

# Letters to Dr. Walter Bortz II

*Dear Dr. Bortz: Did you listen to President Obama's health speech? What did you think?*

*– Jane Gilchrist, Monterey, CA*

**Dear Jane:**

I heard it and loved it. I admit to being an easy target because I'm a fervent Obama supporter. Certainly we have a huge problem. Obama need not convince anyone that we are in trouble.

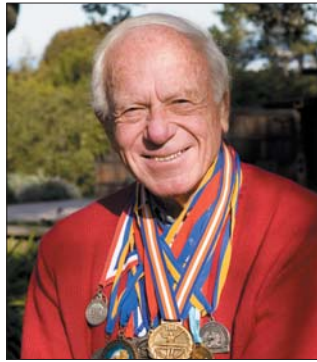
The issue is how to address it. A few years ago, Walter Cronkite commented the healthcare system is not about health, is not about caring. It is not a system and it is very expensive.

All these contradictions are right on target. But how to address it? Last week I met with my wonderful congressperson Jackie Speier and told her of my position which is radical.

**The solution that I favor is not timid.** It is not baby steps but truly a revolution which reverses the incentives from the present ones which reward illness and replaces it with one which rewards health. This is 180° from where we are and would require a lot of political courage and moxie.

As young married, we used to promise our kids \$50 if they didn't miss a day of school because of illness. They rarely if ever did. What if one could reward health and the steps we can take to ensure it like a safe driver discount? Adolescent male car drivers cost more. And are charged more. Should a similar provision address those people who don't take their own lifestyles seriously if they impact all of us by high healthcare costs?

We have a ways to go, but this is a good start.



*Dear Dr. Bortz: I must have been the recipient of a thousand different weight loss advisories each promising reduction with no pain and no cost, and I've become aware that for all this hoopla, I didn't really know what a calorie is. Can you inform?*

*– Bill Lincoln, Sacramento, CA*

**Dear Bill.** Thanks. Strictly speaking a calorie is a unit of energy. Specifically, it is the amount of energy, which is required to raise the temperature of one cubic centimeter of water by 1°. The most common use of the term, however, applies to foodstuffs whose chemical composition when combusted, like a pine log, releases energy.

The three calorie supplying foodstuffs are carbohydrate, fat and protein. Fat yields 9 cal for every gram that is metabolized whereas carbohydrate and protein produce four calories for each gram metabolized which yields the important recognition that fat by far is the densest form of food. Almost everything we eat is a mixture of these three basic nutrients, differing by major degrees in the proportions of each.

But a calorie is a calorie is a calorie. The body doesn't really care which type of food is eaten.

As the GI system, just as your car doesn't care whether it is Chevron, Texaco or Shell.

50 years ago a preposterous book came out with the title "*Calories Don't Count.*" The truth is, of course, that the number of calories is the only thing that counts, not what foodstuffs provide the calories or the timing of these calories but only how many are eaten.

It is possible to gain weight eating lettuce if you eat enough. Similarly, it is possible to lose weight if you only eat Snickers bars. As long as when you encounter one, you walk swiftly by.

**Calories are energy and they do count.** I wrote a paper published in the AMA journal some years ago which you can find on my website: [walterbortz.com](http://walterbortz.com). The title of this paper is "*Predictability of Weight Loss.*" It is a wonderful paper, if I do say so myself. And encompasses many of these crucial information gaps that you inquire about.

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Coming soon: A new book by Dr. Walter Bortz: "*Next Medicine. The Coming Revolution That Will Save American Healthcare.*"

Every year, the average American spends about \$7,300 on medical expenses. The typical Canadian pays \$2,700, the Briton only \$2,000. And yet, according to the World Health Organization, our healthcare system, in terms of total quality, ranks 38th in the world. Not only do 40 million Americans lack health insurance, more than 200,000 die each year because of medical mistakes. Our life expectancy is lower than Cuba's.

In *Next Medicine*, Walter Bortz shows how the American healthcare threatens the stability of our entire nation. To learn more, visit [www.walterbortz.com](http://www.walterbortz.com).

*Dr. Walter Bortz II is one of America's most distinguished scientific experts on aging and health. He spent his career at Stanford University where he holds the position of Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine. An active marathoner,*

*he has written five books and is working on his sixth: Next Medicine. Would you like to contact Dr. Bortz? Email him at [DrBortz@aol.com](mailto:DrBortz@aol.com) or visit [www.walterbortz.com](http://www.walterbortz.com).*

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