The Nonobvious Fix



Addressing phone use's negative effects on your mental health

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ABOUT THIS SAMPLE

The Nonobvious Fix

Luke Schenker · 2025 · 255 pages

This sample is the first chapter of Section II. The full book is organized into five sections:

I. Fixing Your Phone Overuse
Understanding what's happening and exactly what to do about it.

II. Handling the New World
Theories on Modern Environmental Diet
→ Introduction to diets (this sample)

III. Designing for Outcomes
The mechanics of problems, solutions, and their context.

IV. The Problem's Larger Context
Why these problems exist and what you can expect in the future.

V. Specific Topics
Additional articles found in the Anew application.

II.
Handling the New World

Theories on Modern Environmental Diet

Introduction to diets

Alex was born in Pennsylvania in 1940. He grew up somewhat poor, but not drastically different than the rest of his local community, away from the larger cities in the state. Because of the community being lower income, their staple foods largely consisted of what the community had been eating for the past few decades - primarily grown foods like vegetables, grains, eggs, and occasionally a portion of meat.

This type of diet was overwhelmingly common before WWII. Vegetables and grains were drastically more available and affordable than meats and fats. For the majority of people, then and now, one of the strongest influences on diet is economic viability.

WWII pushed the innovation of processed foods - better preservation, higher calorie, higher yield. The original need catalysing this innovation was to better support the military, so they could have more resources for cheaper, so they could gain economic advantage to support the war effort. With all of the resources of the American military put into innovating these foods, they advanced dramatically.

After the war, there was a flood of these products into the market, based on those military innovations. Over the coming decades, everything from microwaved dinners to the fast food giants were made possible by the advent of processed foods.

Alex's youth was in a world before the advent of processed foods at scale. Now, it's 1980, and Alex is 40 years old. He, and some of his community, have begun to be overweight. Processed foods have

slowly been replacing staple foods he used to eat more as a child, due to them having both a lower economic cost and time cost to his family.

The US government notices the problem that Alex, and many others are experiencing due to their diets. JFK announced his "Youth Health Initiative" in 1961 defining physical standards for young people to aim for in order to be considered physically fit. Then later, in 1992 the US Department of Agriculture released standards for what a modern diet at the time should consist of, known as the "Food Pyramid", adapted from Swedish standards established in 1974.

Why didn't the government have these standards prior? Surely, it lends to reason, that having fitness and dietary standards earlier would result in a healthier society.

It is because these standards solved a new problem. A fundamental change had impacted all of American society, the advent of processed foods at scale, and now new problems had emerged as a result.

Prior to this, based on the American diet staples in the 1940s, it was difficult to become obese for the average person, so dietary guidelines were somewhat unnecessary. Their daily lives were much more physical as well, so exercise standards were also somewhat unnecessary for the general population.

When Alex was a child, he didn't have to have guidelines for his diet, because his world naturally only had relatively healthy options in reasonable amounts.

In his new modern world in the 1980s, he wants to be healthy, but initially didn't know how. Without a mental model of what a healthy diet was, and the limits he should put on processed foods, he has no way to understand what is going wrong, and what to do about it.

Guidelines and standards gave Alex the opportunity to understand the causes of how he had become overweight, and gave him the understanding of the problem so that he could target its causes. Without the model of the food pyramid, and a knowledge of how different foods related to his problem of obesity and health, he'd be very unlikely to figure it out himself.

It's 1995. The structure of the food pyramid guidelines have let him get a clear understanding of what a healthy diet looks like. That's the first step. Then, he looks at his own life and can see where it doesn't match those guidelines. Armed with that clear picture of what's wrong, and what to do, he can make effective and targeted change.

It's 2005, and Alex is 65 years old. He has achieved a healthy diet and weight. Some of his friends however have not. Some have suffered heart attacks from their weight, others have limited mobility from years of type II diabetes. Others weren't so lucky, and died much younger from their diet's influence on their health.

New innovations, like processed foods, can bring both benefits and new problems. It took decades for standards to be established based on the negative potential impacts of processed foods.

The bottom line is this.

- If problems don't exist, guidelines aren't needed.
- Innovations change societies, and create both new benefits and new problems.
- When new problems emerge, the first step is to provide guidelines that teach a person the nature of the problem, and what health is related to the problem.
- With a knowledge of the problem and solution, the person can make direct and effective change.

The world is always changing, but history repeats. We've continued to innovate, and change our societies drastically over the past century. Even every 20 years, the world is almost unrecognizable to what it was.

Defining diets

The advent of processed foods created a new surplus that we needed dietary guidelines to handle. Now, once again, our advancements have created new surpluses and problems. We now have 2 new surpluses that we don't yet have effective guidelines for.

Once again, we're in a new modern world. As before, the first thing we need to do is establish guidelines to mitigate the problems that surplus can cause.

The two new surplus problems are that of:

- Information surplus
- Engagement surplus

Now, let's introduce the two new diets, in response to these two new problems.

What is the nature of a problem, that requires a diet?

- There is a significant change to something that influences you consistently over the course of the day.
- After this significant change, following only what feels natural alone statistically leads to negative health outcomes.

For our food diet:

- The new problem: The advent of high calorie processed foods becoming more economical and potent than previous healthier

staples.

- Why the problem exists: Our bodies favor high calorie foods, without limitation, because evolutionarily they have been a key to our survival.
- What guidelines achieve: Educate a person on how many calories are healthy in a given day, with an outline of what types of foods are healthiest to achieve calorie and nutrition requirements.

The two new diets are a behavioral diet in response to engagement surplus, and an information diet in response to an information surplus.

The advent of the smartphone, just like the advent of processed foods, introduced a persistent change in daily life that changed many of its dynamics.

These two new diets are required because of the influences of the smartphone. However, they are about what the phone itself has changed about daily life, what about those changes have negative impacts, and what to do about them.

There are two distinct diets because there are two distinct problems that now exist, which have disrupted how we would otherwise naturally regulate our daily behaviors and habits in healthy ways.

For our behavioral diet:

- The new problem: The advent of the smartphone has become much more competitive for our attention, achieving a global average of 5hr daily use for a user. This large share of daily time takes away from the time required for naturally occurring behaviors that a person exhibits to manage and regulate their life.

- Why the problem exists: Our behaviors favor habits, and a phone's ability to be consistently more competitive for our attention than our daily surroundings allow it to establish and maintain itself as a constant fixture of our attention.
- What guidelines achieve: Educating a person on how much phone engagement is healthy on a given day, with an outline of what types of behaviors a day should consist of to best healthily regulate your life.

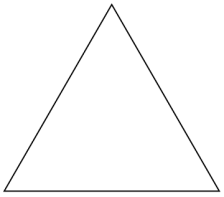
For our information diet:

- The new problem: The advent of the smartphone has further increased our ability to consume more information every day, which has incentivized the greater volume and frequency of the publication of new information. There is more information being designed to maintain emotional engagement rather than simply inform as well. This combination of greater volume of information, with its greater emotional potency, and greater availability, takes advantage of our brain's preference to naturally favor both novel information and emotionally potent information.
- Why this problem exists: Our brains favor novel information, because having up-to-date understanding of your world is a significant survival advantage. Similar to our preference for high calorie foods, out preference for novel information doesn't naturally limit itself. Our brains will favor consuming novel and potent information as much as they can, as long as more is available. And in our modern world, more is always available.
- What guidelines achieve: Educate a person on how much novel daily information is healthy on a given day, with an outline of what types of information are healthiest for them, with guidance on distinguishing attributes of different types of information.

These are the 3 modern diets, due to the 3 modern problems that have resulted from our progress and abundance. Overall, this progress has provided so many more advantages than disadvantages, but that does not mean that we don't benefit from managing the disadvantages.

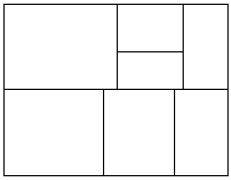
These 3 diets mitigate those disadvantages.

1. Nutritional



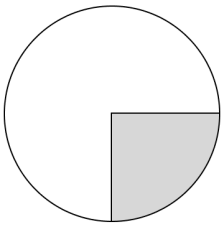
"Is the food I'm eating healthy?"

2. Behavioral



"Are my daily habits and behaviors healthy?"

3. Information



"Is my diet of information mentally healthy?"

In the following sections, we'll assume you have a prior knowledge of nutritional diet, and how to establish one.

If not, the basic principles of establishing a nutritional diet are:

- Understand your needs for the base elements of a diet: calories, protein, and supplemental nutrition.
- Understand what foods contain what elements.
- Establish daily routines that balance consuming those foods, which result meeting your needs for the base elements of your diet.

Those principles we'll apply to these diets.

- What behaviors and information do you need to ensure your health?
- What are you doing or consuming to meet those needs?
- What are the daily routines you can establish to meet those needs?