YOU MAY THINK ALL CALORIES ARE CREATED EQUAL. BUT YOUR BODY WOULD DISAGREE.

One 16-ounce bottle of your favorite cola has 182 calories—the same as 14 spears of steamed broccoli. (OK, you may not want to eat that much broccoli.) But let’s use it as an example to see what happens to different calories inside you:

**CALORIE SMACKDOWN: COLA VS. BROCCOLI**

**COLA** is mainly sugar: glucose and fructose. As you gulp it down, your gut quickly absorbs the empty calories. Biochemical chaos quickly ensues:

- **The glucose** makes your blood sugar spike.
- **Your pancreas** pumps out high levels of insulin in response.
- **This kicks bad body biochemistry into high gear:**
  - The brain’s reward center is triggered, making you crave more sugar.
  - Inflammation (linked to weight gain, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses) can increase.
  - Triglycerides can rise and HDL levels can fall (increasing risks of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke).
  - Blood pressure can increase.
  - The appetite-control hormone leptin may be blocked (making you feel starved).
  - Over time, belly fat storage increases (raising risks of heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes).
- **Persistent fructose intake can promote unhealthy changes as well:**
  - Increased fat production, which can lead to fatty liver.
  - No signaling to the brain that you’re full.
  - Chronically elevated blood insulin levels.
  - Further insulin resistance.

**BROCCOLI** contains sugar (a small amount). But broccoli is also high in fiber, and provides your body with protein, fat, and other nutrients. Here’s what happens when you eat it:

- **You absorb very few calories because of its fiber.**
- **Those few calories are absorbed very slowly.**
- **Your blood sugar and insulin levels remain stable.**
- **Your body takes in nutrients that lower your risk for chronic diseases:**
  - **Phytonutrients:** Natural chemicals that help plants fight germs and pests (and protect us too).
  - **Vitamin C:** An antioxidant vitamin needed for healthy bones, muscles and blood vessels.
  - **Polyphenols:** Nutrients that give veggies and fruits color and help us fight inflammation.
- **You don’t gain weight because:**
  - Your stomach distends, telling your brain that you’re full.
  - Your brain’s reward center isn’t triggered, which kills your sugar cravings.
  - Your liver is not affected.
- **Your odds for longevity increase because people who eat lots of fruits and vegetables live longer.**

**LAST WORD:**

**IT’S THE QUALITY, NOT THE NUMBER, OF CALORIES THAT COUNTS.**

Every bite of food you eat broadcasts coded instructions to your body that foster health or disease. You can choose calories that fuel your sugar addiction and make you gain weight. Or you can choose calories that balance your metabolism and heal you.

So what will it be, a 16-ounce cola or a tasty bunch of broccoli?