



NUTRITIOUS LIFE



WHY CAN'T I DROP THE WEIGHT?

And it's not for the reasons (or the food) you think



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INTRODUCTION

My story starts in a vinyl red booth in my neighborhood Friendly's.

The image of the food on the table is easy to recall. Hot, salty, crinkly fries. Globbs of sweet ketchup. Gooney, buttery grilled cheese. Reese's peanut butter cup pre-made sundaes. Perhaps another order of fries. More globbs of ketchup.

Yum.

"Don't worry." That's what I told myself as I enjoyed my "I'm going on a hardcore diet tomorrow" meal.

I remember the calm enjoyment of the moment. I had confidence and a feeling that this time was going to be different. I was going to stuff myself this one last time and then never want fries or grilled cheese again. I would enjoy every last bite of grease and sugar and then rid myself of all cravings. I was on my way to my healthiest, fittest self after this last indulgent meal.

I'd wake up the next day, eat grapefruit and whole wheat toast, have a big green salad for lunch with lean protein of some kind, run around the reservoir, chug my water, and feel unstoppable. [Insert scratching of record here!] Fast forward a couple of months and the new me would be back at the same old place: saying hello to vinyl red booths.

Sound familiar?

Maybe your story is different, but the end point probably feels the same. I know it wasn't an easy process for me, and I seemingly had a background that should have made healthy eating a piece of cake. (Not a real one, of course.) I was a college athlete. I grew up in a relatively healthy home where my mom made balanced dinners every night, no one could argue that I had "fat" genes, and I actually liked to exercise. So what was the problem? Why couldn't I get out of this "healthy - not healthy - healthy - not healthy" cycle and why was I struggling with my weight?

The problem was consistency. Of the top 5 reasons why people can't drop weight (and number 3 in this book) is Consistency, or lack thereof. That was my own nagging problem.

How many people do you know, including yourself (after all you are reading this!), who want to lose weight? Think about how much time you spend thinking about your weight. You wish that number on the scale were lower, you wonder what it will take to reach that number you desperately want to see. You daydream about how it will feel to be at that magical weight, and you shop online but don't actually purchase all those items you will buy when you are at that weight. You have a little personal party every time you lose a few pounds....and you hurt every time you gain anything at all—even if you know it may just be water weight.

Sometimes you even get desperate. You buy products you want to hide in the cabinet below the tampons or shaving cream so no one sees them. You reach for magic pills and powders you want to believe will make not a difference but the difference. All because you are frustrated. Oh, so very frustrated.

Been there. Done that. Many times, in fact.

But what if it didn't have to be that way? What if you could lose the weight and turn all those weight-fearing moments into positive energy?

I know the pressure of the scale. I also know that it doesn't have to exist. Whether you know exactly how many calories or grams of fat are in every food at the store, or barely understand the difference between simple and complex carbs—nutrition information is not your problem. You just don't want it to be so friggin' hard.

And it doesn't have to be. Having worked with thousands of clients, read thousands of research articles and tackled my own weight loss demons, here is what I believe are the most common reasons why so many people struggle to drop the weight.

1) "I am just too busy"

I am busy. You are busy. We are ALL busy! But doesn't it seem like we are getting busier and busier? Whether it is taking time to go grocery shopping, cutting up the veggies once you have them home, getting up from your desk to go and get lunch, taking time to make yourself lunch while your kids eat...

Whew. Just typing it is exhausting, which means doing it is even tougher! Many of us feel like we just don't have time. I have a question for you: Do you brush your teeth? Shower? Make your kids lunch? Stop by the ATM machine? You DO have time. I am not going to tell you that it doesn't take any time or even insist that it's easy. But it only takes a little time. Much less than you think. Remember, nutrition is part of your day. We all need to eat. So you'll quickly see that with just a little planning and a few simple lessons that will require you to think even less, you'll have more time to spend on the rest of your life without having to worry about your health.

Drop the Weight Secret: Learn the tricks of healthy weight loss, and feeling less busy will be your treat. One hour spent on prep at the beginning of the week can save you 5 hours during the week.

2) "I am scared of failure...and success (and I don't even know it!)"

Have you ever wondered why you do so great and follow your plan so diligently for the first few weeks or 5 to 10 pounds lost...only to see things quickly change? Have you ever considered that your weight—or more accurately your struggle to lose weight—has become part of your identity?

What would you worry about every day if you got up and said, "I feel GREAT. All my jeans fit perfectly!" For many people, weight loss becomes a subconscious battle. You might be hanging on to weight or undercutting your ability to succeed because it gives you a place to focus your negative energy.

I know this might feel like a negative accusation, but these are the hard, dig-deep questions that have to be answered before you can set out on a journey to lose weight and improve your health once and for all. After all, that's what I really care about. No more short-term fixes or 2-week success plans. I don't want you to only drop the weight—I want you to drop it for good.

This means you need to be honest with yourself. When I speak about my own weight struggles, these were the same questions I had to confront.

Have you ever considered what will happen if you lose weight and the man of your dreams doesn't appear instantaneously? Or that dream job is handed over to someone else?

Is weight your excuse for everything else in your life to not go right?

Are you afraid to try and change because you are afraid of what may happen if you do reach that goal?

Think about this mindset. It's a toughy. I know. But it will do as much for your ability to feel better about yourself than any diet plan I could ever offer.

Drop the Weight Secret: Weight loss isn't just about the information we seek; it's about the questions we ask to understand why we struggle.



3) "I am not consistent"

This may be the most common reason people have trouble dropping those last few pounds. Being consistent with anything takes dedication, commitment, change in daily routine, motivation, and preparation.

It also requires you to conquer your emotional demons and understand why you haven't made changes in the past. Fortunately, as you work on all that emotional "stuff," I can guide you through how to be consistent even when your heart may not be in it. In other words, push through until it comes more naturally.

Do not mistake being consistent with being perfect. There are no on days or off days. There are just days. And, on most days you should eat most meals as healthy as can be. That doesn't mean you won't ever have fries again. Or dig your spoon into your spouse's sundae. It does mean you will approach each meal as an individual opportunity to make the best, healthiest decisions. It also means that whether you are travelling for work or pleasure, out for dinner on a Saturday night, celebrating the birthday of a friend, at a spa for the weekend, or trying the new local vegan restaurant, you will develop an eating style. There are no cheat days or binge meals. And, you will know how to eat clean regardless of the situation. That is being consistent.

Drop the Weight Secret: A good weight loss plan does not control your life, but it does have a small daily presence.



4) "I may not want it badly enough (I may not know this either!)"

Client: "Why do I have to do eat veggies with every dinner?"

Me: "Usually when you don't eat veggies you end up eating too much rice or go for dessert after the meal. Remember veggies have water volume and fiber and they help fill you up, aside from just being good for you."

Client: "I just hate prepping them."

Me: "What did you have for dinner last night?"

Client: "Rotisserie chicken that I bought and 10 crackers because I was hungry. Then, a handful of cereal later in the night."

Me: "How long would it have taken you to prep a salad with the red pepper, olives and pre-washed lettuce you already told me were in your fridge?"

Client: "Umm...4 minutes, maybe 5 most."

Me: "You know you can do this."

This conversation is a common one I have with many clients. It doesn't show a lack of dedication, but instead it's almost as if there's a processing error. The task of making healthier decisions becomes a virtual wall that is much more imposing than reality. Sometimes we need to assess our goals and make sure our efforts are in line. We think we want to reach a certain goal but are actually ok with the amount of effort we are currently putting in and the results we are getting.

How badly do you really want to make the changes to reach your goal? For some people they are just so used to saying they want to reach a specific goal that they waste negative energy trying and then failing. Instead, decide now: What is your true goal and do you really want to put in all the work to get there?

Drop the Weight Secret: Be truthful with yourself and assess your goals and desire to do the work to reach them.

5) "I am focusing on the wrong 'problems'"

You know the saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

This mindset appears repeatedly but oftentimes you don't even realize what behaviors could be making it harder for you to live a more Nutritious Life. You may think your problem is snacking, the breadbasket at dinner, or not knowing how to make a healthy meal, but I want you to take a closer look with a more open mind.

Maybe your "problem" isn't the bread but rather going into dinner too hungry, and the fix just may be an afternoon snack that contains enough protein to keep you satisfied and put you in an empowered frame of mind. This is just one example but I hope it makes you see how there are many ways to find solutions that will actually solve the root of your problem. And when that occurs, you really start to see better results.

So much of what I'll do here is help you identify those sneaky reasons why you seem to be hungry or struggle with eating foods you shouldn't, and then troubleshoot to make it an easier process to succeed.

Drop the Weight Secret: It's not always behaviors that are the reason for weight loss struggles; oftentimes it's uncovering why you behave certain ways and taking proactive measures to help remove problems before they occur.

YOUR WEIGHT GAME IS OVER

This book, these tips, and the lessons I share are not about weight loss. They are about empowerment and freedom. Living a Nutritious Life is about balance. But right now, your life feels out of balance because the number on the scale refuses to change. I've been there myself and I restart that journey with every new client. And now I want to be there with you. So let's start fresh and take a new approach to your eating and nutrition. And by the end you will no longer be asking, "Why Can't I Drop The Weight?"



CHAPTER 1

THROW OUT THE RULES

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: Too much counting causes too much thinking and stress and leads to less doing.

When I was in college I tried to do it all. I wanted to be the best student. I tried to excel on the field as a lacrosse player. I did everything to be a great friend. And I was giving everything I could to eat healthy and fuel my body the right way. I had lots of great intentions, but it was too much work and, ultimately, something had to give. The first thing to go was my nutrition. You can blame it on being a college kid (and for a while I did), but that was just an excuse. And it wasn't until I was a nutritionist dealing with clients of all ages that I saw the problem pop up again...and again...and again.

We are a do-it-all society. We have big goals and dreams and try to accomplish them all at once. That's mostly a good thing. But with every goal comes a laundry list of tasks. Nowhere is this truer than with diet and nutrition. You have so many rules to learn that it's almost impossible to keep track. But there's a new hope and new way of changing your weight loss battle that has become the cornerstone of Nutritious Life.

While you can't just abandon everything you know, you can simplify it. Imagine a world where you didn't have to count calories, didn't stress if you ate carbs at night, and didn't worry if you logged enough minutes at the gym.

I know lots of people are stressed by the idea of counting calories. And guess what? You're not alone! Counting calories works for some people—and if that's you then great, there's no need to stop—but the majority of people just don't want the burden. And, guess what? You don't need to! Ultimately, it's why I try and get as far away from counting calories as possible. You already have enough stress to deal with, and generally this habit doesn't make for a healthier lifestyle.

So let's make a change; one that you've been waiting and hoping for. Your diet and your eating are no different than any other habit in your life. The more you make them a routine—and the more you can simplify the process—the easier it is for you to see the kind of changes in your body that you want. I've done the math, crunched the numbers, and decided to toss out the rules and instead make a simple checklist.

That's why I created a step-by-step checklist to help you stay on track. There's no calorie counting and no stress. But if you're able to check off about 80% of these each day, you'll be surprised by the simplicity and changes you see in your life.

This is the Nutritious Life approach to being healthy, purging the fat from your body, and falling in love with a healthy lifestyle all over again.

THE SIMPLE DIET CHECKLIST

The best plans are the ones that are easiest to follow and sustain—and don't require perfection. Here is your checklist to helping you live your most Nutritious Life. You don't have to do all of these every single day. But when you follow these habits repeatedly, your body will change in ways you won't even believe.

- ✓ Enjoy a glass of water first thing in the morning (and throughout the day). Begin each day with a glass of water as soon as you wake up. Add a slice of lemon for flavor and to help detoxify your liver, keeping it in greater health to metabolize the food you consume. Water helps us feel clean, healthy and refreshed. Staying hydrated will also help keep you feeling full.
- ✓ Drink 2 cups of green tea per day. While white, black, oolong, and green teas all come from the same plant and have similar amounts of caffeine, green tea leaves are processed differently. Green tea leaves aren't fermented before drying, and are richer in antioxidants called catechins, which may trigger weight loss by stimulating the body to burn calories and decrease body fat.
- ✓ Eat breakfast. Mom was right when she told you breakfast was the most important meal of the day! Though all meals are important, breakfast jumpstarts your metabolism, gives your body fuel to maintain its energy and lays the foundation for a healthy day.
- ✓ Snack smart on nuts (and healthy fat!). You can't go wrong with a handful of nuts a day. Walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, pecans, and pistachios all contain healthy fats, which are excellent for your heart and waistline. Raw, unsalted nuts and seeds are best. And, don't be afraid of healthy fat in general. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of your diet should come from fat. I love olives, avocado and coconut.
- ✓ Add vegetables or a side of greens to every meal. Having a salad to start your meal and a veggie with your meal means you will be packing in extra antioxidants, as well as fiber and plenty of water volume (a good thing) which helps keep you full...all without adding in lots of extra calories.
- ✓ Choose lean protein. Lean choices are rich sources of protein and are either lower in calories and fat and/or excellent sources of omega-3s. Choose meats like beef tenderloin, bison, skinless chicken breast, ostrich, pork tenderloin, and turkey breast. Choose fish/seafood like cod, shrimp, sea bass, scallops, wild salmon, tuna, halibut, flounder, and mussels.
- ✓ Eat whole, real foods or foods with as few ingredients listed as possible. Eliminate as many packaged foods as possible from your diet. For example, it's not just the vitamin C in an orange that contributes to your health. You can't eat a pack of fruit snacks fortified with vitamin C and think you're getting the same benefits as eating an orange! There is a whole group of phytochemicals, fiber, and substances that scientists haven't even discovered yet that all work together in a whole orange which improve our health.

- ✓ Eat a variety of nutrient rich foods. I really can't say enough about how important variety and balance are to your diet. Your body needs so many different nutrients that it's impossible to get them all from the same few foods, even if it's a healthy few. By aiming to get loads of color and variety in your diet, you can feel confident knowing that you're getting a great balance of nutrients. And no, a cup of cheeseballs does not count as an orange colored food. Think whole foods, like fruits, vegetables, and legumes.
- ✓ Prepare meals and snacks ahead of time. Spending a few hours on a Saturday or Sunday to prepare meals or snacks for the week can help cut back on time when things get hectic during the week. It might seem like extra work, but you're actually saving lots of time and reducing potential stress. This way you can ensure having nutritious meals ready to bring to the office for lunch or to come home to for dinner without any added headaches or spending money on unhealthy delivery foods.
- ✓ Add flavor with herbs and spices. Most people think of "diet" food as plain grilled chicken and rice cakes. Actually you shouldn't think of food as "diet" food at all...and you don't need to eat bland, boring food either. Rather, just think food, real food! When you eat real food, incorporating wholesome ingredients like herbs and spices, your meals are delicious and uber healthy. Herbs and spices provide fiber, antioxidants and antimicrobial properties without calories or sodium. Aim to add them to each and every meal and ditch the "healthy food is boring" mindset!



CHAPTER 2 YOUR BIGGEST HEALTH ENEMY

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: Sugar is hiding everywhere.

There's been a lot of buzz in the news lately about sugar being a "toxic" substance that people abuse. Although there is no definitive scientific evidence that proves sugar is addictive, researchers agree that foods high in sugar can stimulate the brain in the same way certain drugs do, inducing responses that resemble addiction. The sugar "highs" and "lows" you experience are likely the result of a sugar "dependency." Your body becomes accustomed to being fueled with a high level of sugar, so when you consume less, you feel out of sorts – which causes you to return to the vending machine. Such a dependency is problematic because changes in blood sugar can disrupt sleep, cause increased consumption of calories, lead to fatigue and cause a whole host of additional problems. The net net? Steer clear of sugar.

Sugar can be listed on a label in any of these forms:

Agave nectar*	Galactose	Maltose
Brown sugar	Glucose	Maple sugar
Cane sugar	Granulated sugar	Molasses
Concentrated fruit juice sweetener	High fructose corn syrup**	Powdered sugar
Confectioner's sugar	Honey	Raw sugar
Corn syrup	Hydrolyzed starch	Sucrose ("table sugar")
Corn sweeteners	Invert sugar	Table sugar
Dextrose	Lactose ("milk sugar")	Turbinado
Fructose ("fruit sugar")	Levulose	

Also, over-consumption of refined sugar can promote obesity and other weight-related problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and coronary artery disease. Your body doesn't require processed sugar, but it does need the sugar that comes from breaking down fruits and starchy vegetables, and even some whole grains, so choose these foods. Instead of shunning sugar altogether, avoid foods with any added sugars. These foods have fewer vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and/or fiber – the most nutritious parts!

The first step is to become aware of the refined and added sugars in the foods you eat. Here's the easiest way to make that happen.

Step 1: Check the ingredient list:

When refined or added sugars are listed among the first few ingredients, you know the product is likely to be high in sugar. (By the way, you should be eating mostly foods that do not come with a label anyway!)

Step 2: Check the nutrition information panel:

Look for total grams of sugar (listed under "Total Carbohydrate").

- A product is considered high in sugar if it contains more than 15 grams of sugar per 100 grams. (As a frame of reference, a small piece of fruit contains about 15 grams of sugar.)

- A product is considered low in sugar if it contains less than or equal to 5 grams of sugar per 100 grams.

Limiting sweetened items in your diet, like soda, will give you a major health boost. Nix soda alone and you'll cut out one of America's biggest sources of sugars, artificial sweeteners, and potentially dangerous chemicals. Like all sugar-laden foods, sodas are perfect examples of empty calorie foods, which contribute calories to our diet (and increase our waistlines!) without any beneficial nutrients or satiety. Ditch them NOW!

Step 3: If you use "natural" sweeteners make sure you choose the right ones:

Here is a quick background on some of the more natural options and why some might not be so great—even if clever food marketing makes them seem OK.

Agave: Slightly more caloric than sugar, but since it is 1.5 times sweeter, you can actually use less of it to achieve the same level of sweetness. That sweetness comes from agave's high percentage of fructose, which is sweeter than glucose. This is not a green light to add it into your diet. It is a "use with caution when you absolutely must" add.

Chicory: Derived from the root of a perennial plant via a natural process, chicory is less likely to raise blood sugar levels because of its low glycemic index.

Stevia: From the stevia plant, this is an attractive option because it has no impact on blood sugar and is virtually calorie free. By comparison, table sugar spikes blood glucose levels and contains 40 calories per tablespoon. I still don't recommend it often though because it can lead to increased cravings later, which is exactly what you want to avoid.

Monkfruit: Like Stevia, monkfruit (a type of small melon found in tropical and subtropical regions) is an all-natural, calorie-free sweetener with no effect on glycemic index. And, since it is so much sweeter than sugar to taste, you can use a lot less to achieve the same level of sweetness. Ditto - stevia - I don't really recommend. I don't think people should get used to their food being sooo sweet!

The net net is still the same. Aim to use no sweeteners whenever possible!

DEFEAT YOUR SUGAR CRAVINGS

Identifying sugar is only part of the battle. If it were as simple as knowing what foods have sugar and not eating them, you probably wouldn't even need this book. But sugar is everywhere. And it tastes so good, right? You also probably need some tips and tricks to help reduce your cravings and desires for sugar. That way, you can be filling your body up—and not depriving yourself—in a way that will leave you less likely to dig into your hidden Halloween stash.

5 WAYS TO HELP YOU WANT LESS SUGAR

Eat Breakfast

About 90 percent of sugar addicts skip breakfast. By eating within 30-60 minutes of waking up, you prevent that drop in blood sugar that makes you crave sugar later. What's more, eating breakfast curbs hunger pangs, leading you to healthier food choices throughout your day and preventing you from choosing unhealthy foods during your lunch break. Instead of the usual muffin or bagel, try Greek yogurt with nuts or whole grain toast with almond butter for a better, steadier flow of energy without the sugar high and low. Also, breakfast eaters tend to get in more of the necessary nutrients through the day – B vitamins, iron etc. -- which are all important for curbing sugar cravings.

Don't Forget about Fruit

I've had clients tell me they gave up bananas because of all the sugar in them, but the reality is that bananas aren't making us obese! It's the candy, cookies and even seemingly benign foods with added sugar (like pretzels) that are making us fat. Remember, it's more about getting your sugar from natural sources than it is about which one of them is higher in sugar. So when you do get sugar in your diet it should come from something like fruit and/or plain Greek yogurt – places it is found naturally and not added. I usually recommend veggies at lunch and dinner and a fruit with breakfast or as a snack – but you really only need a piece or two a day because the calories (and sugar) do add up.

Make it a Process

The average American is consuming about 460 calories from added sugars a day, which amounts to more than 100 pounds of raw sugar a year! Some people can go cold turkey with removing sugar from their diet, but for most, ditching all sugar all at once is too tall of an order. Research has shown that even a small step, like placing your sweet stash in a drawer leads to about 1/3 less consumption than if it is in plain view on your desk. That's right, it's time to clean out! Get rid of as much processed and packaged foods from your diet as possible. Sugar can be found in sometimes surprising places—ketchup, salad dressings, dried fruit, and even savory food like pretzels, bread and chips, so don't just concentrate on tossing the obvious cookies, cakes, candy, etc. Your cravings will begin to soften as soon as you start removing these foods.

Stay Hydrated

Sometimes we mistake thirst cues for hunger cues – and hunger can make us crave sugar – so a nice cold refreshing glass of water may be just what you need instead of a bag of cookies. For real! If you want to add a sweet touch to your water, try putting sliced strawberries, watermelon, pineapple, or fresh mint into a pitcher of water and keeping it in the fridge. Try naturally sweet teas to both keep you hydrated and satisfy that sweet tooth. Cinnamon teas, sweet orange teas, and anise tea can do the trick. Not only will you stay hydrated, but you will be alleviating your sugar craving at the same time. Aren't you efficient?!

Squeeze in Some Exercise

Sugar feeds both psychological and physiological cravings. Use physical activity to manage and eliminate these cravings, as the high you get from exercise will reward you with better rest, a metabolic boost and a fit body. Research has shown that people often eat sugary foods when they are feeling low in hopes that the sugar rush will make them feel happier. Studies indicate that sugary carbohydrates stimulate more serotonin synthesis (the "happy hormone") as compared to starchy carbohydrates. Chocolate has even been shown to have "mood elevating properties" that are similar to "drug-like" effects. Find something else that makes you happy and mindfully choose that alternative instead. If you get a little physical exercise (try an outdoor hike or a kickboxing session!), you may get those feel-good endorphins pumping. Endorphins are chemicals in our bodies that produce feelings of euphoria, often referenced as the cause of "runners high". But if getting on the floor of your office and doing push ups doesn't do it for you, try taking a quick walk around the block or phoning a friend. Research has shown that sometimes even just the act of making tea can be a mood booster because such activities empower you to take charge of your own mood and health.



CHAPTER 3

FREEDOM FROM DIET STRESS

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: Seemingly good behaviors are actually bad.

I love dessert. Always have and always will. And as a mom who still likes to allow my kids to enjoy some treats, baking some cookies can make it almost too easy to binge on some delicious sweets straight out of the oven. And you know what? I encourage you to indulge (indulge not binge!)—occasionally—and in control.

You see, the biggest problem for why we can't drop the weight usually isn't all the treats and sweets. We know that these foods will pack on pounds faster than you can say milkshake. Our problem is the other missteps in our diet. You know them as the seemingly innocent behaviors that you don't feel so bad about...until you see yourself in the mirror and don't know what happened.

Here are the problems to be aware of and how to open up even more room for the treats you love.

Eating too fast -- Slow down, put your fork down between bites, and enjoy the meal by savoring every bite.

Going food shopping without a grocery list -- When you don't have a plan of attack, it's easy to get lost in the grocery store and wind up spending a lot more money than you planned. This habit is both bad for your waistline and your wallet. Never leave home without your list.

Eating in front of the TV or computer -- Mindless eating is a no-no. When you're focused on other things, you lose sight of how much you're eating. Shut down all electronics while eating and savor every bite.

Snacking on empty calories -- Your desk snacks of candy and pretzels aren't doing you any favors. Instead, avoid the office vending machine, and pack smart snacks ahead of time. Aim for a balance of carbs and protein, like fiber crackers and cheese, or an apple with nut butter.

Eating out of a box or bag -- This is the easiest way to over-snack or overeat. You may have every intention of having one or two bites, but next thing you know, you've eaten half the bag! Plate or bowl a serving so you eat mindfully, listen to your body and don't overdo it.

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Skipping meals -- When you skip meals, your body is denied needed calories, which is energy our cells need for all of their busy functions. A suddenly lowered caloric intake will send your body into "conservation mode" where it conserves calories from what you have already eaten, and slows down metabolism, thus storing more calories as fat. Start with breakfast and eat consistently through the day.

Eating on the go, grabbing unhealthy convenience foods -- Convenience foods are most often packaged, which usually means lots of unpronounceable ingredients, tons of preservatives, and often no nutrients. The result is products filled with obesogens. The name sounds as ugly as its effects. These chemical compounds disrupt your metabolism and may increase the likelihood of obesity. Always keep your bag and glove compartment stocked with 1 to 3 go-to real food convenience items like a small bag of almonds.



THE FORBIDDEN 5

When I was a young (younger!) nutritionist, I would struggle to understand why so many of my clients were gaining weight—despite apparently following my advice.

We would go over all of their food journals, look at sleep (more on this soon), lifestyle factors such as stress, and anything else that could be affecting weight gain and overall health. And as time went on, I started to notice a trend: Certain foods that appeared OK on the surface kept on popping up on struggling clients' food journals. So I started keeping track of certain "hot button" foods. These are not the items that you know are terrible. Just the opposite: They are the ones marketed as "healthy" or "good substitutes."

The closer I looked, the more I saw the pattern form: certain food choices were part of the diet experience for people who struggled to lose weight. The reasons could be numerous—everything from the food triggering the want for something unhealthy to the food actually just being a bad option. Whatever the reason, once these foods were removed (or severely limited), good things started to happen. Here is the list of 5 foods I want to make sure you are avoiding!

Diet Soda and Artificial Sweeteners

Diet sodas contain artificial sweeteners, 200 to 700 times sweeter than sugar, such as aspartame (blue pack) in Diet Pepsi, acesulfame-K (purple pack) in Coca-Cola Zero, and sucralose (yellow pack) in Diet Coke. Though diet soda may save you liquid calories in the short term, in the long term, not so much. Diet soft drinks contain no calories, but studies have linked artificial sweeteners to increased appetite, weight gain, and damage to beneficial bacteria in the gut:

- A study conducted by Sharon Fowler and colleagues at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio and reported at the American Diabetes Association annual meeting, found that with each can of diet soda consumed, an individual's risk for being overweight increased by 41%. Similar to the issues with artificial sweeteners, diet sodas cause your body to crave more calories. I say, instead of diet sodas, try seltzer with sliced fruit (such as orange, lemon or lime) for zero calories and lots of flavor.
- Sugar substitutes may seem like a good choice for people looking to watch their weight because they cut down on calories in sweetened beverages and foods. However, researchers have found that artificial sweeteners may actually make people more prone to overindulge and crave sweet foods because they trick the body into thinking they are getting calories. When the calories do not follow the sweetness, you look for them elsewhere such as overindulging in pasta and dessert at dinner, which equals weight gain!
- And that's not all. Research published in the Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health in 2008 showed that artificial sweeteners not only lead to weight gain, but also cause damage to beneficial microflora in the gut.

When you sweeten food, even with some of the more natural options (agave, chicory, stevia and monk fruit), your body will continue to crave sweets and you just may eat more later in the day. If you need to sweeten up your food from time to time, aim for a natural option versus an artificial sweetener and remember to use the smallest amount possible. Or, skip altogether, eat your non-sweet food as it is meant to be and make a conscious indulgence in a real sweet treat from time to time. My fave? A piece of really good dark chocolate.

Low Fat Cheese

On a gram-to-gram basis, fat packs more calories (9 kcal/g) than protein and carbohydrates (4 kcal/g). Full fat cheese has more fat and calories than its low fat and fat free counterparts. Many chronic dieters go for the lowest fat options. However, the extra fat calories take longer to digest and lead to greater satiation.

Low fat cheese is made from 2% fat milk and can be an ok option if you use cheese regularly on sandwiches or burgers. Fat free cheese? This is a definite pass! These types of cheeses are made with the addition of preservatives, emulsifiers and coloring to mimic the texture and flavor of full fat cheeses. This means if you are filling up on fat free, processed cheeses, you are filling up on all of those preservatives, emulsifiers and coloring. Not only are these chemical additions just downright yuck, they don't taste good.

I say, stick with a portion of the real thing. A little bit goes a long way. Different cheeses will vary in calorie and fat content so go for the naturally lower cal options. Cow's milk cheeses like cheddar and brie are higher in saturated fat and calories versus cheeses like feta and Parmesan. For example, 1 ounce of cheddar cheese has 9.4 grams of fat while 1 ounce of feta has 6 grams. So rather than indulging in multiple slices of packaged processed cheese, try portioning out the real thing, eat slowly and enjoy it for its true flavor.

Pretzels

You may (still) think that with only 1 gram of fat per serving, pretzels are a virtuous snack choice. Sorry, but think again! Every time you go for pretzels I want you to imagine you are essentially throwing back a bag of jelly beans. Pretzels are refined carbohydrates that offer almost zero nutritional benefits. Most pretzel varieties are seasoned with salt for flavor and just 1 ounce of pretzels contains about 400 milligrams of sodium, which contributes a significant amount to the daily recommendation of 2300 mg/day. Since pretzels are just refined carbs with no healthy fat, protein or fiber, they will not keep you full. Now you know why you go back for more and more and more... Popcorn is a much healthier alternative. It's a whole grain, contains around 100 calories in 3 cups and has about 4 grams of fiber per serving. Yum.

Low Fat Peanut Butter

Low fat peanut butter is a good example of why reading labels is important. Peanut butter is a great snack. Yes, if you eat too much the calories can get a little high, but otherwise it's a good combination of protein and fat and most people find it delicious. Peanuts contain healthy fats that aid in heart health and reduce inflammation in our bodies. When we eat peanut butter we should be reaping the benefits of this healthy fat! Low fat versions have less fat than their full fat versions, but this means there are fewer of the healthy fats and more additives. When manufacturers remove the fat they replace it with sugar, making the product unhealthy versus healthy for you! Be sure to read the ingredient list before buying. The ingredient list should read peanuts - that's it!

Yogurt

Just like with cheese, full fat yogurt has more fat and calories than fat free yogurt. These extra fat calories lead to greater satiation.

Fat provides energy, helps burn fat, and allows for the absorption of important vitamins A, D, E, and K. When fat is removed from yogurt, sugar is added in for flavor. According to USDA data, people who eat diets high in sugar get less calcium, fiber, folate, vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, zinc, magnesium, iron, and other nutrients. They also consume fewer fruits and vegetables. Added sugars contribute zero nutrients and many calories, which can lead to extra pounds, obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and coronary artery disease.

When choosing a yogurt, be especially careful of yogurt varieties with fruit mixed in. Sugar can be listed on a label in many forms (including honey, agave, cane sugar, maltose, corn syrup, molasses, dextrose, sucrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup...). Your best option will be low or full fat plain or Greek yogurt with your own toppings such as berries and nuts. Keep in mind, a 6 ounce serving of plain low fat Greek yogurt has approximately 6 grams of sugar (from the yogurt itself!).

CHAPTER 4

THE END OF CRAVINGS

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: You always want to eat the foods you know you shouldn't have.

I love food. No really. I loooooove food. And for a long time, it was that love that would make eating the right way so difficult. In the mornings I'd want that big Morning Glory muffin. Throughout the day I'd get that itch for a frozen yogurt. At dinner I'd desire curly fries and anything chocolate for dessert. And then in times of stress or after a workout...there never seemed to be a wrong time for food.

You can see where this is going. The point is, food should be enjoyed. But you have to learn how to control your cravings and feed them in smarter ways. That doesn't mean you never get to eat any of your favorite foods, but it does mean you don't have to be a slave to those cravings either. In fact, when handled the correct way, cravings can be something you come to enjoy because you know exactly how to satisfy them without any negative consequences.

Tell me if this sounds familiar. When a craving strikes, you immediately try to ignore it. First you do nothing...then you try to satisfy it with celery...then a pickle...then a few pretzels...then an apple...and finally you end up having that whole bag of chips anyway. This is what I call eating around a craving. Next, you feel that since you've already blown your "diet" for the day, you might as well eat all the foods you try to avoid and then start fresh the next day. This is the classic throw in the towel attitude.

It's happened to all of us, and it's certainly not the best way to handle your food desires.

I want you to try something different. Acknowledge (go on give a big "hello") to your craving from the start. It's ok! You're not "bad" because you have it. Then, either eat a small conscious indulgence sized portion of the real thing or the healthiest option that satisfies the craving. For example, an ounce of dark chocolate with sea salt is a great, healthier (but still indulgent) option for an old school candy bar. This is one of the principles of living a Nutritious Life, and that's the concept of eating empowered. Simply by changing your mindset and telling yourself you can have the indulgence will help you want to make the healthier choice! Cashews are another example. They are a "sweet" nut and may satisfy a sweet and crunchy craving.

Or, try one of the tricks below and avoid the indulgence altogether without feeling deprived but instead empowered.

- Imagine yourself in your favorite pair of jeans or your new off the shoulder dress. Close your eyes and picture yourself and think how great you feel when these items fit just right!
- Wait five minutes! Just wait and be patient. Once you resist the initial temptation, you'll be amazed that you just may be over it - completely!
- Go for a brisk 15-minute walk. The act of getting up and moving alone is often motivating enough to squash a craving.
- Drink a big glass of water or sip tea. You may just be thirsty! Also, being proactive with your health (water is healthy remember!) is usually a more powerful feeling than your desire to indulge.

Understanding Your Cravings

Your goal is not to try and stop all cravings; that'd be a hopeless battle. No negativity here, just being realistic peeps; cravings do occur! Instead, you should learn to recognize, understand, and be prepared for the situations when they are most likely to occur. Remember, you want to acknowledge them. When you do this, you'll find it's much easier to control your cravings before they control you.

Why Cravings Hit

Sometimes food cravings are linked to a genuine nutritional need:

- You might want fresh fruit when you have a cold coming on because your body actually needs those extra vitamins.
- Women may crave red meat during their period because beef is a good source of iron and many women have low-level anemia, especially during their periods.
- You might crave something sweet and creamy exactly when your diet has been lacking dairy.
- Or sometimes the cravings may be subconscious associations:
- You might hate your job and eat "well" all day, but when you get home, you want to celebrate your "freedom" with cupcakes and beer.
- You may crave apple pie because you grew up with your mom rewarding you with it.
- They may be based on emotions and even gender differences:
- Most women crave sweet comfort foods such as ice cream, chocolate and cookies.
- Men tend to crave soup, pizza and pasta, as well as ice cream.
- Men have overall fewer cravings and are better able to resist favorite foods (which may explain why it's tougher for women to lose weight).

Defeat Your Cravings From the Beginning of the Day

It's a frustrating reality, but humans are genetically predetermined to prefer salty and sweet tastes. Sodium is a mineral crucial for cell function and fluid balance, and sweetness indicates the presence of energy (calories) that we need from foods.

The most important thing you can do to ward off cravings is to get ahead—and stay ahead—of your hunger: Kick-start your day with a hearty breakfast that's rich in fiber and protein. The fiber will fill you up and the protein will keep you satisfied.

A few easy protein and fiber combos include:

- 6 ounces of Greek yogurt, 1 tablespoon chia seeds, and a hardboiled egg on the side.
- 3 egg (2 whites/1 whole egg) omelet with ½ cup black beans and 1 tablespoon salsa with 1 cup mixed berries on the side.
- ½ cup cooked quinoa with 1 tablespoon natural peanut butter mixed with a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Stay Ahead

Start strong with breakfast and continue the process with snacking. Snack, snack, snack. Snacking often gets a bad rap, so depriving yourself between meals might feel ultra virtuous. But by the time dinner rolls around, what happens? If you're anything like me and many of my clients, you're ravenous! The paper clips sitting on your desk start to look appealing! Who hasn't overeaten after going 5 hours without a bite? Think of your hunger on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "stuffed – I'm never eating again!" and 10 being "starving – the paper clips even look good enough to eat!" This is what I call your hunger quotient or HQ; always try to keep it between 6 – "slightly hungry" and a 4 – "slightly satisfied."

Remember, though: snacking isn't about "snack food", it's about food! Even the best intentions won't help if the closest thing in sight is the office vending machine. Always keep healthful snacks prepped and ready to go in convenient places—your bag, your desk at work, within easy reach on the kitchen counter at home...you get the idea. Think of snacks as small, nutrient dense real food meals eaten frequently throughout the day. These bites should be no less nutritious than your "real" meals. It may also help you to think THIN:

T - Are you **thirsty**?

H - On a scale of 1 to 10, what's your **hunger** quotient? Do you need a snack?

I - Can't figure out what you're **in the mood** to eat? Think carefully about your options and choose exactly the taste and/or texture you're yearning for—like a handful of salted almonds, or some strawberries stirred into creamy Greek yogurt.

N - **Not sure** how you feel? Are you frustrated or stressed? Imagine putting that feeling on a conveyor belt and watching it slide away before you reach for a snack. Seriously! This visualization really works to help you put aside your emotions before grabbing for food. Give it a try!

8 POWER FOODS YOU MAY HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED

As you “embrace” your cravings, also try powering up with these super foods.

Amaranth

The Aztecs loved this grain, which tastes sweet and kind of nutty and is a good source of iron, magnesium and zinc. I like to add the seeds to soups and stews, cook it in a little sesame oil and serve in place of rice, or have it as a hot cereal sometimes. Even the leaves are edible—they taste like spinach! It takes about 25 minutes, but is worth the wait – promise.

Black rice

This variety of rice may be a novelty here, but it's a staple food for one-third of the world population. It's available at stores like Whole Foods Market, and the bran--or outer coating of the rice grain--is loaded with the anthocyanins, as many as are in blueberries. Those phytochemicals, found in many purple and reddish foods, are linked to a decreased risk of heart disease and cancer, and improvements in memory. Try it the next time you make rice as a side dish, or use it in a vegetable-filled risotto.

Cantaloupe

Refreshing and sweet, this melon is made for dessert lovers! It's also a nutrient goldmine, and a single serving provides you with more than your Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of vitamin A. We all know that types of vitamin A work wonders when applied directly to the skin--that's why we're all buying up all those retinol products! But we need to eat foods rich in vitamin A to keep skin smooth and our eyesight sharp, and it's a good buffer against damaging free radicals. It's not just for breakfast—chunk one up and serve with raspberries and almonds for dessert.

Eggplant

Not only does this vegetable--a staple in Italian foods--have high levels of chlorogenic acid, one of the most powerful antioxidants found in plants, it has 13 other phenolic acids. But here's the kind of research factoid that floors me--while analyzing some wild eggplants, researchers found several phenolic compounds that had never before been isolated. There's potentially a whole new antioxidant frontier, right there in Eggplantville! Grill it, sliced lengthwise, top with a little olive oil, sea salt and rosemary—it's easy and delicious



Pecans

All nuts tend to be rich in vitamin E, a powerful antioxidant, as well as a good source of protein and heart healthy fats. (Plus they're so satisfying that working them into your diet as, let's say, a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack ensures you won't show up at your next meal too hungry to think.) Pecans have the highest antioxidant power of all nuts, and have been shown to reduce lipid oxidation—a critical measure of heart health—by 7.4 percent. They also contain plant sterols, which lower cholesterol. Even the FDA agrees and suggests that eating 1.5 ounces of nuts, such as pecans, each day lowers the risk of heart disease. Eight halves contain 2,500 ORAC points (the way to measure the potency of antioxidants), and because they're a little sweeter than some nuts, they make a great afternoon "sweet" treat.

Pistachios

For many people, they're great because the time it takes to pop the little green guys out of their shells makes you eat them more slowly. And in many ways, they are nutritionally like other nuts, especially almonds. But like pecans, pistachios are packed with plant sterols, which researchers think lower the risk of heart disease, and have been shown to reduce the risk of lung and other cancers. Eighteen pistachios have 1,000 ORAC points. They're a perfect party food: I'm always amazed that a bowl of pistachios draws almost as big a crowd as my guacamole!

Red beans

I've been raving about black beans and chickpeas, but don't overlook red beans, both the small ones and the larger kidney beans. Both are loaded with antioxidants and make a great addition to just about any salad, stir-fry, soup or stew.

Russet potato

Yep, here I am, a nutritionist, giving my blessing to potatoes! In the last decade of carb bashing, the poor spud has gotten a bad rap. Yes, when we turn them into French fries or mash them with way too much butter, they're not a good choice. But a whole baked russet potato is a great source of vitamin C (so helpful in combating free radicals), and vitamin B6 and potassium (which are good for your heart). Look for a medium size potato, which is likely to have about 190 calories, making it a good "base" for your meal. I like mine topped with plenty of salsa, and a small portion of cheese.



RESPONDING TO THE BAD DAYS

Remember, your goal is not to be "perfect." I always say that a "perfect" diet is actually not perfect at all! There is room for indulgences and room to "give in" to cravings in a completely wholesome diet. So don't try and do that whole "perfect" thing and don't get down when you do "give in" to a craving.

Don't feel too guilty about breaking the calorie bank either once in a while. But remember that going overboard doesn't have to be inevitable. Mindful eating is so important: listen to your body, eat slowly, and learn to recognize when you're satisfied – even when you're indulging in the most decadent foods. You don't have to eat everything on your plate because you don't know when you will ever "let yourself" eat that food again. There will always be more food where that came from! If you do overeat, it's easier than you think to get back on track. I like to say that every meal is a Monday morning. Every meal is a unique opportunity to eat well, no matter what your last meal was. That means you can always start over; every bite is an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and make decisions to live a more Nutritious Life. Period.

COMMON MISTAKES

Foods that weigh you down

Whatever you do, try your best to avoid foods that sit in your stomach and make your body retain water. High fat foods take much longer to digest, delaying stomach emptying. Foods with high amounts of sodium, refined sugars, and indigestible sugars (like artificial sweeteners and sugar alcohols in diet foods) require extra water for breakdown, forcing your body to retain fluid, which leads to bloating. Missing the salt and sugar? Add flavor without calories by using spices and citrus to perk things up: eggs with oregano and thyme, a sliced apple dusted with cinnamon, or even just a squeeze of citrus into your ice water.

Forgetting to Hydrate

Remember to drink water! When you think about water, you might think of water weight, but when you keep the added sugar and salt to a minimum, water can use all its powers to cleanse and hydrate your system. Getting enough water is also crucial for staying on top of your game—dehydration leads to headaches, fatigue, and constipation. Not fun!

CHAPTER 5

THE SILENT FAT TRAP: THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: You're not aware that your sleep schedule is packing on pounds.

Ask anyone who knows me: I need my sleep! I always say I feel like I can conquer the world with the right amount but without that amount, forget it, I am useless! Can you relate? It's not that I'm not high energy—I really am. In fact, I think it's because I am such an active person that when it's time for me to wind down—around 10:00pm—I relish the moment. It's all part of what helps me conquer my world...and make sure I'm not cranky while doing it.

To me, sleep is almost as delicious as food. I love that feeling of climbing into bed, settling back against the pillow, and saying, "Aaah." And the early morning, after a solid night's sleep, is just as luscious. When I wake up at 5:30am or so (and yes, if I'm taking care of myself and getting enough sleep, that happens naturally for me—I don't even need to set an alarm) it's my favorite time of day. The world feels more peaceful, and the next 24 hours seem so full of possibility: Running through the streets of early a.m. New York City is an amazing way to start the day!

But I have been guilty of convincing myself (for short periods, anyway) that I really can get by on just five or six hours a night. And it works, at least for a few days. But then it catches up with me, and turns into a kind of nightmare. I get grouchy. I can't focus. And I find myself wanting to drink too much coffee or eat too much sugar to get my energy back. So I force myself to turn in early or take an afternoon nap on a weekend, and I feel my world shift back into balance.

I know many people share my struggle.

That includes people who want to sleep but can't. People who fall asleep fine but wake up frequently. People who hate the idea of going to bed because there's too much fun to be had. And people who simply have so many things jammed into their day that adequate sleep isn't an option. (I have friends who are doctors and lawyers who routinely send me emails at 3 a.m., and it makes me feel bad. I can't even imagine how ferocious and deranged I would be if I tried to do a 90-hour work week even once, let alone week after week!)

Whatever your struggle with sleep, I'm here to tell you that always sleeping alone is absolutely critical to your weight loss results. And no, I don't want you to send your spouse or significant other to the couch or guest room! I mean banishing all your electronics—your phone, your computer, and your TV. Think of your bed as the perfect place for sleep, and of course, for sex! But everything else belongs outside the Inner Sanctum. This one is a struggle for me—I do love my iPhone! But honestly, having a random text or email chime startle me just as I am about to drift off isn't worth it. I remind myself: "Keri, you're off duty! It's OK to be unplugged for eight hours!"

IT'S NOT JUST DIET: SLEEP IS MAKING YOU FAT

Trust me, sleeping alone will make your weight loss easier. In the last decade, researchers have made very clear connections between weight gain and sleep habits: The less people sleep, the more they weigh.

In fact, some researchers believe that America's rising obesity rates may be closely linked to falling sleep levels. In the last 40 years, reports the University of Chicago, American adults have cut their average sleep time by nearly two hours. (In 1960, U.S. adults slept an average of 8.5 hours a night. By 2002, that had fallen to less than seven hours a night.) And the proportion of young adults sleeping less than seven hours increased from 15.6 percent to 37.1 percent. Now, only 23.5 percent, or less than one out of four young adults, sleeps at least eight hours a night. As sleep time fell, those researchers say, average weights rose. In 1960 only one out of four adults was overweight and about one out of nine was considered obese, with a body mass index of 30 or more. Now two out of three adults is overweight and nearly one out of three is obese.

An early study in this field, way back in 2004, demonstrated that partial sleep deprivation screwed up the levels of hormones that circulate in our bloodstream and regulate hunger, causing an increase in appetite. Worse, it caused cravings for calorie-dense, high-carbohydrate foods. Scientists studied 12 volunteers—all healthy young men—and found that when they slept only four hours a night for two nights, leptin—the hormone that tells your body to stop, that it's had enough to eat—dropped 18%. And levels of ghrelin, the hormone that says, "keep going, eat more!"—jumped 28%. And keep in mind it didn't take weeks for that to happen—it just took two nights. When I hear new moms saying, "I don't know why I can't lose this pregnancy weight," I nod with perfect understanding of what's going on. Some experts suggest that a new baby typically results in 400 to 750 hours of lost sleep for parents in the first two years—no wonder the weight won't budge!

Since those early studies, the evidence has been piling up, making an even stronger connection between too few ZZZs and too many LBS. A very recent analysis from Case Western Reserve Medical School followed more than 68,000 women for 16 years, and found that those sleeping seven hours or less gained more weight, and were more likely to be obese.

And a study from Columbia University found that sleep-deprived women on average eat 329 more calories per day than when they are well rested. Considering that typically, an average woman—that's about 5 feet 4 inches—with a relatively sedentary job needs to eat somewhere between 1,200 and 1,400 calories a day to maintain her weight, 329 extra is more than most women can afford.

Nor does it help that the kinds of snacks people hunt for when they're zonked often come in the form of the junkiest kind of carbs I can think of (anyone who has ever gnawed on an hours-old greasy Danish knows what I'm talking about). Then, they often get washed down with coffee or energy drinks. And while those may be helping millions of sleep-deprived people get through the afternoon without feeling like zombies, there's a price to be paid when the lights go out. Instead of dreaming about Bradley Cooper or a beach vacation, most people are left to toss and turn.

Making sure you get enough sleep will help you lose weight. A lot more weight. A team of sleep scientists at the University of Arizona in Tucson studied 245 overweight women, and found that sleeping seven hours or more per night increased the likelihood that the women would lose weight, and keep it off, by 33 percent.

Even better? Those extra pounds you lose may help you sleep more deeply. That's because people who are overweight or obese have a higher incidence of something called sleep apnea. This disorder—most commonly found in men until age 50, when it turns into an equal opportunity health risk—is tricky to diagnose, because so many people have it and don't realize it. Sleep apnea causes them to sleep fitfully and wake up frequently during the night, so they're not really sleeping deeply. (If you're the kind of person who sleeps nine hours a night but still feels wiped out, please ask your doctor about this. The Sleep Foundation says 18 million Americans have it.) While an estimated 70 percent of obese people have it, there are many risk factors. For example, Chinese women and African American women are more at risk.

Why Sleep Is So Important

Like nutrition, the study of sleep is relatively new. In fact, it wasn't even until the mid-1950s that researchers were able to identify the different phases and cycles of sleep, such as REM, or rapid eye movement, and the link between REM sleep and dreaming.

Until then, most experts thought of sleep as very passive. Now, researchers know our brains are very active during sleep, and in many different ways, and that it affects our daily functioning—including body weight. I like the way the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke explains it:

Nerve-signaling chemicals called neurotransmitters control whether we are asleep or awake. Neurons in the brainstem, which connects the brain with the spinal cord, produce neurotransmitters such as serotonin and norepinephrine that keep some parts of the brain active while we are awake. Other neurons at the base of the brain begin signaling when we fall asleep. These neurons appear to "switch off" the signals that keep us awake. Research also suggests that a chemical called adenosine builds up in our blood while we are awake and causes drowsiness. This chemical gradually breaks down while we sleep.

Then, even though falling asleep feels instantaneous to us, we typically pass through five phases of sleep: stages 1, 2, 3, 4, and REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, in cycles that repeat over and over throughout the night. Most people spend almost 50 percent of total sleep time in stage 2 sleep, about 20 percent in REM sleep (when most dreaming happens), and the remaining 30 percent in the other stages. Infants, by contrast, spend about half of their sleep time in REM sleep. (Here's a fun fact to amaze your friends: Elephants sleep standing up, except in REM sleep, when they lay down. No idea if they're dreaming, but at least they're more comfortable!)

These four stages are called NREM, or non-rapid eye movement sleep, and no one really knows why we do it. One theory, though, is energy related: That because our bodies are making a much lower metabolic demand during sleep, it's a time for glycogen stores to be replenished in the brain.

Then, usually about 70 to 90 minutes after we fall asleep, we slip into REM sleep, when most dreams occur. Our breathing becomes rapid, irregular, and shallow. Eyes jerk around, heart rate goes up, blood pressure goes up. Men sometimes get erections.

Of course, while our brain is doing all this, experts explain, other body systems have their own agenda. During sleep, our bodies crank out plenty of hormones, including growth hormones, which help kids grow and adults repair cells and tissues. Other hormones help fight off infections, and boost our immune system. And of course, that's when our skin repairs itself, too—it's not called beauty sleep for nothing!

How to Make a "Clean Sleep"

One of my favorite expressions is "sleep hygiene." I love the idea that there should be a systematic, pristine approach to bedtime, just like there is to washing your hands or brushing your teeth. And while I'm not saying I don't push it sometimes, especially when I am burning the candle at both ends, I do try and follow these basic "hygiene" rules. It's because sleep specialists have shown, time and again, that they make it easier to fall asleep, stay asleep, and get the best quality sleep you possibly can. In addition to banishing all your electronics...

- Try and go to bed at the same time each evening, and get up about the same time in the morning—even on weekends and yes, even on vacations. As nice as it feels to sleep in sometimes, it only makes it more difficult to maintain your bedtime discipline.
- Get moving! Exercise and activity mean that when you fall asleep, you'll sleep more soundly, getting the high-quality rest you deserve.
- Go outdoors, whenever you can. Regular exposure to the sun or bright lights, especially in the late afternoon, keeps your Circadian rhythms in tune.

- Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable, and consider wearing socks to bed if your feet are often cold.
- Making mindful meditation part of your bedtime ritual will help you relax, and make the transition from busy brain to sleepy head almost effortless. One way is to practice an 8-count breath. This is simply done by taking a deep breath for a count of 8, holding for a moment, and then taking 8 counts to exhale. So simple and so effective!
- Pamper yourself. Maybe it's a cup of tea, a rich hand cream, a spritz of aromatherapy on your pillow—a kind, gentle gesture toward yourself will help you remember you're about to enter your dreams. That's the ultimate "me" space!

FOODS TO HELP YOU SLEEP

Unfortunately, there's no food that works like a sleeping pill. For years, for example, people believed turkey was a sleep-inducer, because of the tryptophan it contains. Alas, researchers now know that there's no way one person could eat enough turkey to get such a result; instead, it's probably the way we overdo it with carbs on Thanksgiving that send so many of us to the couch for a nap. That said, there are a number of foods I'd like you to eat—check them out below and I also include many of them in *The Great 1-Month Slim Down*.

They won't knock you out like an Ambien, but they will soothe the stress and inflammation in the body, boost your cognitive function, and support healthy blood pressure. Combined, these things mean that when you do slip between the sheets at night, you'll drift off deep into dreamland!

Sleep Food #1: Apricots

Full of vitamin C and beta-carotene, I think these are one of the prettiest fruits ever, and I love their tangy-tart flavor. (They have plenty of designer offspring, too, many crossed with plums—you'll find them with catchy names like Aprium, Plumcot, and Pluot.) Their connection to sleep? Stress resilience. Vitamin C-rich foods have been shown to help your body recover faster from stress, and fewer jangled nerves means mellower evenings. I like them dried, too—just be mindful of their higher calorie count and don't eat more than six halves per serving.

Sleep Food #2: Asparagus

These delicate stalks are high in folate, which is essential for a healthy cardiovascular system and has a proven effect against anxiety. I like it fresh, but I always keep a few boxes of frozen asparagus tips on hand, for nights when I run low on produce. Sautéed with some sliced almonds and a little cayenne, it's fast and unexpected.

Sleep Food #3: Bananas

These sweet, creamy and comforting tropical fruits are a good dietary source of melatonin, a hormone that aids sleep. They've also got tryptophan, which we need to make serotonin, as well as potassium, which helps normalize heartbeat. Sometimes, clients worry that they're "fattening," and shrink from my banana suggestion as if I told them to eat a hot fudge sundae before bedtime. But here's why you should not worry: At roughly 105 calories and with all that nutrition, it's not like we can hang America's obesity problem on the humble banana! They are filling, and sometimes, I don't even eat the whole thing—just a half a fruit at bedtime makes me feel full and sleepy. Then I use the other half with my breakfast smoothie the next day.

Sleep Food #4: Chamomile tea

Made from a tiny European flower that's in the daisy family, Chamomile, with its soothing mild flavor, is an age-old remedy for soothing yourself to sleep. While there's not much clinical research to back this up yet, I've heard some health experts insist it can be more effective than sleeping pills, particularly if you get used to drinking it, night after night! I like to brew myself a nice big mug before bedtime, and sip it as I go through the last hour or so of my day. I know for me, and many of my clients, it works wonders!

Sleep Food #5: Chickpeas

These lovely legumes, whether smooshed into my beloved hummus, simmered in soups, or tossed into a salad, contain plenty of folate—an important B vitamin that does everything from help your DNA, produce healthy blood cells, and protect women and embryos during pregnancy. Canned varieties are fine, but don't be put off using the dried ones—use a quick boil method, and skip the whole overnight soaking process.

Sleep Food #6: Nutmeg

The smell says something as simple as "apple pie," but researchers have shown that nutmeg improves blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and also have found it effective against bacteria such as *E. coli*. But it's earned a reputation as a home remedy for anxiety, menstrual cramps and even bad breath. Try a pinch in a glass of warm organic milk or almond milk, and watch how well you sleep.

Sleep Food #7: Popcorn

It's filling, and all that fiber makes it a great snack for someone trying to lose weight. It's also a significant source of antioxidants, with surprisingly large amounts of polyphenols. A 100-calorie serving—about as much as you get in 3 cups—can make a great bedtime snack.

Sleep Food #8: Tart cherries

Considered a symbol of immortality in ancient China, these fruits are loaded with anthocyanins, an important type of antioxidant that lowers inflammation, as well as cholesterol and triglyceride levels. But they're sleeping beauties, too—cherries are a source of melatonin, the hormone that aids sleep.

CHAPTER 6

SURVIVING WORK AND REAL LIFE: THE SNACK-SMART PLAN

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: You don't know how to snack the right way.

You already know that I'm a fan of snacking—especially if you struggle with cravings. For most people, eating more often helps them stay satisfied without feeling like they're restricting themselves. And it might inhibit those bigger meals when you feel like you can't stop eating.

While the number of meals you consume doesn't matter, the size of your snacks do. According to Purdue University researchers, the biggest problem with our snacking behavior is that snacks have become meals, and meals have become feasts. In the last 30 years, snack sizes have increased from 360 to 580 calories. That's a significant 220 extra calories per snack. And when you consider that the average woman snacks twice a day during the workday, you're looking at almost 500 extra calories per day. That number might seem innocent enough in isolation, but so does online shopping. Just as your credit card bill can skyrocket during a few sessions of retail therapy, so can your waistline. In just 2 weeks, your oversize healthy snacks can contribute to an extra pound of fat.

Your best strategy is to find the meal frequency that works for your lifestyle. You might find that one day you'll eat three meals and another you'll eat five or six. Don't worry about the details or over think the eating process. Your body will process foods the right way as long as you are making sure that the majority of your foods come from healthy fats, lean protein, vegetables, and fruit.

Making Snacks Work for You

The problem is not snacking; it is the same problem as our meals: we are eating the wrong types of foods! Seemingly harmless foods such as pretzels or high sugar yogurt and granola, and junk food such as chips, are packed with empty calories, sugar, sodium and trans fats. And the portion sizes are often way out of whack!

To make your snack attack work, you just need a little planning so you can have the right type of food to snack on. Remember there is no such food as "snack" food. Food is food regardless of when it is eaten - breakfast, lunch, SNACK or dinner. Eat real foods (the least processed foods) in small portions. If you eat real foods with a good proportion of nutrients (fats to carbs to protein) and you listen to your body (stop eating when slightly satisfied and eat when slightly hungry) you can use snacks to your advantage.

The key to a great snack is getting the right balance of carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats and of course portion control. Listening to your body is key here. This balance of macronutrients will help provide satiety and give you energy!

Snacking Improves Satiety

A study from a medical school in South Africa found that participants who were given breakfast in intervals throughout the morning were less hungry and ate less at lunch than those who ate breakfast in a single meal. Plus, the people who snacked felt just as satisfied as if they had eaten a high calorie lunch.

Another study tracked a group of French adults and found that they ate, on average, 2.7 meals and 1.3 snacks each day. The satiety ratio was higher for snacks than for meals and snacks consumed in the afternoon were found to be especially satisfying.

Snacking Is Good For "Overeaters"

Studies also found that when French people, who customarily eat a fourth meal each day, gave up their afternoon snack they gained weight because they overate at other meals. Those who continued with their four meals per day had a better metabolic profile with a reduction in the secretion of insulin, an improvement in insulin resistance, and better glucose control.

Snacking Might Help Satisfaction

One study tracked obese people on a very low calorie diet for 4 weeks, and researchers found a reduction in stomach size that ranged from 27-36 percent. Thus, people who eat smaller, more frequent meals will begin to feel more satisfied with less food over time.

Snacking Might Help You Avoid Dessert

People who naturally snack throughout the day when they are hungry make smarter food choices, according to a study by Arizona State University.

Snacking Could Help Your Cholesterol

Research confirms that snacking helps heart health. One study compared two groups of people eating the same diet. The group who ate smaller, more frequent meals resulted in lower LDL cholesterol by 14% and total cholesterol by 9%.

Snacking is Good Mood Food

A study at the University of Wales showed that women who were given snacks reported being in a better mood, were sharper mentally, and performed better on a word-recall task.

The Snack Pantry

The hardest part of adding snacks to your diet is figuring out what to eat. Sometimes we know what we want to eat—but that same food may not be good for our waistline. That's why it's important to eat real food for snacks and focus on what you are truly craving. For example, if it is creamy you are craving don't think frozen yogurt, maybe oatmeal or even avocado may do the trick. Whole foods - like fruits, veggies, nuts - are much more nutrient dense than the empty calorie junk and processed food. Aim to get fiber, healthy fat and protein; if not all three, get at least one! Here are a few of my favorites:

- 3 cups air-popped popcorn with Parmesan cheese
- 2 high fiber crackers with 2 teaspoons natural peanut butter and cinnamon
- Sliced red, yellow and green peppers with 2 tablespoons hummus
- 15 mixed nuts (almonds, cashews, pecans)
- Apple with 2 teaspoons almond butter
- ½ avocado with a sprinkle of sea salt and lemon
- Homemade kale chips
- 6 ounces Greek yogurt with 1 cup berries or 10 nuts
- Cherry tomatoes and 1 ounce of goat cheese
- 2 ounces turkey wrapped in lettuce
- 1 cup edamame
- Hard boiled egg with crudités

Pre-Packaged On-the-Go Snacks

- The Chia Co Chia Shots
- Crespo Olive Snack Pouches
- Tribe Hummus Single Serve Snackers
- Wholly Guacamole Minis
- Krave Turkey Jerky
- Matt's Munchies Premium Fruit Snacks
- Kind Bars
- Justin's Nut Butter Squeeze Packs
- Sea Snax
- The Good Bean Crispy Crunchy Chickpeas (1 ounce or 1/8 cup)
- Popcorn Indiana FIT Popcorn individual bags
- Vital Choice Wild Red Traditional Canned Sockeye Salmon or Chicken of the Sea Pink Salmon Pouch
- Kitchen Table Bakers Crisps
- Sahale Snacks: California Almonds + Sea Salt
- Carrington Farms Flax Paks
- Dang Toasted Coconut Chips Snack Bags (1.43 ounces)

CHAPTER 7

THE GROCERY STORE PROBLEM

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: Your foods are not "clean."

As a nutritionist, food purity is a huge concern of mine. People in my line of work spend a lot of time studying the basic components of food, and looking at data about what this chemical or that additive does, both in terms of the nutritional value of a food, as well as other risks it might pose. And of course, we all know the more natural a food is, the better.

So if I ruled the world, we would all eat nothing but the finest organic produce, preferably in season. We would make sure it came from local sources, so that it wouldn't be shipped thousands of miles, by trucks spewing exhaust and carbon dioxide into the air. We'd eat lots of whole-grain products, like deliciously crusty and chewy artisanal breads, baked by people we know in our hometowns. The yogurt, cheese and milk products we'd eat would be from friendly farms nearby, and even the meat we'd eat would be local, where we could guarantee each cow, pig and chicken had eaten plenty of good healthy stuff, frolicked in the sunshine, and had been butchered following the highest standards.

But very few of us can live like that. Organic produce, while it has been shown to be somewhat more nutritious for people and far better for the environment, is still a bit pricier than conventionally grown food. (I am happy to report that's changing all the time, as more and more farmers jump on the organic bandwagon, and farmer's markets become available to more and more people.)

The price difference is still quite pronounced in proteins, and as much as I love grass-fed beef and wild-caught salmon, I'm keenly aware that not everyone chooses to pay that much for food all the time.

Whatever you do, don't go nuts about this. If you try to make the best decision about everything, you'll quickly find yourself paralyzed by the overwhelming amount of information (much of it conflicting). Don't feel like you're doing something "bad" if you're committed to a certain kind of kitchen cleaner—just try and make a greener choice in another area. Buy wild salmon to eat at home, but don't give yourself a hard time for ordering farmed salmon in a restaurant.

And I'm also aware that not every decision should be based purely on nutrition. Some experts, for example, might argue that it's better for the planet in the long run, to eat locally-grown produce that isn't organic, which means it's been raised with fertilizers and pesticides, than to eat organic produce that's shipped in from, let's say, China. (The argument is that we need to make some tradeoffs that give the environment priority over our personal health concerns.) In fact, new research from Mintel, a company that tracks how consumers spend their food money, reports that 52 percent of American shoppers now think that buying local produce matters more than buying organic. That's a big shift from several years ago.

And even though I make most of my own choices based on the quality of the food—that's my job, right?—I never argue with people about their decisions. Food issues are complex, and everyone has to find the balance between ethical and practical that works for them.

WHAT FOODS ARE OK?

Chemicals cause problems. Take the apple, which by now, you know I think is one of Mother Nature's best ideas ever. Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture found residues of pesticides in a staggering 98 percent of the apples it tested, by far the highest rate of any type of produce. While in almost every case, the USDA ruled the amounts of the harmful chemicals within its "safe" levels, I don't want to eat them! It even prompted the Environmental Working Group, an influential watchdog group, to put conventionally grown apples on its "Dirty Dozen" list.

Here are the best guidelines I can offer right now, but the truth is, with so many scientists studying the food chain from so many different angles, new information comes to light all the time.

Beef

Treat yourself to grass-fed. I love grass-fed beef. It's not just because it's lower in calories, has more omega-3 fats, and such antioxidants as vitamins A and E, and perhaps seven times as much beta-carotene. I think it tastes much, much better. But it will also cost a typical beefeater about \$300 more a year, which isn't chicken feed. And some experts think that while there's no arguing that it's healthier, the differences aren't great enough to justify the expense.

Salmon

Go with wild-caught fresh when possible. Again, in my perfect world, everyone would eat wild-caught salmon three times a week. But candidly, if that happened, we'd all be in trouble—there just aren't enough of these wonderful fish in the oceans to feed us all. In order for us all to come to terms with that, it means we are going to have to eat farmed fish, at least some of the time. That does worry the purist in me, since some studies have shown farmed salmon are more likely to contain more PCBs, a pollutant linked to cancer. (And honestly, how good can an RD feel recommending salmon for heart health and a calmer mood, while knowing it may increase your cancer risk?)

But with wild-caught salmon, there's no guarantee against contamination and pollutants either. (Hey, it's not like the fish tell us where they've been swimming the last few years!) And one important study found that wild-caught salmon in the Pacific Northwest (the major supplier of wild-caught salmon for most the U.S.) contain higher rates of mercury than farmed.

So my advice is to splurge on the wild-caught stuff, feel fine about eating the farm-raised, and stay tuned—we are learning more about sustainability everyday.

Packaged Foods

Over the years, packaged foods, which are generally highly processed and heavy on chemicals such as coloring and preservatives, have been losing favor with more demanding consumers. And there have been many experts who believe there is a link between the chemicals used in many packaged foods and the obesity epidemic: The strongest evidence focused on preservatives, MSG, and high-fructose corn syrup. And BPAs, present in canned foods, have been identified as a potential obesogen.

But I'm happy to report that by now, even the most mainstream American households have taken notice, and in the last decade sales of fresh foods have skyrocketed, while sales of processed foods have actually fallen, according to food-industry sources, a decrease of just 3 percent in the last year alone.

That's not to say all processed food is bad. As a busy mom, I know there are some days when the world just can't go around without using some of these quick and easy solutions. And when that happens, give yourself a break! Remember, the goal isn't to be perfect. Aim to eat real foods that are not processed as much as possible and fill in with the best packaged and processed options where needed. Thankfully, many food manufacturers have caught on and the number of "ok" packaged foods is definitely on the rise.



CHAPTER 8

THE RESTAURANT TRAP

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: Any meal outside the home appears to make your button pop.

There are a lot of nutritionists who might tell you to never eat at restaurants. That would be great...if it were realistic and fun. But, you're going to eat out and you should eat out. As I've said repeatedly, food should be enjoyed. And eating at restaurants is as much a social activity as anything else. So your job shouldn't be to make your life more difficult; instead it's about going to a restaurant with freedom of mind.

It's up to you to go to any restaurant prepared. Restaurants are not inherently "dangerous", but you can make it more difficult to walk away from your meal feeling stuffed if you avoid a few common mistakes that make your dining experience a diet nightmare.

Here are some simple tips to make sure the restaurant is never your rival and actually a part of living a Nutritious Life:

Restaurant Reminder #1: Have a snack

Never go to a restaurant when your HQ is close to 10 (starving). You have already slowed your metabolism, and chances are you will make poor choices for your main course (as well as eat the entire bread basket). Have a small snack beforehand, so you walk into the restaurant with your HQ around 6, tops.

Restaurant Reminder #2: Drink up

Stay hydrated throughout the day so you don't mistake thirst for hunger. Always drink a large glass of water before you get to the restaurant or as soon as you arrive. This will fill you up slightly and make you feel healthy.

Restaurant Reminder #3: Choose fiber

Look for high fiber starch options, such as brown rice or sweet potato, and skip the French fries and white bread. Be sure to watch your portions here, as these are foods that are often easily overindulged. Often I suggest skipping the starch portion altogether and getting your fiber from a salad and side of veggies.

Restaurant Reminder #4: Go lean

Choose leaner sources of protein such as turkey or chicken, or high omega 3 sources such as scallops or salmon. Order foods that are baked, boiled, steamed, poached, roasted, or grilled, and avoid the fried and sautéed options.

Restaurant Reminder #5: Order healthy fats

I love fat! It is essential for cell function and satisfaction, but the key is choosing the right kinds, which can be difficult. Now that process should be easier: When you order your food, make sure you are in control of adding a small portion of heart healthy fats such as olive oil or coconut oil.

Restaurant Reminder #6: Control the portions

Order dressings and sauces on the side so you control the portions. This includes ketchup – remember to have just a little ketchup with your burger and not a little burger with your ketchup!

Restaurant Reminder #7: Fill up on veggies

Instead of diving into the breadbasket, ask for an order of steamed green beans or crudités. You will be surprised at just how many restaurants will do this.

Restaurant Reminder #8: Go for soup!

Soups are great as a filler, and many soups, such as vegetable or bean, are high in nutrients. Stay away from cream-based soups; choose broth-based ones instead. Research shows that eating soup will often leave you consuming fewer calories overall at the meal.

Restaurant Reminder #9: Skip that first drink

Skip at least the first alcoholic beverage. If you do choose to indulge, aim for a wine spritzer or vodka with club soda and lemon. Remember, alcohol lowers your defenses, making it easier to inadvertently over-consume food. Sip, don't chug that wine!

Restaurant Reminder #10: Indulge consciously

If you opt for dessert, choose the healthiest options. Every food you consume—even dessert—is an opportunity to consume nutrients. Go for mixed berries, herbal tea, or a cappuccino made with low fat milk.

Restaurant Reminder #11: Digest your food

Try to allow yourself time to digest your food before going to bed. Going to bed with a full stomach often makes you extra hungry in the morning. Plus, your body does not digest food as well if you go to sleep immediately after a meal.

Restaurant Reminder #12: Take a walk

Walk home from the restaurant or take a stroll around your neighborhood. A refreshing walk is a good way to help burn a few extra calories, but the real benefit may be how good it can be for your mind!

CHAPTER 9

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Why Can't I Drop The Weight?

Answer: STRESS!

This probably comes as no surprise, but stress is hurting more than just your mind. It takes a tremendous toll on your body and your ability to lose weight. Our bodies are equipped to manage the stressors of a life lived hundreds of years ago (see bear, flee). They have not adapted to modern day stresses – work deadlines elicit the same physiological responses as seeing a bear – but the stress reactions are chronic reactions, not fleeting, and they are wreaking havoc on our health and wellness. Acknowledging that we are stressed is the most basic foundation to managing it. In an effort to empower you, here are some thoughts to reconnect your mind and body over the subject of stress:

Learn To Identify Your Stress

You may not experience all of the symptoms of stress, but more likely than not, you are familiar with a few of the following: headaches, muscle tension/pain, chest pain, fatigue, lowered libido, stomach issues, disrupted sleep, anxiety, lack of motivation, irritability, depression, overeating, under-eating, substance abuse and social isolation.

Stress Stresses Your Internal System

While the two major stress hormones – adrenaline and cortisol – are phenomenal in situations when you meet a bear, they are less helpful when chronically circulating in the blood. Adrenaline makes your heart race, raises blood pressure and stresses the cardiovascular system. Cortisol increases blood sugar, and enhances the brain's use of glucose, which is also not ideal in a chronic state. You may have heard about increasing cortisol levels and weight gain in your mid-section. It's true.

All Stress Has Consequences

Stress is subjective and somewhat qualitative. While we cannot pinpoint the exact amount of adrenaline that is linked to heart disease, we do know that stress has a direct relationship with all of the following: cardiovascular disease, sleep disorders, digestive problems, psychological issues such as depression and memory loss, weight management and skin disorders.

How to Fight Back

While I wish I could offer something to remove all of your stress, unfortunately, I can't offer that type of solution—but I can make suggestions that will allow you to handle stress much better. Taking steps to be a less stressed person is a proactive way to help manage your health. Here's what I want you to do: Try one of these 5 things daily to reduce your stress:

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Exercise
- Taking a walk
- Journaling
- Socializing
- Taking a bath
- Laughing
- Petting your dog
- Take 5 minutes to stress - then move on!

If you incorporate at least one of these each day, or respond with a stress-busting option each time you feel anxiety creeping in, you'll find yourself in a much happier place and able to manage your stress.



CHAPTER 10

YOU CAN DROP THE WEIGHT!

If there's anything that I've learned as a nutritionist it's this:

Everyone's body is different.

Everyone has many real barriers that make diet and exercise difficult.

"I'm busy" is a real problem that can feel impossible to overcome.

Eating healthy is sometimes a process. A lifelong one. And, that's ok.

And most importantly: No matter who you are, what your age, background, or experience, everyone can drop the weight.

That's why I wrote this book. It was meant to be freeing and enabling, but most importantly, it was to help bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be. The body you want is not living in some other body; it lives within you. All that's needed is a little help, some TLC, and the simple tips and tricks that fit into your busy life.

Living a Nutritious Life isn't about being perfect, not feeling stressed, or avoiding dessert. It's about balance, enjoyment, and happiness with what you're eating, how you're living, and the way you feel.

And the best way to have it all is to remember that "I can't" isn't part of the conversation. When those questions pop into your head, that's when this guide is here to be your BFF and remind you that you can, you just need to figure out why you're struggling.

All of the answers and solutions are right here and will lead you to the body and life you want. And if you need more dedicated help, a more concrete plan to get you started, you can always try The Great 1-Month Slim Down to lead you in the right direction.

Wherever you go from here, remember that this is your life and your body. Do not fear the struggles or the moments when it's hard. Instead, just ask yourself why something is happening, and if you take the time, you'll be able to find the answer and feel good about you and your body.