Coast has rebounded well—and Colorado will recover from the EPA's blunders. The lesson is to leave well enough alone, and that government lives by a double standard.

Ricochet

[Scott Walker and a 'Return to Normalcy'](#)

by Jon Gabriel



Despite what The Donald and Jeb! and Carly said in last week's debate, Scott Walker's closing statement tackled an even larger elephant in the room: "I'm a guy with a wife, two kids, and a Harley. One article called me '[aggressively normal](#).'" The Wisconsin Governor's detractors aren't as euphemistic. Let's face it: Scott Walker is B-O-R-I-N-G.

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In a field of flashy candidates, a dull Midwesterner caught the zeitgeist by calling for a "Return to Normalcy":

"America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality."

Ohio Senator Warren G. Harding's promise of a boring four years delivered a landslide victory from an exhausted electorate. After dying in office he was replaced by our dullest president, Calvin Coolidge, who was succeeded by a third steady hand, Herbert Hoover.

In many ways Walker is the heir to Silent Cal; a leader focused on concrete results with minimal rhetoric and even less drama. He spent his time as a county executive and governor methodically rolling back the worst excesses of government as the world flailed around him. The unwashed progressives in Madison ranted and raved, but Walker remained the eye of the storm. Unions threatened his family, judges harassed his friends, and MSNBC's Ed Schultz held a year-long St. Vitus' dance, while the governor stretched in his church pew, dreaming about hot ham.

As an ideologue, I'm more attracted to conservatarian activism. If a candidate promised to cut government in half, I would think it was merely a good start. Forget balancing the budget, I want spending well below incoming revenues for the next decade. And if the next government shutdown doesn't last a year, don't bother. So, on paper, a "return to normalcy" shouldn't be that appealing.

But Walker appeals to an exhaustion with politics in general. Like most small-government enthusiasts, I don't want to think about Washington, D.C. every minute of every day. My ideal politician is someone I only hear about at election time and maybe in January when he submits

his State of the Union address in writing. I would much rather focus my time on family, business, and art, than waste Christmas Eve watching C-SPAN's live congressional feed. I long for the days when supermarket magazine racks featured celebrity weight loss tips instead of FLOTUS lecturing me about kale.

If we're frustrated with politics now, we'll desperate for relief by November 2016. If Scott Walker is able to capitalize on that mood — starting with a definition of what “normal” even means anymore — the White House chef might need to stock up on hot ham and rolls.

American Interest

The Nihilistic Populism of Donald Trump

by Walter Russell Mead

Is The Donald a populist candidate? Our friend Glenn Reynolds [argued](#) in Sunday's *USA Today* that the rise of Donald Trump is best understood as a populist event—“an indictment of the GOP establishment and, for that matter, of the American political establishment in general” and “a sign that large numbers of voters don't feel represented by more mainstream politicians.”

Over at the *Washington Post*, Daniel Drezner, another friend, [disputes](#) Reynolds' interpretation of Trump, arguing that though “there's definitely something to this”, “on closer inspection this isn't really a straightforward populist story, for two reasons.” The first is that “the policy preferences that Trump is pushing aren't all that popular.” The second is that Trump, rather than emphasizing his solidarity with ordinary people, makes a point of flaunting his tremendous wealth and privilege at every possible opportunity in outrageous ways.

But Reynolds is right and Trump is very much a classic populist—in the following sense. Populism isn't always about taking majority positions or cultivating economic solidarity with non-elites. In some populist movements, specific policy positions that don't always or even often have majority support gain energy by hooking up with generalized dissatisfaction with elites and the *status quo*. Late 19th- and early 20th-century populism, from a policy standpoint, put a lot of stress on agrarian issues and crackpot economic ideas that, though there weren't any opinion polls at the time, don't seem to have had majority support. So while, as Drezner points out, hard-line immigration enforcement may not be particularly high on the agendas of a majority of voters, Trump can use the issue to signal his contempt for the establishment—and voters pay more attention to the tune than to the lyrics.

As for Drezner's argument that Trump's wealth and Ivy League credentials weaken his populist *bona fides*: Rich and successful men, from Catiline to Andrew Jackson to Ross Perot, have presented themselves as populists from time immemorial. The Donald's high-flying, bombastic style, with its tasteless and vulgar flaunting of exactly the kind of wealth that populism resents, looks superficially like it ought to drive *hoi polloi* away. That's not how it works. Populism is often a political tool for members of the elite who, for one reason or another, can't make it to the top through conventional methods and have to play an outside game to realize their ambitions; elitists and men of the people have both played the populist card over the centuries.

Some populists, like William Jennings Bryan, make a point of staying close to the people they sprang from. Some politicians build mass support by ostentatious simplicity; think of Gandhi in India. That is roughly the path that Scott Walker is taking, loincloth and Hindu mysticism aside. Some politicians appeal to popular constituencies by advocating for their economic interests, at least apparently. This was the path of Huey “Every Man A King” Long in Louisiana. It was also

the strategy President Harry Truman took in 1948 when he warned working Americans against Republican plans to destroy the trade union movement and the New Deal welfare state.

But Trump offers a different kind of “representation.” By flouting PC norms, reducing opponents and journalists to sputtering outrage as he trashes the conventions of political discourse, and dismissing his critics with airy put-downs, he is living the life that—at least some of the time—a lot of people wish they had either the courage or the resources to live. In this sense he’s not unlike Italy’s bad boy Silvio Berlusconi, who accumulated tremendous popular support by flaunting his refusal to abide by conventional rules of behavior.

For voters who’ve come to believe that both parties are owned and operated by the kind of people who pay Hillary Clinton hundreds of thousands of dollars to make platitudinous speeches, who believe that the system is rigged and will never be reformed, that the candidates offering “real solutions to real problems” are fooling either themselves or, more probably, you, Trump at least offers the satisfaction of making the other rat bastards and pompous PC elites squirm. He laughs at them and makes them look small; he defies their hatred and revels in their pursed-lip disapproval. By incurring the hatred of the chattering classes, he seems to some voters to be signaling both that he hates the empty showmanship of the capital as much as they do and that, by making himself the enemy of the self-determined arbiters of the rules of the political game, he is throwing himself on the support of the American people.

Trump is a sham, of course, but for many Americans in 2015 the whole political process is a sham. Trump, however, is an entertaining sham, and some voters think that if the establishment is going to screw you no matter what you do, you might as well vote for the funny one.

So it doesn’t matter that Trump’s positions (insofar as he has taken any) are unpopular, or that he is so obviously and outrageously a member of the economic elite that has so many Americans riled up this year—indeed, it may help him. Donald Trump is living large, which is how many Americans wish they could live.

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THERE ARE SOME WHO OPPOSE MY NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN.



THEY SAY I GAVE IRAN A PATHWAY TO THE BOMB.



THEY SAY SANCTIONS RELIEF WILL ALLOW THEM TO EXPORT MORE TERROR.



THEY SAY I SEEM TO SIDE WITH IRAN MORE THAN I SIDE WITH FAITHFUL ALLIES.

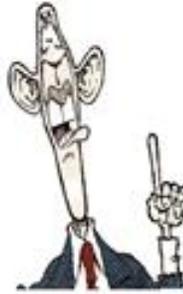


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WELL... I HAVE JUST ONE RESPONSE FOR ALL MY CRITICS.



DEATH TO YOU GREAT SATANS!



I CERTIFIED TO THE JUDGE THAT I'VE TURNED OVER ALL RELEVANT EMAILS.



OH, WOW... YOU MEAN HE HAS YOUR WORD ON IT?



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