

# The Truth About Optavia: Why This Popular Diet Program Should Be Reconsidered

By Robert Ferguson

**Editor's Note:** After receiving numerous questions about Optavia and taking a close look at the program, I decided to write this article to share my perspective with those interested in understanding why I am not a fan. Please know that my critique of Optavia is not driven by bias or competition with my own programs. In fact, there are other programs—besides my own—that I have endorsed and highlighted for their effectiveness. My intention here is simply to present the facts. I hope you find this article informative and invite your questions and feedback.

In the world of weight loss, Optavia has become popular, promising quick results and a "simple" plan for achieving your health goals. But behind the polished marketing and glowing testimonials lies a controversial program that has raised serious concerns among health professionals. Let's take a closer look at Optavia, its structure, and the alarming practices that have left many questioning its legitimacy.

## How Optavia Works: A Multi-Level Marketing Business

At the heart of Optavia is its network of "coaches," ordinary individuals—mostly women—who are recruited as part of a multi-level marketing (MLM) structure. These coaches are not required to have any formal education in nutrition or health. Instead, they are trained to promote and sell the Optavia program to others, often earning commissions based on the number of clients they sign up.

While the idea of having a "coach" to guide you through a weight-loss journey may sound appealing, it's important to understand that these individuals lack the qualifications necessary to provide sound nutritional advice. This creates a scenario where uninformed guidance can lead to negative health outcomes.

## What You're Paying For: An Extreme Low-Calorie Diet

One of the most glaring issues with Optavia is its reliance on extreme calorie restriction. Participants are typically encouraged to consume fewer than 1,000 calories a day—an amount that is far below what the average adult requires for basic bodily functions, let alone optimal health. For comparison, the recommended daily calorie intake for adult women ranges from 1,800 to 2,400 calories, depending on age, activity level, and other factors.

Because of the severe calorie deficit, Optavia advises against exercising while on the program. This is a red flag, as proper nutrition should support an active lifestyle, not discourage it.

### **The Hidden Costs of Malnutrition**

Participants in the Optavia program often report serious side effects, including:

- **Hair loss:** A clear sign of malnutrition, often due to inadequate protein and essential vitamins and minerals.
- **Hormonal imbalances:** Extreme calorie restriction can disrupt hormonal functions, leading to issues like irregular periods or worsened symptoms of menopause.
- **Digestive discomfort:** The prepackaged "fuelings" provided by Optavia often cause gas, bloating, and other digestive issues.
- **Emotional and physical exhaustion:** Living on so few calories can lead to fatigue, irritability, and a decreased quality of life.

### **The Dangers of Losing Skeletal Muscle**

These risks make extreme calorie restriction not only unsustainable but also dangerous for long-term health. One of the most critical but overlooked dangers of consuming fewer than 1,000 calories a day is the loss of skeletal muscle. When the body is deprived of adequate calories, it doesn't just burn fat for energy; it also breaks down skeletal muscle. This muscle loss is problematic for several reasons:

- **Slowed metabolism:** Skeletal muscle is metabolically active tissue, meaning it burns calories even at rest. Losing muscle slows the metabolism, making it harder to maintain weight loss.
- **Increased risk of heart attack:** Research indicates that losing muscle can increase the risk of heart attack by as much as 300%.
- **Faster aging:** Muscle mass is critical for maintaining strength and mobility as we age. Loss of muscle accelerates the aging process.
- **Higher risk of fractures:** Reduced muscle mass contributes to weakened bones and increases the likelihood of hip fractures and other injuries.
- **Weakened body and increased mortality risk:** Skeletal muscle plays a vital role in overall strength and resilience. Loss of this tissue significantly raises the risk of all-cause mortality.

These risks make extreme calorie restriction not only unsustainable but also dangerous for long-term health.

## **Problematic Ingredients: Vegetable Seed Oils**

A significant concern with Optavia's "Fuelings" is their reliance on vegetable seed oils, such as soybean oil. These oils are high in omega-6 fatty acids. While omega-6 fats are essential, excessive intake—especially without adequate omega-3s to balance them—can lead to an unhealthy omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. This imbalance has been linked to increased inflammation and a higher risk of chronic diseases.

For example, Optavia's Essential BBQ Crunchers list soybean oil as an ingredient, and the Essential Lemon Tart Crisp Bar includes a blend of canola, sunflower, and/or soybean oils. The typical Western diet already skews heavily toward omega-6 fats, with omega-6 to omega-3 ratios as high as 20:1, compared to the ideal ratio of 3:1 or lower.

High omega-6 intake, coupled with low omega-3 consumption, exacerbates inflammation and negatively impacts overall health. While some experts argue that seed oils may not be inherently harmful, maintaining a balanced diet that optimizes omega-3 intake is essential for reducing the risk of chronic diseases and improving long-term health.

## **A Costly Program That's Unsustainable**

Optavia isn't just extreme—it's expensive. Clients pay an average of \$400 a month for the program, which includes prepackaged meal replacements called "fuelings." These products are far from whole, nourishing foods and provide little to no education on how to transition to a sustainable, long-term lifestyle.

This lack of education is one of the most troubling aspects of Optavia. Instead of empowering participants to make informed, healthy choices, it traps them in a cycle of dependency on the program's expensive products. Once participants stop the program, many regain the weight they've lost—and often more—because they haven't developed the habits or knowledge needed for lasting change.

## **A Call for Regulation**

In my opinion, Optavia's reliance on extreme calorie restriction alone should disqualify it as a legitimate weight-loss program. Diets that fall below 1,200 calories a day are widely considered dangerous and should only be done under medical supervision. Yet, Optavia markets its program as safe and accessible to the general public, without adequate oversight or accountability.

The stories I've heard from individuals who have tried Optavia are heartbreaking. Clients have come to me with their hair falling out, their hormones out of balance, and their bodies feeling depleted. This is not what health should look or feel like.

## The Bottom Line

Optavia is not the lifestyle solution it claims to be. It's an unsustainable, expensive, and potentially harmful program that prioritizes profit over people's well-being. If you're considering a weight-loss program, I urge you to seek out evidence-based approaches that focus on whole foods, balanced nutrition, and long-term health—not quick fixes.

Your health is too valuable to risk on programs that compromise your well-being for the sake of a business model. Always consult with qualified health professionals when seeking guidance on weight loss and wellness. There are better, safer, and more sustainable ways to achieve your goals.

## References

1. "Essential BBQ Crunchers Ingredients." Optavia. Retrieved from [optavia.com](https://optavia.com)
2. "Essential Lemon Tart Crisp Bar Ingredients." Optavia. Retrieved from [optavia.com](https://optavia.com)
3. "Optimize Your Omega-6 to Omega-3 Ratio." Healthline. Retrieved from [healthline.com](https://healthline.com)
4. "Seed Oils and Health." EatingWell. Retrieved from [eatingwell.com](https://eatingwell.com)
5. "Seed Oils Don't Deserve the Negative Hype." New York Post. Retrieved from [nypost.com](https://nypost.com)
6. Janssen, I., et al. "Skeletal muscle mass and distribution in relation to health outcomes." Clinical Nutrition, 2004. Retrieved from [journals.lww.com](https://journals.lww.com)
7. Fielding, R. A., et al. "Ageing and skeletal muscle: New insights and directions." Age and Ageing, 2011. Retrieved from [journals.sagepub.com](https://journals.sagepub.com)
8. Cooper, C., et al. "Sarcopenia and fracture risk." Age and Ageing, 2011. Retrieved from [academic.oup.com](https://academic.oup.com)
9. Srikanthan, P., & Karlamangla, A. S. "Skeletal muscle mass and mortality risk." American Journal of Medicine, 2014. Retrieved from [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
10. "Essential BBQ Crunchers Ingredients." Optavia. Retrieved from [optavia.com](https://optavia.com)
11. "Essential Lemon Tart Crisp Bar Ingredients." Optavia. Retrieved from [optavia.com](https://optavia.com)
12. "Optimize Your Omega-6 to Omega-3 Ratio." Healthline. Retrieved from [healthline.com](https://healthline.com)
13. "Seed Oils and Health." EatingWell. Retrieved from [eatingwell.com](https://eatingwell.com)
14. "Seed Oils Don't Deserve the Negative Hype." New York Post. Retrieved from [nypost.com](https://nypost.com)

---

Robert Ferguson is a California- and Florida-based single father of two daughters, nutritionist, researcher, best-selling author, speaker, podcast and television host, health advisor, NAACP Image Award Nominee, creator of the Diet Free Life methodology, Chief Nutrition Officer for iCoura Health, and he serves on the Presidential Task Force on Obesity for the National Medical Association. You can e-mail Robert at [robert@dietfreelife.com](mailto:robert@dietfreelife.com).