



# path to health

Alabama-born neurophysiologist Will Clower did a double take the first time he walked into the dining hall at the neurological hospital in Lyon, France.

The hospital had an open bar.

"There was this cask of wine," he recalls. "Free refills of wine over lunch!" It blew the brain scientist's mind. What he noticed, though, is that the doctors didn't go back for refills. They never got tipsy.

"In our culture, wine is the sum of its drug-like properties. It's an intoxicant. Why in the world would you give doctors an intoxicant over lunch? For them, wine is a food. Of course you have wine with your lunch."

That wasn't the only thing Clower noticed during two years in France. He noticed that the French ate rich, sumptuous foods, not just on special occasions but every day. He noticed that they lingered over meals, often late into the night. He noticed that grocery stores had rows and rows of cheeses but no low-fat varieties. The French were breaking every diet rule Americans hold dear, relishing their food – and not getting fat.

"We adopted their behaviors and found that everyone in my family – except my cats – lost weight eating creams and cheeses, bread and butter, and wine and chocolate. Every day."

Clower's observations became the basis for his life's work. In 2001, after relocating to Pittsburgh, he published *The Fat Fallacy*, proposing a fix for America's high rates of obesity and

heart disease.

"You have to find people who are thin and healthy, and do what they do," he says. About 17 percent of French adults are obese, compared to a third of Americans, according to the International Association for the Study of Obesity. Heart disease is less prevalent in the country known for buttery croissants.

"My point of view is really straightforward," says Clower, 45. "If you do what they do, you'll get results. You don't have to calculate how many hydrogens are saturating your fatty acid chains. You don't need a Ph.D. in biochemistry to know what to do with your fork."

Clower created a program called The PATH to Healthy Weight Loss, which is detailed in his second book, *The French Don't Diet Plan*. He coaches individuals and corporate clients including Westinghouse, Alcoa and Citizens Bank. The program has been taught to doctors and nurses at Vail Valley Medical Center in Colorado and to students and faculty at his alma mater, Berry College, in Georgia. This year, Clower will be a regular contributor to TABLE.

People on The PATH can eat whatever they want – as long as they eat "real food," Clower says. If it didn't grow, it's probably not real food. If it's loaded with dyes or preservatives, it's not real food. If the ingredients would send spellchecker into a tizzy, it's not real food. What healthy cultures as disparate as France

and Japan have in common are diets loaded with real food, he says.

The trouble is, our senses can't be trusted to distinguish real food from "faux food." Food manufacturing has become so sophisticated that a plastic baguette can be made to smell fresh out of the oven. That doesn't make it bread.

Not long ago, Clower found two baskets of baguettes at his local Giant Eagle. The baguettes from one basket had a dizzying list of ingredients. The others had four ingredients: water, flour, salt and yeast.

"One was real food and one was not," he says. "They looked exactly the same. How you know is by looking at the ingredients."

How we eat is as important as what we eat, according to Clower. The French love their food, and they show it by eating slowly, sitting down with family or friends more often than not. Americans tend to eat on the fly.

"We treat it like putting gas in our cars. It's an errand – something to get over with. If you love your food, then you want to taste it. And you want that to last as long as possible."

He teaches people to take small bites, chew slowly and put down their forks throughout the meal. He asks them to eat at a table, with others if possible, instead of behind the wheel, in front of a television or with a computer mouse in one hand. "Interestingly, if you taste your food, if you take your time with it, the amount that your body asks for drops," he says. "In healthy cultures, they eat all they want. They just want less."

Clower's meal plans can seem counterintuitive to chronic dieters accustomed to deprivation. Take this dinner menu: grilled pork chop with garlic and rosemary, mashed sour-cream potatoes, raw veggies and a glass of red wine. Finish with vanilla pudding – and not the sort from a 60-calorie pack. Portion control is critical.

Clower tells clients to use smaller plates and serve themselves less than they think they need. They can go

## four key principles of The PATH

**Eat Real Food.** Real foods are those products that are natural, can be found in a standard biology text and are normally part of the food chain.

**Learn the HOW of Eating.** When you finally let go of the mental headache of counting carbs and calories and fats, and focus on the HOW of eating, your new habits take weight off for you.

**Reduce Stress-Induced Eating.** Stress-induced eating must be handled or no diet – low fat, low carb, blood type, food combining, you name it – will make any difference at all.

**Be Active Without Exercise.** Exercise must be something you love, not something you're forced to pound out on a treadmill. •

– from *The French Don't Diet Plan*

back for seconds if they want, but if they take their time with their food, chances are they won't. When Clower wants his favorite ice cream, he puts it in an espresso cup. "If you put it in a soup bowl, it'll be sad and lonely and need three more scoops for company."

Here's homework for anyone interested in The PATH: Buy the best dark chocolate you can find. Break off four squares and put one on your tongue. See how long the flavor lasts. Refrain from chewing.

"You can get two or three minutes of chocolate," says Clower. "And after all that, you still have three more squares. You can spend 10 solid minutes with that little piece of chocolate. You've tasted it more. You've consumed less. That's how to make this approach work for you." •