

Country Report: Egypt

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I'm an integrative nutrition and health coach. I have my nutrition business in Cairo, and I also work with many segments of the population from the villages and rural areas, with high-class people, and with people who are at different levels of awareness. I'm working mainly with clients who are struggling with eating disorders and new diets: people who spend their lives dieting. They don't know how to eat anymore: What is food? What is eating? And they have been following many, many rules all their lives. So they've lost not just the connection with food but also with their bodies, the universe, and everything. They are stuck in not being able to judge their own daily diet anymore: this is good food; this is bad food. It is what I call black-and-white mentality. If I know that this food is good, then I can eat this food, and I'm a good person. If this food is bad, and I'm eating this food, then I'm a bad person. So, people eat as a sort of self-punishment and get into a very complicated trap of guilt and shame.

That's why I'm working against diets—honestly! Because over history there have been many, many diets, but we still have the same body. Our bodies, of course, change as part of our experience as human beings. But five years ago, in Egypt, vegan and vegetarian diets were flourishing, and everyone went vegan. People were very happy: that was the healthiest thing to do, they thought. Now it's carnivore diets, and people are eating only beef and raw meat and strange things. This is interesting because it is confusing for our bodies. If you are stuck in your head and you are just imposing rules and ideas and diet trends on your body, then you don't know what's healthy for you anymore. All these diets have scientific “proof” that they are healthy. You will find scientific research and evidence that Atkins, ketogenic diets, veganism, vegetarianism, carnivore diets, and everything else could be healthy. The question is: for whom?

So what I'm doing is using a bio-individual approach because every human being is completely different, not just in terms of their physical body but also their emotions. How do you think? How do you feel? What's you? I don't use anthroposophical terms like etheric, astral, etc., but they are implied in my work. I like that every human being is very, very different. It takes time to get to know yourself and what's fitting for you. I have clients who have been dieting for 15 to 20 years—they are dieting, and they stop dieting, and they restrict themselves, and they are back on diets. For them, food is just a bunch of calories, nutrients, and fear. A lemon is just something very low in calories—nothing to do with the calming quality of lemons. They have never seen a lemon tree with its thorns and spikes. Maybe they've heard that lemons have calming qualities, but they don't know why, because they have never seen a lemon tree, and they have never picked lemons. They just don't know; they don't have this connection. For them it only means, okay, it's good to eat, because it's good for the low-calorie diet. So it's “good” food for them, just like a banana could be “bad” because it is high in carbs.

I'm working to cultivate this connection again. Not just a connection with yourself, but with your body, to discover your hunger and satiety cues again, to know what's good for you, because your body is giving you signs. You don't have to follow any diet. If you're eating something that's not good for you, if you're intolerant to something, or something is irritating for you, your body will give you a sign like a headache, a bit of irritability in the stomach, or a skin rash. You'll feel you're not happy or you don't like the food. Cravings are

also the language of the body: your body is telling you something. So, if you are not listening, your body will give you feedback. This will keep escalating into imbalances like chronic headaches or strong sugar cravings. If you're still not listening, your body will give you illness. Our bodies are important. This is the concept I'm communicating with all my clients: our bodies are working with us, not against us. If you are having some kind of imbalance, gaining weight, experiencing strong cravings, are afraid of food, etc.—these are all signs that something is wrong and you need to change your approach. If you repeatedly go on a diet, there's something wrong. You are disconnecting more and more with your body.

I'm often asking my clients the stupid questions. It's important to ask very simple questions, like we ask children: Why do we eat? Because with time, people lose that understanding. Why do we eat? I keep asking this question to people from many different levels. And the answer I get is: we eat to live. Well, if we eat to live, why do we have over 50 types of mangoes in Egypt? We can live on one type. We can even live without mangoes. These questions get people curious. They wonder: How can we plant bananas when they don't have seeds? This is stimulating for people because they ask, and then they perceive those fruits or vegetables, or food, is something that's beyond just calories and nutrients.

So with my clients, I'm working with their thoughts, emotions, and health history. I'm often working with eating disorders and eating patterns like binge eating, restrictive behavior, vomiting, emotional eating, and stress eating, where people are using food in a very emotional way to cope with their emotions. And I get the whole health history and the biography of the person. It's important for me to know not just what you eat, but who you are because when you are eating, it's an interactive process. Your body is interacting with the food, and your food is also interacting with your body. A banana could work differently in different bodies.

I'm also working with clients who have chronic illnesses, thyroid imbalances, and obesity, which is definitely a disease, because it goes beyond how you perceive your body or that you're just a little bit overweight. It is very common in Egypt to have obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. This is mainly due to lifestyle, diet, and lack of movement. And, for sure, due to the current financial situation and inflation. It's very complicated and a very bad financial situation, so people have less access to food in general and especially to high-quality food. Fruits and vegetables are very expensive—it's easier to eat just bread and pastries. So, we have a very high rate of type 2 diabetes.

I don't have a fixed approach in my work—it's really customized according to the client. And usually, it is a process of getting to know many things and many layers of their concerns and goals and the way to get there. It's always important for me to know how our thoughts, emotions, and body sensations are aligned or communicating to know who we are.

For the past 3 years, I was also part of Sekem, which is an anthroposophical biodynamic farm and big project institution. I worked there in the Integrative Health Center with a team of therapists in movement therapy, eurythmy, and rhythmical massage. We also addressed the client or the patient in a very holistic way by considering many aspects of the human being. Now I'm a freelancer. It's more fun to work in a team, but I would say it's more efficient to work by myself. So now I'm a full-time independent nutritionist. In a nutshell, this is what I'm doing and a brief overview of the situation of nutrition in Egypt.



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