



THE FAT SUMMIT

Separating Fat From Fiction

Transcript:

Interview with Pilar Gerasimo
pilargerasio.com

Interview by Mark Hyman, MD
drhyman.com

Dr. Hyman: Hey everybody. This is Dr. Mark Hyman. Welcome to the Fat Summit, where we separate fat from fiction. I'm here with my good friend and award winning journalist, Pilar Gerasimo, who is the editor and founder and the one whose brain child is this extraordinary magazine called Experience Life. You probably may not have heard of it, but I consider it the best health magazine out there period, full stop, head and shoulders above everybody else. Why? Because Pilar and her team have really done hard investigative work to figure out the answers to the questions that are on all our minds, which is how do we live healthier lives? How do we eat? How do we take care of our bodies? What does the science show? And they've done the hard work of interviewing thousands of experts, including myself.

I'm not completely unbiased, but I've had many interviews with them, many articles that I've helped with and even articles that I've contributed to the magazine. I think if anybody is looking for a really smart, fun, engaging magazine to give them the skinny on actually what's really going on in health today, I would check out Experience Life magazine. And she's won many, many awards. She's created an extraordinary app called Being Healthy is a Revolutionary Act, and it's just really all about the 101 things you can do to be a health revolutionary and empower yourself to change your life and change the world. So welcome, Pilar.

Pilar: Oh, thank you so much, Mark. Can I call you Mark?

Dr. Hyman: Oh, of course.

Pilar: As opposed to Dr. Hyman today? It's lovely to be here with you. Thank you so much for having me, and thank you so much for all those kind words, it means a lot, always, coming from you, to hear words of praise about the magazine and about my work. It's a big deal for me, because you've been an incredible mentor and a great teacher and an incredibly valuable source for the magazine for many, many years. In some ways, I really think your work helped shape the frame of how Experience Life covers nutrition and health and progressive medicine. So we'll continue to come back to you...

Dr. Hyman: Thank you.

Pilar: ...for the cutting edge. Thank you.

Dr. Hyman: That's right. You came to one of my first workshops on UltraMetabolism over 10 years ago.

Pilar: Yes, yes.

Dr. Hyman: That's right.

Pilar: That was a real game changer for me. I got to see what happens, that sort of up-close experience of transformation, seeing people's health turned around in the course of three days. Just dramatic, very simple and very, very powerful.

Dr. Hyman: It's true. We had people fill out quizzes when they started, and when they finished, I think it was five days, and people's health just totally transformed. Their migraines went away, their joint pains went away, and they felt better. They would eat just really simple, real food and connect together in a small group setting. It was really pretty profound. So I've been friends with you for years, and I've been to your house, and your maiden name is Bacon.

Pilar: My mother's maiden name, yes.

Dr. Hyman: And your mother's maiden name is Bacon, and I've been to your house, and you serve bacon, and it's sort of a staple in your community. It's sort of an interesting phenomenon to think about, which is what should we be eating, and why are we so all afraid of fat? I want to take this on from the perspective of the media. Now, most of us consume our health information not from scientific journals but from the media. The newspapers, magazines, TV, often in sound bites, and they're often whiplash. One day eggs are good for you, one day they're bad for you. One day is butter bad, then butter's good. And one day meat's bad, one day meat's good. It's like everybody is completely confused, and they're just like, "Oh, whatever. I'll just eat whatever I want."

And when you start to dig into this, it's so confusing. Even as a doctor it gets confusing, because when you look in the scientific journals there's been, for example, reports in The New England Journal of Medicine that 50% of the conclusions in the headlines in the media that report on scientific studies are wrong. Half the time they're wrong, and then on top of that half of the abstracts in the journals that actually report what we think is the right answer, which is what most people read, which is just a summary of the study, many of those don't actually reflect the findings that are in the data in the scientific article. So it makes it even more confusing.

So how do we kind of come in the media that has this problem, and how do we sort through it? How have you figured out how to sort through the real answers around diet and nutrition, and particularly around fat?

Pilar: Yeah, woo, big question.

Dr. Hyman: I know. We've got an hour.

Pilar: We've got an hour. Thank you so much for sharing that, though. The point of view of just statistically how bad the media reporting is on these kinds of topics. And I think there are a few reasons for that. One, let's start with just journalists, what they're up against. Folks who are writing and editing newspapers, what newspapers there are left, and magazines and also even, especially, online media right now, are under really incredible pressure.

They don't have the time that they used to have to sort through this stuff, to go to the experts themselves and get real deep analysis. They're under the gun to produce, and they're under the gun to produce headlines that sell or that produce clicks. So their job is to produce something. They don't really care so much about whiplashing you as they do about getting you to buy the article, the magazine, or click on it, or add it to your feed.

So there is a kind of unfortunate misdirect of the journalists who are still left reporting on these topics, and there aren't as many as there used to be, toward doing the wrong thing as opposed to the right thing. Even if they had the time and the energy, however, to go after the deeper information, they're still up against some really interesting influences. And I want to talk more about this in a little bit, but the force that advertising and the publishers, who run the money part of the business in most publications and media outfits, they're under intense pressure too.

They want to produce as much revenue as they possibly can, and many times they're defending advertisers' interests much more than they're serving readers' interests. And that causes them to tell only part of a story when the other part of the story might offend some of their advertisers. It causes them to avoid entire stories. I think that the story of trans-fats was one of the stories that was simply delayed in the main media. It probably wasn't given the attention it deserved for at least 10 years, if not more, yeah.

Then there's a third aspect to it, which just has to do with the media landscape that we're in right now, which is that we're hit with so much media, and it's coming so

much faster than it used to, that we're bombarded by these headlines that I can read six in a row in my Twitter feed.

Dr. Hyman: All you used to have was your newspaper and maybe TIME magazine, and now you've got like 14 blogs and 5000 Facebook posts, and it's a lot.

Pilar: Yeah, and it's interesting, because on the one hand, the speed and the density of all of these headlines hitting you is one force, but then there's another interesting force, which is that there's a real fear on the part of legitimate and credible resources. The magazines that have the biggest reputations to defend, they're terrified about getting something wrong. So when something has been reported for 10 or 15 or 20 years, and that position has been defended by the American Heart Association, by the USDA, by the FDA, there's a real reticence...

Dr. Hyman: How can the government be wrong? Right.

Pilar: Exactly, exactly. And almost all of their reliable sources have come from those kinds of places or they've come from folks who have previously had industry connections that are now serving in one or other capacities that are considered well respected, authoritative resources, and they go back to those usual suspects.

Dr. Hyman: The revolving door. Right.

Pilar: Yes, absolutely. Yeah, so those are just a few of the influences. We could talk more about each of them in turn, but you get a sense of what you're up against.

Dr. Hyman: The money is a big thing. I think in the media, there are a few places where you get to say stuff. Huffington Post was like that. I think it's shifted from being like that, because it's now a big corporation, because I noticed much more restrictions. I think Dr. Oz, people have positive or negative connotations around him and his work, but I know him very well, and he's willing to go out there on a limb and not take money from advertisers that are against what he's saying. So he's willing to say, "Well, they'll be other people who want to advertise," and he does.

Pilar: That's amazing.

Dr. Hyman: And when you look at television, most of the commercials are for either fast food, junk food, or drugs. So on the one hand, you're promoted to eat crap, and it makes you sick. And the other hand, you're getting the drugs that actually are

designed to treat those problems. I've noticed a lot on television that you can't actually talk about these things. That there is a concern about not a full, free freedom of speech and it's really money-driven.

I remember being on Martha Stewart once and there was this thing we were doing with her, and she had her trainer there, and the whole show was sponsored by The Dairy Council. And the producer was telling me that they were going to promote milk as a sports drink. I'm like, "If you're asking me as a doctor or scientist, here's the literature that actually doesn't support that conclusion," and I sent him paper after paper after paper. He's like, "Yeah we know, I'm sorry. But they're funding the show." Most experts, when they go on the show, they don't have cue cards, they don't have the teleprompter. They have to know what they're talking about, but the host has a teleprompter.

Well, in this segment, her trainer, which was an expert in exercise, had these little cue cards that were being flashed up to give her the bullet points of what to say about dairy as a sports drink. And I thought, "Wow, this is just such a subverted, corrupt system that the science is getting misrepresented," because it's not even that we're not even able to say the stuff that we should say, it's that actually the truth is getting distorted because of the funding of the show. That was an eye opener for me.

Pilar: Oh, my gosh. And the situation that you just described occurs millions and millions of times across the United States, and really the world in every type of media. As a magazine editor, I've been approached by the Dairy Council, the Egg Council, and all kinds of folks. Advertisers have responded directly and written to me to say something along the lines of either, "How dare you?" Or "Cease and desist." Or, "It's really unfortunate that you've reported this incredibly inaccurate perspective. Let us shower you with paid for industry research papers that suggest you are wrong and reporting the incomplete story. At the very least you should report the "other side."

And this comes down to almost like a climate change sort of situation where 99% of scientists who are climate savvy agree that climate change...

Dr. Hyman: It's a problem.

Pilar: ...is being caused by human activity. Yeah, and it's a serious problem. But as a journalist, you're supposed to haul out the one or two crazy people who are connected to institutes that are connected to the oil industry, and make sure that they get equal time. And it's not really an equal argument. But that happens too.

I think it's interesting, on the one hand, for example, the Dairy Council stuff around low-fat messaging too. We still have to argue sometimes with advertisers when they really want to put advertisements in the magazine whose messaging is just an ad. And in principle, there's a whole church and state relationship where editors write what editors want to write, and advertisers say what advertisers want to say. And readers aren't supposed to care that they're getting radically different messages. But they're supposed to believe, still, that there is credibility and objectivity on the part of the reporting crowd that we don't let ourselves be swayed.

But the truth is, even if we're reporting really accurately, and the advertisers are putting ads in that have different conflicting messages, it's really difficult not to be confused or to feel like you're being sold out anyway as a reader. And I think it's understandable that when you see an ad from someplace like the Dairy Council that sounds very scientific, and as you know, Mark, and as Michele Simon has explained in many of her articles and books, all of these councils that sound like they're so...

Dr. Hyman: Oh, my god. Yes.

Pilar: ...official, "The science and the freedom of consumer..." whatever. There's dozens of them.

Dr. Hyman: The Center for Consumer Freedom, which says obesity is a myth. Well, just go to Wal-Mart, and you'll see it's not a myth. We're not really all fat. Don't pay attention to what you're seeing. Ignore the men behind the curtain. It's like, "Really?"

Pilar: Yeah, right. And then I think, too, we start getting so accustomed to hearing mixed messages, like you said, that people just kind of throw in the towel and they say, "Well, I might as well just eat what I want to eat. We'll never figure it out. I'll just do what I want to do." And I think that that's one of the unfortunate things many magazines, I think, are very comfortable...And this is probably true of television as well, having a kind of nowhere perspective on nutritional points of view.

They try so hard to be agnostic and to not take a position, that they are unwilling to invest themselves in an argument like the one, I think, around fat and saturated fat in particular, that really deserves to be had in a very serious way. Instead, they kind of report little sound bites or get a he said, she said, and they leave the reader "to decide for him or herself." But the reader isn't prepared to decide, really, at that point, because he hasn't got enough information.

Dr. Hyman: It's true. I was just involved in an article in New Yorker magazine. It was written by Dr. Jerome Groopman, who's a brilliant Harvard doctor, written a book called "How Doctors Think." And it was on inflammation. And he quoted me, and he quoted other experts. And if you're someone who doesn't really know the science, you hear a prominent doctor saying, "Well, there's no such thing as an anti-inflammatory diet, and food doesn't play a role in inflammation, but you should take a statin, an aspirin. And everybody should do that. And vitamins don't work." How do you...

Pilar: Where to begin.

Dr. Hyman: Yeah. How does a consumer even manage that? Because they're hearing these completely divergent points, and the media doesn't really take a position and say, "Let me do the work, look at the science." Guys like Gary Taubes, he told me...he's OCD. He's a completely brilliant guy, he's OCD.

Pilar: He's obsessed.

Dr. Hyman: He told me for like one...I don't know how many people it was. It was some ridiculous...for one New York Times Magazine article, he interviewed literally hundreds on hundreds of scientists, and did the work. And took months and months of reporting and investigative journalism and looking at the actual studies and digging behind the curtain and trying to figure out what it actually said, not what they said it said. There's so much...

Pilar: That's tough.

Dr. Hyman: It's very tough. It's very tough to do.

Pilar: It takes time.

Dr. Hyman: It takes time.

Pilar: And it takes time, and journalists like Gary Taubes and Michael Pollan...there are really only a handful of people who are reporting on food and nutrition in this deep way anymore. And there are people who have differentiated themselves by reporting this way, and made themselves into recognizable brands, who now can make decent livings doing what they do. Remember, most journalists are being paid peanuts. Their jobs are endangered. I worked very briefly at the Huffington Post, and I will tell you in a 24-hour news cycle, got a whole bunch of very young journalists working really, really hard, trying to churn out content. Which at the same time, they hope it will be helpful or meaningful past a click, right?

So, like I said, this is a very different world Gary Taubes and Michael Pollan are operating in. So I think that's one of the things to be aware of is that, we had an article authored by Michele Simon in, I think, the May issue of Experience Life, called Decoding Health Media.

Dr. Hyman: Yeah, let's talk about that, because I read that. It was very good.

Pilar: And she talked a little bit about...Yeah, oh thank you. I was really proud of it too, and it won some impressive awards. I think it changed some minds about some things, which is the most important thing to me. But she made the point that in an environment where both the producers of media and the consumers of media are at a disadvantage because of the media landscape. And when you have the force of advertising and industry manipulating, and science is kind of up for sale in a lot of cases, we know that it's intense.

The challenge of getting the story straight and the way that Gary and Michael go about doing it becomes a kind of, "You need to be OCD. You need to be absolutely driven and on a mission to do it." And then those articles appear in the New York Times, which is great. But they will appear next to, for example, Tara Parker-Pope's column, which I read, and it's fine, but it gets stuff wrong all the time. And either way, you say, "I read it in the New York Times." Who is right?

Dr. Hyman: That's very true.

Pilar: And unless you know the difference between the way that...and not to say that she doesn't do her research, I'm sure she does. But many times she suffers from the problem that most of the journalists at her position do, which is that she's going to people who sound perfectly reputable. She's taking a quick look at studies that seem to say what they say. But if you get past the abstract, is it correlation? Is

it causation? Is it really a significant enough study? Are the methods good enough? That's a tough thing to...

Dr. Hyman: Conflicts of interest are huge. We know that in the food space, the nutrition space, when studies are funded by the food industry, they're eight times more likely to show a positive outcome for that product, that's their product, that they're studying; whether it's dairy or soda. There's literally studies by the American Beverage Association that show that drinking soda is fine.

Pilar: I've seen those. They've sent me those studies.

Dr. Hyman: It just flies in the face of common sense. And it's like you kind of appear below the...And there was a recent study, a recent article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association talking about the tremendous conflicts of interest in research, particularly around food research. And it makes it very hard for the average consumer of media to actually know what to do. So let's talk a little bit about fat, because this is really a big problem, right? So, we are trying to figure this out.

Pilar: All of this applies to fat.

Dr. Hyman: And we've gone from everybody believing that fat was the demon, it was evil. We should all be eating none of it or very little of it, to now the pendulum swinging. We had the TIME Magazine cover with little face of eggs with a little frown face. It's just like, "Watch out for cholesterol," to now the government saying, "Oh by the way, we got it wrong on cholesterol. Sorry guys. You can go ahead and eat your egg yolks, because it doesn't really matter if you eat cholesterol." And now you've got the TIME Magazine cover saying, "Eat butter." And everybody is just head spinning on this. And now the latest craze is butter coffee. Are we swinging the other way? What should we be doing?

Pilar: Well, first of all, I think it's really important to reflect that even as these TIME Magazine covers have swung back and forth, there is a much slower uptake on the pro-fat message within the space of a lot of mass media magazines. I think you're seeing a divergence now between paleo-centric publications, for example, and major mass market, what you see on the news. I'm still not seeing a full about face on fat in most of the major magazines that people see on the newsstand, like at Wal-Mart or at Safeway. And so while that's story is available...

Dr. Hyman: Well, that's why I wrote the book "Eat Fat Get Thin," which is coming out soon to really talk about this whole issue.

Pilar: Great book, and you really go into a much deeper dive on how so many of these headlines that people think are research headlines are really not representing the research behind them in the first place. And thank you for doing that, because I will say, we're going to talk a little bit at the end about how media consumers can defend themselves and empower themselves. But this is one of the ways, in my mind, is getting past the headlines in the daily and weekly and monthly media and digging into books where people really have a space and time to unpack and analyze this stuff for you. And really give you more detail so that you can make a sensible decision.

But yeah, so let's just talk a little bit about the evolution, and I know you've talked about this in your book, which I love, but you probably also talked about this with some other experts. The thing with fat that was so interesting is...you mentioned...I grew up, where I live we eat fat. It's a farm where we grow our own animals and pretty much ate every part of them when I was growing up. And no one in my family had ever had an issue with any fat-related problem. We think of as fat-related problems, but they're not fat related problems. Yeah, cholesterol, high blood pressure.

But what I remember was in the 70's and particularly in the late 70's, or maybe early 80's, there was this flood of new advertising and information about the same time, saying that vegetable oils were healthier and really contrasting the ugly, dirty, ickiness of, say, lard or the heaviness of butter with the lightness and airiness of margarine and these crystalline vegetable oils. And vegetable oils were like suddenly...

Dr. Hyman: What the hell is vegetable oil? You see those bottles of vegetable oil. What is it? What is it a vegetable...is it broccoli oil? It's interesting.

Pilar: Yeah it sounded good right? Vegetable oil has to be good for you. So what I remember was that we started hearing the phrases like polyunsaturated fats. I think that there was kind of this turn away from natural fats into processed fats, because they were a food product that was getting great lift. They wanted to have great lift in the market place. You've told the story about how coconut oil got demonized, and we started using hydrogenated fats instead. There was a United States market

for those things, from corn or from soybean that made really good sense for advertisers to promote and for industry to get research showing that it was better for you somehow.

So that whole story has been told, but I think what you're experiencing now, what you see having happened with the media, our folks who went through, in many cases, that whole period of history, went also through seeing the obesity, diabetes crisis rising up, the diet industry coming in, and then the pharmaceutical industry following, right? Because keep in mind, a huge percentage of the advertising pages in health and fitness magazines are pharmaceutical ads. Yeah, absolutely.

And there's that message that came across loud and clear, and not just in ads, but in the media. Follow a heart healthy diet or a cholesterol lowering diet that here's what it is, right? Low-fat products that are industrial products, processed foods, use these industrial commercial fats instead of the traditional fats that you've been told to eat because they'll help you lower your cholesterol. And then when your blood pressure and cholesterol...you follow all that good advice, and you still, miraculously, nothing happens to your cholesterol or blood pressure except maybe they go up. Now it must be time to resort to the drugs. So that was really the frame that developed over the 70's and the 80's and even the 90's.

Dr. Hyman: It's a great business motto, eat low fat and more drugs.

Pilar: It is, and I think what's sad about it is that a lot of readers, a lot of the reason I started Experience Life magazine, came out of my own frustration of realizing I was being really radically misled. That when I got unhealthy in my life, having grown up as a really healthy kid eating all that stuff, was when I went and started doing the thing my mother had said was probably a bad idea, which was eating a bunch of processed foods and trying to be like a normal person in the United States of America.

Dr. Hyman: How did that work for you? Did that work out?

Pilar: It worked out really well for me, in that it inspired me to start a magazine I'm very proud of. But it didn't work out for me personally. The more I followed the traditional, conventional advice I was seeing in magazines, the unhealthier and unhappier I got. I gained weight. I got depressed. I started liking my body a lot less and started...the self-loathing would drive me to behaviors that were really not good at all. I mean, numbing out in front of the television and eating junk food, to

starving myself and trying to lose weight on these diets that all of these magazines told me were calorie reduced, low-fat diets. Just destroyed me.

And it took me a good 10 years to unload myself from all of that and decide, you know for me Mark, a lot of it was going, "Look, I was a good student in college, I could learn this. I figured I would just learn it. I let go of the stuff that I'd been reading and started digging into books and research and talking to smarter people than me about why fats work this way. Like, "What's going on?" I'm not going to lie, it took me a decade to figure it out for myself, and then I really felt like I wanted to share it with other people.

Because I think that if you go right now to the newsstand, it doesn't really matter. If you pick up AARP magazine or you pick up Glamour magazine, you're going to find still today, I go through them sometimes with a highlighter. Or just dog-ear pages that are really bad advice based on not very good science and often quoting people that I know to be either industry connected or kind of ideologically connected to a mindset and to the parts of science that support their science and not the rest of it. It's like very selected use of science, and we've talked about this before.

Some of the best respected experts in the United States, the people who are the usual suspects, to whom reporters reliably go for good quotes and what they hope will be good explanations. They're meaning well, they're reaching out to these folks, and they're absolutely getting flawed information.

Dr. Hyman: It's very hard. I'm writing my book "Eat Fat Get Thin," and I really had to dig into the research. And it was just astounding to me how on topics that you would think there'd be agreement on, there's just widely divergent opinions from really smart scientists on the same topic. Some think Omega-6 is God's gift, and we should be drinking soybean oil, and others think this is going to be poison, causing heart attacks. Some think saturated fats are the devil, and others are like, "Well they're not really a problem, it's not a health food, but it's not really a problem." And others are like, "We should be eating butter."

I mean it's really strange. I actually had the time to dig in and read literally thousands of papers, and I wrote 8000 words on meat, because I wanted to know what does the research say about meat? Because it's confusing. I don't want to eat meat if it's going to hurt me. I don't want to tell my patients to eat meat if it's going to hurt them. Yet we hear in the media all the time that "Oh, meat causes a problem, it causes cancer."

We really don't know. But I try to unpack all the issues and look at the science and be objective about it. And try to present this like, "Here's what we know, here's what we don't know, and here's what makes sense." Some of it is from an evolutionary point of view, like we evolved eating buffalo and elk, which can't be all that bad for us, we survived. People are like, "Oh, we all died when we were like 40." Well, not really. Half the people died in childbirth or early in childhood, and the other half lived to like 90.

Look at the Plains Indians. The Plains Indians at the turn of the century were living on buffalo and roots and berries and nuts, and they actually had the highest percentage of centenarians of any population in history. More people got to 100 years old than in any other population. And they were eating a predominantly meat-based diet and fat. They used pemmican which was like 70% fat, 30% protein, 5% to 10% berries and carbs. I think it takes time to do that, though. I've been in this field, I've been studying nutrition for decades. But even for me it was hard.

So it's really hard for the average consumer to sort through this and to know what to trust. And you've got people with ideological views who think that it's like a religion. I'm Agnostic, I don't care. I just want to know what the right thing is, and I have a point of view, but I'm really willing to change it if I...I used to be a vegetarian, and I actually was looking through my drawer the other day, looking through old pictures, and I found these pictures of myself when I was in my twenties when I was a vegetarian. And I was more flabby, more scrawny, and I didn't have the health. I looked at my face, and my eyes were puffy, and I realized I actually am much healthier now and much more fit and muscular eating more fat.

I eat mostly vegetables, but I do include lots of fat, and I include some good quality animal protein. And I think I'm healthier than ever. I see this with my patients. So I have this sort of unique perspective of someone who's not only looked at all the data like a journalist, but I've actually gotten to have a living laboratory of tens of thousands of patients over 30 years and seeing actually what happened when you put them on a low fat diet. I thought pasta was a health food. So all of a sudden, I'm like, "Well, that's not a great idea to be eating tons of rice and pasta."

Pilar: Well, good for you for being willing to change your position based on your experience and the experience of real human patients in your care. I think that's one of the suggestions I always have for people is, people complain, like, "Oh, well, this year it was this information, last year it was this. Now it's this other information." And they keep arguing about the details that they're reading and bemoaning the state of the media and the confusion. But I'm like, "What have you tried?"

Literally, actually tried yourself for three months and gotten your blood tested on either end and seeing how you're doing? Or gotten your poo tested on either end and see how you're doing."

Firstly, I really do believe, and I think the science supports this, that we're genetically individual, and some people do better on certain kinds of diets than others, both because of their genetics and because of their lifestyle. Often times, people refer back to the paleo and the ancestral health world, and they just talk about diet. But remember, they had radically different kinds of stress experiences and sleep patterns and social constructs than we did, all of which affect biochemistry. So I don't think we can just simply say, "Well, they did this, therefore..." or "They died at 40, therefore..." It doesn't translate that way.

But I do know that when I started experimenting on my own body, my end of one, it was very clear to me, often times not within the span of months, but within the span of weeks or days, and in some cases even hours with certain kinds of food additives, that I found out really did not agree with me at all. I came up in the world of Tab and Splenda and shaking stuff on to my food that has artificial flavors, horrible.

Dr. Hyman: Yeah, whatever happened to Tab?

Pilar: Tab, I think it went the way of the dinosaur. But it was replaced by 95 other diet beverages, including those little things you pop into your water right now, because like water is not good enough.

But yeah, getting back to the fat problem, I guess I think that one of the things I've always really appreciated about your work is that you've explained the transformation that happens in folks biochemically and human-wise. People change how they're showing up. Physically, they look really different. One of the things that I noticed a lot is the quality of people's skin. I'm 48, and people often say, "God, you've got really great skin for someone in their late 40s," and I'm like, "Well what are you doing?"

Dr. Hyman: It's all the bacon fat.

Pilar: It's all the fat. I'm being funny, but I'm not being funny, because the truth is, during most of the 80s and 90s, when all of my girlfriends and I, we were following low fat diets. That stuff lands on your body really hard. Some people went like zero fat, aimed for no fat at all in their diets for 10 or 15 years. And their bodies paid a price for it.

Dr. Hyman: What did you see?

Pilar: What did I see? Well, what I saw...my own experience?

Dr. Hyman: Your experience, or the people or your friends who were doing...what did they complain of?

Pilar: Well, mostly it was like they were constantly hungry and that they were trying to feed themselves and their hunger with everything but fat. So sugar became a kind of good alternative. Refined carbohydrates became their version of comfort food, sort of fake fats, things that looked creamy, but were made out of something other than actual cream, like these strange chemical concoctions.

And what I saw in their bodies was puffiness was really...and I think a lot of what they saw as a weight problem was probably an inflammation problem, what you've noticed comes off people when they go on an elimination diet. It's all that water weight from their body being mad. But their experience of just being obsessed with food and constantly concerned with their portions. And they'd go through this, "I'm going to cheat," or "I'm going to be good" phases." For most women I know, honestly, food is an obsession. Either they love to talk about it, or they don't admit how much they think about it.

My experience has been when I'm eating well, which for me means eating a significant amount of fat in what is a very vegetable intense diet, but I also eat my meat happily, as you know. I don't think about it much. I feel happy and content and my weight is very stable.

Dr. Hyman: That's a very important point, which is that the thing that actually controls your behavior is your brain. And your brain without fat doesn't work properly, and your brain on fat actually is regulated in a way that actually makes you...So what really controls your thinking about food is fat, because fat actually regulates your brain's ability to feel satisfied. Most people realize that when they go off fat, all they're doing is thinking about food. And they've actually done studies on this, Pilar.

Pilar: Yes.

Dr. Hyman: They've actually taken people, put them on low calorie, low fat diets, and all they did was think about food, obsess about food, think about, draw a picture, dream, everything about food. And they were miserable, they were hungry, they were unhappy, they were cranky, they were depressed, their skin was bad, their hair was bad. It was fascinating. They'd lost a bit of weight, although their bodies compensated and actually shut their metabolism down, so they actually plateaued, and then when they got to eat again, they ate so much...

Pilar: Tons.

Dr. Hyman: They gained even more weight than they had when they were... like 50 % more weight than they actually had before. Not 50%, they ate 50% more, and they actually gained a bunch of weight. So when you actually eat fat, what happens is you shut up that voice in your head that says, "I'm hungry," and you're craving, and you're looking for stuff. It's really fascinating to see what happens. The whole thing shuts down, and one of the powerful ways to do that is actually using this technique that I've learned about, which is using something is called MCT oil, which is actually a super fat that goes right into your liver. It doesn't go through the lymphatic system. It doesn't need to be processed in the same way.

Your body uses it really quickly. It's a great energy source, and it's a great source of brain fuel. So when I have it, I don't even think about food. It's really amazing. You get in this little low-grade state of balance where you're not swinging all over the place, and your blood sugar is not going to go all over the place, and you can actually feel good. You can just eat for pleasure and not be having this horrible relationship with food. And so many people blame themselves for their behavior with food, and they have this self-hate or self-loathing about their relationship with food, but often it's really because they're not eating the right foods, and our...

Pilar: Exactly.

Dr. Hyman: ...And our good friend David Ludwig, who's a professor at Harvard, has really written a book called, "Why Are We Always Hungry?" or "Always Hungry?" and it's about this phenomena that happens when you shift your diet from real food and good fats to low fat, and how that makes us always hungry, and we never can get out of that. The only way to shift that and speed up your metabolism is actually eating more fat. It's very fascinating.

Pilar: I love that book, and we're really proud, actually. Experience Life has a beautiful feature with Dr. David Ludwig, based on his "Always hungry?" book in our January issue. So just about the time that your Fat Summit will be going live, we'll be publishing that piece with David. We also did a really fun...we participated with David in creating this pilot study for that program, and pushed it out to about one 100 of our Experience Life readers. All of them had really interesting experiences. I think for many people, it's the first time that they've gone on a medically designed diet that is a high-fat diet, and really healthy, full of delicious vegetables.

Dr. Hyman: It's 50% percent fat, 50% fat. If you talk to any doctor in the last few decades, they'd be like 50% fat, you're going to kill yourself. But what happened with these people?

Pilar: Yeah, transformative. And I will say too, keep in mind, for most people, getting back to the media influence, if after 20 years of reading magazines, all you've read are phrases like lean meats, low fat dairy, meat free, vegetable healthy, blah, blah, blah.

These phrases alone start to stick in your head, and it makes you really reticent about trying something like a higher-fat diet, because everything in your neurology, all the stored information in your brain, from the articles themselves, from the advertising, from the things that you haven't seen because they've never made the headlines. You're completely programmed to believe that putting fat in your mouth is going to make you fat and sick, and kind of nuts. And I think it's strange that it's the opposite. So I really encourage...

Dr. Hyman: It's so counter-intuitive, right?

Pilar: We encourage our readers in Experience Life. It's is, yeah.

Dr. Hyman: We still hearing the scientists saying...

Pilar: You have to try.

Dr. Hyman: If you have nine calories per gram for fat and four calories for carbs and protein, if you cut out the fat, you'll eat less calories, and you'll lose weight. Well, actually, that's not how your biology works. It's not just a math problem. It's a hormone problem, and the hormones that get produced by sugar and even protein in high amounts and carbs, are different than the hormones that get produced your

body when you have fat, which actually cause more weight loss as opposed to weight gain.

Pilar: Yeah. It's interesting, when we do recipes in the magazine, we've always had a very fat-friendly approach to food, I think, since we launched in 2001, insanely, so long ago. But we've never put calorie counts next to those recipes. We've never put fat or carb counts. We have a little notice now in the magazine, because so many of our readers would complain bitterly, "Why are you not giving..." they live and die by these calorie counts, and whether or not they will make a certain recipe depends on how many grams of fat or carbohydrate it has in it.

We're saying, "Listen, we really have this point of view that if you're eating whole foods almost exclusively, and you're eating a reasonable balance of them, and trusting your instincts about what looks good and tastes good to you, you're going to end up with a fairly healthy array of nutrients. And you're going to end up with a fairly balanced, healthy collection of macro-nutrients as well. This is has been my personal experience, but it's informed by about 15 years of health journalist background, that really does work well for almost everybody. There's a very rare person for whom it does not work, but without the information, people aren't brave enough to try it.

Dr. Hyman: What you're talking about is the opposite of what is taking hold in the media and in science, which is this phenomena we call "nutritionism," which is breaking down our diet into its component parts and trying to talk about them as if it makes sense. So saturated fat or polyunsaturated fat, or any ingredients or nutrients we're trying to...like calories, protein, fat, carb grams, like...

Pilar: Or Soybean oil. It has vitamin E. it's good for you.

Dr. Hyman: So we get stuck in looking at these sub-components instead of the whole complex of our diet. What you said is really true. If it's a whole food...soybean oil is not a whole food, right? It's a highly processed weird substance that didn't exist 100 years ago, right? Now, if you look at our traditional diets or things we've been eating for centuries or millennia, it's just real, whole, unprocessed food. If you wanted to grind a grain...I was in the china 30 years ago, and I went to this village up in the mountains. They had these two giant stones with these wooden things sticking out of them, and they had two guys walking in a circle for hours grinding the grain.

Well, first of all, it's not refined. It's super course, it's what they make stuff out of, it's all they have. Just don't make the grain, and you're going to burn off 4,000 calories. So it's like, "Fine."

Pilar: Same thing with making French fries, it's such a mess, or doughnuts. If you really, really want them, and you go to all the trouble of making them, God bless you.

Dr. Hyman: And, by the way, you'd be making them with the ingredients that you actually recognize, right? So like you make bread in your house, its flour, its yeast, its salt, its water. Its things you know about. But like our friend Vani Hari, she finally put subway mat, subway yoga...I mean subway bread had yoga mat ingredients in it. It's a azodicarbonamide, what is that? You don't have azodicarbonamide in a jar in your kitchen that you put in cooking, right? So you don't want to have ingredients in your kitchen that actually are going to be harmful for you, and those are the only things you should be eating in the food that you have.

Pilar: Okay, now you brought up Vani Hari, which brings me to another topic that is media-related. I'd love to just tell you a little bit about it if I can. We put Vani Hari on our cover in October of last year, and it was for our food issue.

Dr. Hyman: That's great.

Pilar: And we had this amazing thing happen...yeah, it was. I didn't know that she had such a controversial profile. But it was interesting, so what I want to talk about is another piece of media we haven't yet talked about, which is the power of social media and the manipulation of social media to create public perception shifts that can be to the advantage of industry stakeholders. So, as you know, Vani is a mutual friend of ours now. She became a friend of mine because of this experience. I got to talk to her quite a lot and got very impressed by her.

But we put her on the cover, and we started getting an incredible, unprecedented amount of hate mail. Comments on our website that were full of pornography and ethnic slurs, threats to my staff. I'd never seen anything like it. They were calling her a racketeer and a criminal. I was like this is crazy. We occasionally print things that they make people a little mad, or they don't like it, or doctors write in when we say things that they don't agree with. But in this case, it was like three weeks of sustained attack.

And I started looking into to it and discovered that there was this whole phenomenon called astroturfing, where organizations are created to look like quote unquote "grass roots movements," but fake grass is what they really are.

Dr. Hyman: That's true too. I like that.

Pilar: And they're an organized group that's astroturfing, yeah. We wrote a really great piece on this, Mark, in our October issue called Turf Wars. I really encourage you to look at it, and if you feel like you want to, share with folks. Because people have no idea the extent to which social media is polluted by paid for and organized groups acting in ways that support industry messaging. In this case, it had a lot to do with objecting to Vani Hari's position on processed foods, and the way that she was talking about organics versus GMOs, for example.

But, also, I think that there is a movement that has some interesting sector intersection of the food industry, big food, big pharma, and big Ag, which of course affects both categories since pharmaceutical and agricultural companies are one and one now, and food is produced by agricultural companies that produce a lot of chemicals, that make that part of the world run. And they really don't like the messages that are coming from forward-thinking, progressive, outspoken folks like Vani Hari, and they don't like it when magazines like mine that have a 3 million reach across the United States put that person on the cover, and give her credibility. Same thing happens oftentimes when we talk to progressive medicine experts like you. People get very upset by disruption of the status quo, and we occasionally will get messages, mostly letters to the editor, but in this case it was truly a social media extravaganza.

So I want people to be aware of this phenomenon and to notice it. I don't know that it happens as much around fat, particularly, although I think we're going to start to see, as most of these companies that have produced these vegetable oils start questioning their loss of the market. They're going to be finding alternatives to those products, but I think they're also going to be seeing more defenses of them, just like we saw with high-fructose corn syrup. There was a huge astroturfing movement. A fake "Moms for corn syrup" came out of nowhere.

Like who are these moms who are so defending of corn syrup or of trans-fats? There's a little bit of that too.

Dr. Hyman: The corn refiners of America created a website called Sweet Surprise, and all these beautiful ads with fathers and daughters walking through cornfields, and how it's just a natural sugar, and...I mean, it's astounding to me.

Pilar: Only dumb people would think that this or that or the other thing is bad for you. Clearly it's good for you.

Dr. Hyman: And they're watching. I actually write a lot about high-fructose corn syrup. I had one like you got; I got this letter from the Corn Refiners of America, where they have actually documented every instance in the media where I highlighted the problems with high-fructose corn syrup. And they came after me and threatened me in a very nice way, but it was very threatening. And I was like, "Wow this is amazing. They're actually paying attention." And this was like 10 years ago, before I actually had such a big following. And it was really stunning to me how they are on the prowl for people who are saying things that actually can subvert their profits, and then they're coming after them aggressively through very subversive means.

Pilar: And often things that look like pro-science. That's the other thing, it's couched oftentimes in a pro-science...like there's a site called sciencebasedmedicine.org that loves to attack you and your colleagues in the progress space...

Pilar: And also did a huge attack on...yeah. And so you'll see sometimes in the comments, things to watch for in social media and in the comment streams at web sites or in forums are sudden, crazy insistence on things being pro-science, and we don't want to believe anyone who doesn't have 5 million credentials after their name. But if they have 5 million credentials and they're saying this one thing, then they're a hoaxter, they're a huckster, they're a polecat, and a liar, and a faker, and not to be believed.

They're pseudo-scientists then, and you'll start to see this debate that we unpack in our astroturfing story.

Dr. Hyman: I've got my shirt on.

Pilar: Oh, yeah. So what I want people to realize is that I think that this is a fairly important and growing movement that we're going to see more from in all the spaces, potentially, including the fat space, but for sure in diet and nutrition, and alternative or progressive, or functional medicine. And if it's on a radar...

Dr. Hyman: How do people, then, empower themselves and defend themselves if they're immediate consumers in this all?

Pilar: Well, I think one thing is simply absorbing the information that we shared today, and understanding that it's a little more complex, that you can't just trust the headlines. I think, first of all, understand that the forces at work are both industry-influenced, that what advertisers want is oftentimes what media gets. Because they are underwriting, and they're footing the bill for media, as far as publishers and editors are concerned. They're going to be under a lot of pressure to say things that their advertisers like.

So that's one influence to be aware of. The second is kind of a logistical influence, which is just the time compression that we live in, and the pressure that journalists are under, and really the lack of capacity that they have to do a great job of editing things. So even if you're reading things in reputable magazines or reputable newspapers, understand that this journalist may have done his or her best job, but it doesn't mean that they got that story right, and you do need to go deeper yourself. This is hardest part, because people don't have time or energy.

I have really found, for me, the thing that has worked the best as an editor, and as an individual who's interested in this information, is connecting with experts who clearly have spent good chunks of their life in the science itself, who don't have an ideological position, who are not being paid by industry to say these things, and finding out how they... listening to the logic of what they are unpacking. This is not an easy thing for a consumer to do, but I think consumers can connect themselves with books from those experts that they appreciate, or people who are evaluating it well.

I think Gary's a great example of someone who's just...Gary Taubes has done incredible homework, and so it's interesting to listen to his point of view. I think the other thing that you have to do, though, mark, is really come back to that end of one. If something sounds like it makes sense to you, give it a try for a few weeks. See really how you feel. But I think most people, when they go on a low fat diet for three weeks, are going to find out... they're going to feel exactly what you described, which is crazy, obsessive, hungry. Their body's not going to be working the way they want it to. And then you know what? That's a really good time to abandon that particular approach and try another one.

You have a lifetime to experiment. If all you did was spend three weeks experimenting with different approaches like this, I think within a couple of months you'd probably start landing on what works for you.

Dr. Hyman: Absolutely. I always say the best doctor is you. Your body is the best doctor in the house, and if you listen to that one, it will usually tell you what works and what doesn't. It's just so interesting, I'll just tell you a quick anecdote. I had a patient, who had a dramatic improvement in their health outcomes using functional medicine, and changing their diet, and they went to the doctor, and the doctor said, "Oh, this is nonsense. So what if you're lactose ...you're better. So what if you feel better? This is all nonsense. Diets don't really help, this doesn't work. It's just probably because he was a nice guy, and you felt better."

And I was like, "What?" It's like, "Please..." Winston Churchill said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth and then quickly pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." I think it's all...

Pilar: What was that?

Dr. Hyman: You stumble over with the truth, and then you quickly ignore it, because it doesn't fit your story. And that's the problem of paradigm shifts. We're in a huge paradigm shift around diet and fat and science right now. It's actually better than ever in a way, because we actually, for the first time, have access to information and knowledge that can help us sort through it all. It's not easy, but you're right, we can do it. So I'm excited about your new book, Pilar, "The Art of Being Healthy In An Unhealthy World," so why don't you finish by telling us a little bit about it and what you're hoping to achieve and what you want us to know about it.

Pilar: Yeah, thank you so much. Well, "The Art of Being Healthy In An Unhealthy World" is really a collection of wisdom that I've accumulated through my personal and professional voyage over the past 20 years or so. The title really refers to my belief that being healthy is a revolutionary act. And if you want to be healthy in the culture we live in today, it is both an art and a science to figure out how to do it, when you're swimming against a tide and marching against a stream going the other direction. So I found it to be both an art and a science.

For me, I'm collecting a lot of the information I've learned through experience, which is how to construct a mindful day from the moment that you wake up, until the time you go to bed at night, so that you have a structure, a designed structure that allows you to be aware of when the culture is working against you, rather than

being a victim of it. Of noticing, "Yeah, oh, someone just put doughnuts in front of me, isn't that interesting?" If you don't have your consciousness around you, it's going to be very difficult to make a better choice. So it's a combination of the practical council. The fundamental part of it is how to hold your space in a crazy world, the one that we're living in now.

Dr. Hyman: What you're really saying is that you have to design your life, so that the default choices are the healthy choices, right? Because we often don't design our well-being into our life. We design all sorts of things, but we spend so little time actually thinking about how to create well-being in the context of a day, which is like a canvas that you have to paint every single day. I think I'm very conscious of that. I look at the spectrum of my day, and I'm, "Hey, where am I going to fit in the things that actually I know are going to make me thrive?" It's something I know automatically, but it's not something that we're taught to do, or know how to do, or think about. And I think I'm so excited to see your book come out, which is going to hopefully get us to think more about how to do that in a practical way. So thank you for...

Pilar: Thank you. And we'll talk about the media elements then too, mark, so you're going to hear more about that. But thank you so much. I really appreciate your interest, enthusiasm, and support, as always. And I'll be calling you for some quotes.

Dr. Hyman: Off course. Well, thank you so much for joining the Fat Summit and helping us understand the complicated and confusing world of media and nutrition and information, and helping us understand how to be better media consumers. So thank you, Pilar. And I encourage everybody to go get a copy of Experience Life magazine, which is fantastic. So thank you.

Pilar: My pleasure, thanks so much for having me.