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I've Had So Many 'Last' Meals, It's Ridiculous

The problem with the'last meal' mentality is that it's just another delaying tactic. You've decided to tackle your weight yet feel deserving of a final blow out before embarking on what you consider to be a long period of grim deprivation. Two things; firstly, if you stopped seeing your diet as a block on all your favourite foods then why would you feel compelled to gorge on them? Secondly, take action right now! So it's a Sunday morning and you resolve yet again to shed those extra pounds. If you were to start RIGHT NOW on your quest and forget about waiting until tomorrow to start then you won't view the rest of Sunday as an all out eating extravaganza.
If you're still with me here then don't allow yourself to feel cheated out of your usual pre-diet binge - I know that your diet is often preceded by a frenzy of slamming cupboard doors as you attempt to clear the house of all the food you really love. You may still decide to do this in some measure but the key here is that you are not a dustbin. The redundant food does not need to be funnelled into your mouth.

So don't feel cheated - which implies that you've lost something - feel excited and know that you've everything to gain. Failing to plan is planning to fail, right? So spend the rest of Sunday in planning mode. Why are you back here again? We are creatures of habit and you will inevitably find that it's the same things that rear up to thwart your efforts every time. Be honest and decide what it is that always hampers your quest for a healthier you. Uncover your top three saboteurs and then decide what you will do to overcome them. Want an idea of what the most common saboteurs are for everybody?

1. Grazing. You pass the cookie jar and just take one. Surely one won't hurt? Then it's just a small square of chocolate as you grab the car keys on your way out. No harm in that. Later just the tiniest end of that freshly baked baguette. Before you know it you've mindlessly put away several hundred calories!

2. Emotional eating or eating for any reason other than hunger.

3. Regularly eating beyond the point of fullness.

Let's take grazing. Stop grazing! It is simply a question of taking firm control of your mind and deliberately choosing your habits rather than allowing them to just develop in any old way. Make a decision. There are only two alternatives. eg. I exercise/I don't exercise. I will follow this plan/I will not follow this plan. I graze/I do not graze. After 3 weeks not grazing will be your new habit. Done.

Similarly, if you're not hungry or eating simply to finish what's in front of you then believe me your body would really prefer to wait awhile. You know exactly what it does with excess food.

Mega Binge? 5 Ways to Move Right On

Every day is a new day.
Every morning when you wake up is a new beginning. Forget yesterday's trials and tribulations and just sit a while and mentally plan the day ahead. What could prove challenging? How can you plan ahead to deal with it? Perhaps a packed lunch prepared now could avert a foray into the staffroom biscuit barrel later on? Think, plan, do. We all screw up at times – whether it concerns our business, our relationships or our health. It happens. The only people with no problems at all in life are six feet under.

Yell a mental 'stop!'

Slow down, forgive yourself and move on. You're learning a whole new way of living after years of yo yo dieting. To expect perfection is unrealistic – and you know it even though you can't abide it when you falter. Sometimes there seem to be so

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many obstacles and temptations that it's just so darned hard and you question if it's all going to be worth it. Maybe slimness is not all its cracked up to be. Believe me, it is. Regroup, regroup. YOU CAN DO THIS. The binge is over and now we dust ourselves down and start over.

See this as a journey, not a 'diet'

Restrictive diets are appealing to many folks because they offer a high degree of control and often define exactly when and what to eat. Thus all responsibility and decision making is taken away. This explains why people very often stick religiously to these plans and experience the desired weight loss. However the potential for binge eating is high – especially at the perceived 'end' of the diet when the behaviours that caused the excess weight in the first place are still lurking beneath the layers of tight control. And when they surface again...

Remember we decided that obstacles are inevitable? A binge is an obstacle and obstacles are surmountable.

Whenever I hear the word 'obstacle' I think immediately of that SuperMario game when the little guy is racing along in a car at dizzying speed as mountains loom whilst large rocks and showers of bouncing boulders continually try to thwart his efforts. What does he do? Well, he doesn't stop. He goes over, around, under and every which way to get past these temporary blocks. I'll let you think about that.

Keep your eyes on the prize

The only way to stay on track is to want it so badly that you will do whatever it takes to succeed. Why do you want this? Yes you want to lose weight but why exactly? To live to see your grandkids? To attract a new partner? Only you know. Stay intensely focused on what you want, never give up on reaching for it REGARDLESS OF WHAT GETS IN YOUR WAY and your success is guaranteed

Can You Finish this Sentence: “Drop a dress size by Christmas...?”

Drop a dress size by Christmas...gain a dress size by Easter. If you keep it off that long. The Daily Mirror (UK) has selected four young mums to follow yet another diet plan with the aim of squeezing into their dream dress by Christmas. Sounds reasonable?I'll wager that all those ladies lose weight and it would be really interesting to follow their paths into the first few months of the new year. Losing weight is childsplay compared to the real challenge of keeping it off. It requires a complete lifestyle shake-up so why oh why do we persist with endless variations of diets such as these? We know in our hearts that they NEVER achieve permanent results. It's simply soul destroying to struggle through weeks of gnawing hunger and deprivation only to encounter the inevitable bodily rebellion (=binge) which negates every single one of our efforts. Every single time. One of my clients describes the utterly impossible task of fending off the overwheming desire to eat after a period of dieting as like having her whole body taken over by a ravenous alien being whom she is powerless to control.
So what's wrong with this latest approach by the national daily?

1. The daily calorie consumption is too low. 1250 caloriesequals absolutely starving regardless of how many well meaning people wax on about filling up with vegetables and glasses of water.

2. One word: habits. There are glaring clues in the women's stories. As one lady readily admits – she regularly eats four bags of crisps during the day and often tops up with more in the evening. Is it only me that thinks this has to be addressed FIRST?

3. The suggested meals are few and are dull. Five jelly babies or six marshmallows is far removed from many peoples idea of a rewarding 'snack'. Dull means danger when it comes to attempts to control eating.

4. Where's the exercise plan? One lady admits to losing focus and another to having dieted before "but the pounds crept back on". No surprise there then. Time to do something a little different maybe...?

We never ever learn. It really is time to face up to those destructive habits, eat a little less and move a whole lot more. Throw in a measure of accountability (who's checking up on you?), commitment and focus and the plan looks a whole lot rosier. Add a little food and exercise knowledge and a detailed plan – more so than motivation. As Jim Rohn once famously said " Motivation alone is not enough. If you take an idiot and you motivate him, now you have a motivated idiot".

People-Watching on the Champs Elysees - The latest on Food, Fat and the French

In Mireille Guiliano's bestselling book 'French Women Don't Get Fat', she claims that French women don't exercise that much, eat three-course meals yet seem to avoid piling on the pounds. Having just spent several days in Paris I'm inclined to agree. Almost. French women are certainly not all rail thin but the incidence of obesity is much, much less than in any UK city – and this is undoubtedly a city phenomenon; take a trip out to the French countryside and this observation is less valid. There are fat French women aplenty.

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I'm chatting to a young couple in a restaurant in France. Yes they do tend to go for coffee and pastry for breakfast - not the healthiest choice I know – but then they won't eat again until lunchtime. They say they are always hungry before eating and never eat until uncomfortably full. Many food-free hours will then pass until a lateish evening meal – again regulated by hunger and fullness. Portions are smaller, food is less processed with no fads and with no irrational exclusion of carbohydrates, The upshot is that their weight hardly fluctuates. This might be the norm in Paris but it definitely is not the way the average British person approaches food and eating.

It's not that the French are out exercising en masse - visit any British city and it's pretty common to meet joggers pounding the pavements. This is still a rarity in Paris but then there is the fabulous 'Velib' – a city-wide bike hire system. Anyone can pick up a bike at any metro station or anywhere there's a "borne" (stand) of bikes, ride around for half an hour, and then leave it at any Velib' stand. The first half hour is free, and not only that, the bikes themselves have evident street cred with their high-tech, futuristic appearance. Clever marketing ploy - this is proving a popular means of whizzing around the traffic-bound city.

Despite all this French women's magazines have not escaped the ubiquitous diet pill and there are plenty of references to 'detox' and dieting. However the overriding impression is still that food is a positive pleasure and not a guilty one. Any British woman who has ever struggled with excess weight will invariably tell you that guilt and a whole plethora of negative emotions are associated with food. This influence has come from society and the hugely powerful media. Only yesterday a survey revealed that more than half of Britain's population has admitted they are overweight. However, they are not ready to go to gym. The survey conducted for the British Society of Gastroenterology saw every one person in five admitting to binge eating. Sadly, 15 percent of those surveyed said they would choose to take diet pills rather than work out. It still amazes me that physical activity is so abhorred in the UK. Perhaps it's time to strike out the word 'gym' which seems to generate a mental wall of resistance and urge people into the great outdoors. Going by my own initially exercise-resistant clients, this works every time.

They're Calling it the Cabinet of the Famished

Fancy a job in the French government? Only the irritatingly naturally thin and would-be slimmers need apply. President Nicolas Sarkozy has definitely lost oodles of weight since teaming up with the comely Carla and he's now reportedly on a mission to whip his ministers into shape. And *round* is not acceptable. Sarkozy is eager to portray a fit and healthy image to inspire public confidence in the abilities of their leaders.
For sure the ministers must be grumbling when forced to forego those famous French cheeses in favour of frugal servings of fish and vegetables. Rumour has it that even the odd sip of wine is frowned upon. Quelle horreur. I have spent time in France, I have French friends, I have witnessed the French attitude to mealtimes. Sarkozy is playing with fire. Dieting is anathema to the French male. But when promotion is at stake...qui sait?
The interesting point here is the shift of such attitudes into government who have enjoyed a sort of unquestioned 'slimness immunity' over the years. Outside the cosseted confines of government, slimness has always been equated with success, with ambition, with control. With the ability to be master of human cravings and desires. Being fat or overweight implied sloppy, lazy behaviour. Many studies have proved that discrimination continues to exist in the workplace with employers (such as Sarkozy) readily admitting to a preference for leaner candidates especially when it comes to employing women.

The workplace continues to be an increasingly harsh environment for overweight employees. According to a study by Tennessee State University economists Charles Baum and William Ford, obese men and women can expect to earn on average anywhere from 1 to 6 percent less than normal weight employees, with heavy women being the biggest losers when it comes to their wallet. Excruciating it may be for the larger members of our society, but think about it - can you really blame an employer who is constantly worried about burgeoning employee healthcare costs?

We have witnessed and 'voted in' a multitude of decidedly portly politicians over the years. What Sarkozy has perhaps unwittingly done is cast the subconscious seeds of doubt into our minds. We may outwardly disagree with his latest demands but will we hesitate a little longer in the voting booth? Those rotund politicians of the past were their own worst enemies and exacerbated their burgeoning waistlines with overly tight clothing and unkempt hair leading to an inevitable dishevelled appearance. Not exactly confidence inspiring. But were they incompetent? That's for you to decide.

Emotional Eating - The One Minute Manager

One of the biggest problems that most dieters face when trying to lose weigh t is the frequent and overwhelming desire to eat for reasons other than hunger; for emotional reasons when food is used as a calming device. But whilst food is undoubtedly one of life's greatest pleasures, it's pleasure is fleeting and serves only to temporarily patch any underlying distress.

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The ability to manage difficult situations and feelings effectively—without turning to food and eating—is a necessary foundation for a successful weight loss plan and healthy lifestyle. Easier said than done and anyone contemplating a weight loss programme should acknowledge that the path ahead will be littered with many obstacles (emotional eating being only one of them) and decide in advance how they will tackle these inevitable hurdles.

Of the mountain of advice out there designed to 'distract' you through dips in resolve and motivation, very little of it tells you how to handle the desire to eat at the exact moment it strikes and how to deal with it swiftly. Many dieters recognise the onset of these periods of wild abandon and mention a growing feeling of anxiety and waves of panic just before beginning to spiral out of control. Next time this strikes, try this:
Stop. Sit down (if possible) and breathe through the uncomfortable feelings. Don't try and quash them – simply acknowledge whatever it is you're experiencing. Feelings of panic, dread, turmoil, what? The depth and intensity of these moments can be frightening but believe that you can control them and you will. The overwhelming desire is to do anything to calm and settle the alarming level of discomfort and we know that usually you will turn to food at this point. You can still do this. This is not a replacement for your desire to eat – it's still your choice – but just do this FIRST.

Just take a few minutes to work through why you are suddenly awash with these sensations. There are many, many different flashpoints related to perceived underachievement at work, other peoples negative comments and so on but here are some of the most common ones related to food itself:

Are you thinking in EXTREMES? Did you eat much more at lunch than you intended and now feel a complete blow out is the only way to quell your feelings of failure?

Are your thoughts UNREALISTIC? You set your heart on losing 6 pounds this week and didn't make it so now you feel hopeless.

Can you only see THE BIG PICTURE. You can't just take it a day at a time but keep focusing on the huge task ahead of you if you're going to shed all your excess weight. You're feeling completely overwhelmed.

You view your plans as extremely RESTRICTIVE. You cannot see any possible way to find good in your journey towards a new body so you experience resentment.

Make no mistake – the ability to recognise the 'why' behind your current discomfort is a big step forward on your weight loss journey. Next time I'll look at effective ways to flip those non supportive habits of thought. And remember - habits are things we choose.

Slim Down With a Rubber Band

I recognise that just thinking about why you're feeling hopeless about your weight loss goals isn't going to take away your desire to eat or you'd have worked out how to deal with this long ago. However, it is true that in order to begin a shift away from negative, self-defeating thoughts you must first recognise them. When we persist with negative thought patterns we are destined to keep repeating the same life experiences over and over again because we will never view reality any differently. Our lives will never improve and our weight will never change. Make no mistake - our thoughts and emotions are not only part of our mental programming, but have a physiological effect on our bodies. You are what you think you are.
If you've eaten more than you planned today then FINE. The one guaranteed way to make yourself feel even worse is to carry on eating uncontrollably. You know this – you've done it again and again and the pleasure is fleeting compared to the pain of remorse and self loathing that follows. Go right now and do anything at all that's not related to food for the next 30 minutes. You're committed to this remember?

If you haven't hit your weight loss target for this week then FINE. Your goal is not to lose x pounds, your goal is to stick to your new lifestyle programme. And you can bet that if the word 'life' is in there you're going to experience good days and not so good, joy and pain, progress and feeling stuck.

How about feeling overwhelmed? Doesn't that happen to all of us whatever we've taken on? New job, new course – anything that expands our current comfort zone. Whoa! Rein in that crushing sense of being unable to cope and just focus on what you can do today, what you can do right now to move you a little closer to that bigger ideal that feels so unattainable right now. A 30 minute brisk walk will do much more than take you away from the kitchen – with each step you'll be moving closer to the life you committed to when you embarked on this whole weight loss endeavour.

And what about if you're totally hacked off at the thought of all the fun draining out of your life now you're set on these lifestyle changes? Yes, there will be temporary discomfort whilst you develop and install new habits but the fitter and slimmer you become, the more activities you will develop the confidence to try. In fact, life will be more fun than ever.

So the key is to be mindful of your thought patterns as much of the time as you can and not allow yourself to wallow in negativity for too long when thoughts often turn to food. To snap instant attention to your thoughts try this: place a rubber band around your wrist; as soon as you notice negative self-talk creeping in, pull the band away from your skin and let it snap back. The ensuing sting will serve as a sharp reminder that it's time to halt your current line of thought and flip your thoughts into something much more positive.

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It's the Obsessing that Often Screws it Up

Many times when I'm chatting to someone about weight loss, I'm amazed by how they invariably make life so damned difficult for themselves by constantly ignoring the signs when their weight first starts on the upward trend (when the issue is far easier to address) until both their waist meaurement and the task ahead is overwhelming. We cannot press the stop button.

Take Fiona. Now she's an educated lady with a young family and a career to boot. She's also very overweight. And this she claims, is down to faulty genetics, lack of time and the fact that the task is just too overwhelming. But this lady is a business performance coach – a goal setting supremo! She very often achieves what she sets out to do. So she has lots of evidence of success. It's all down to her meticulous goal setting and action plans that her children attend a fantastic school, the family have visited several european cities together and she has been steadily learning to speak French over the last two years as part of a larger, more distant goal to run a B&B one day in rural southern France. But, claims Fiona, weight loss is different. It is less controllable, less predictable. And beset with obstacles. Each attempt is more difficult as the fear of failure becomes greater. And no-one could ever bear to believe that this is the way the rest of their life will roll out. Too horrific to face so let's not.

Take values. These are things that really matter to us, things we hold dear. Examples would be family, freedom, fun, acceptance or achievement. Did you know that the top three things most people claim to value are family, work and health? I wouldn't like to comment on the first two but the ladies I see are definitely not behaving as if their health was something that really mattered to them! Most times it becomes very precious only after a wake up call.

I do know that the issues of weight, eating and foods are emotionally charged which naturally exacerbates our reaction and makes it harder for us to approach shedding a couple of stone in a lucid, calm manner. We agonise. We panic and feel very, very anxious. We self medicate with food. If only...if only we could approach this as any other goal setting exercise with the necessary SMART conditions (SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited and all your goals should fit into this requirement). If we did this we would see amazing results.

The most successful weight losers I see are those that make a very detailed plan of how they intend to reduce their weight. Then although they set time aside in their diaries to follow through on any actions such as trips to the swimming pool and they follow their plan pretty much to the letter, they – and this is important – sort of forget about it. What I mean is they get on with that whole other big fun thing which is all the other parts of their life. So the weight loss goal is not THE most important aspect of their day and does not therefore become an obsessive quest. Any lifestyle change obviously requires commitment, determination and a great plan. It's the obsessing that often screws it up.

Exercise Can Make You a Better Boss

A study from the Center for Creative Leadership found that executives who exercise are significantly more effective leaders than those who don't.

The data was collected over a 10 year period and analysed specific traits such as inspiring commitment, credibility, leading others, leading by example, energy, resilience and calmness. Are we surprised? Let's look at these in a little more depth:

Inspiring commitment – we have all experienced getting fired up each year about our plans to lead a healthier lifestyle. And we know how easily those decisions get sidelined. We're just too busy with work and families etc So if our boss – with all his/her presumed workload and daily demands can keep on keeping on – then so can we.

Credibility – Your boss will gain more respect if he/she gets out there and partakes in activities which although we openly acknowledge they are good for us we often experience a hard time in summoning up the constant motivation to do them on a regular basis.

Leading others/leading by example – this is definitely an admirable case of do as I do. If you, as the boss, bang on incessantly about absenteeism or levels of employee ill health then what better way to encourage your staff than by lacing up those trainers and hitting the gym yourself?

Energy, resilience and calmness – we know that the fitter we are, the more vitality and general hardiness we develop.

If they can find the time then so can we. But how?

1. Look at your weekly exercise time commitment in one block i.e. plan to workout for 2 hours each week. There will be lighter days in your schedule when you can eat up a whole hour by playing a game of tennis for example but then the rest of your week may be so overloaded that you can barely squeeze in a 15 minute session. Fine – just go walking! But do go. Just move whenever you can during your week.

2. Cross train. Try to include as much variety as possible. This also helps if you're very time poor as an intense interval session for example takes up barely 20 minutes of your day. If you opt for walking and want to do this every day without fail – that's great. Just be mindful that in order to be most effective these sessions will require a greater time slot

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3. Travel with your trainers. Many hotels have gyms and swimming pools. Always pack your training shoes, a swimsuit and light workout gear. Jogging around a city is such a great way of sightseeing that there are even companies that arrange this sort of thing!

4. Hire a personal trainer, let them design an achievable, realistic amount of weekly exercise for you and then arrange to workout with them until you can manage the programme and its demands by yourself

5. Just begin. Don't think too far ahead and in too big a chunk as it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Just do what you can this week. And when next week comes around carry on with what worked and ditch the stuff you just know you won't stick to.

These are just a few suggestions to start you off - what other ways can you think of to shape up your week?

Women Over 40 Crave Danger, Lust and Excitement

Sooner or later, age will inevitably have an effect on your body...and your mind. When it comes to keeping fit and losing weight in your forties and fifties are you still motivated by the same forces? The general thinking is that in your twenties the main impetus to looking after yourself is often the desire to increase sexual attractiveness. We workout to attract a mate and aim to achieve peak health in order, perhaps subconsciously, to appear supremely fertile. Whereas, it has been suggested, later on in life we embark on fitness programmes in an attempt to hang on to our health, to continue to enjoy the same life to the best of our physical ability. To maintain the status quo. Pure rot.
The mature ladies that I meet every day do not even pretend towards a desire to exercise to counter dwindling abilities. No. Deep down they want to look good, to be the envy of other women and to be attractive to the opposite sex. At 40, 50, 60 and beyond. Yes, the desire to lose weight is there but more as a vehicle to hell raise rather than as part of a health phase. This is backed up by recent reports suggesting that underneath the calm, collected exterior of todays 50 plus woman lies a simmering turmoil of dissatisfaction and a yearning for change. Apparently, the seismic hormonal shifts around this age render women less maternal, less accepting and much more likely to embark on adulterous affairs and similar illicit liaisons. The motivation is excitement, fun and danger.

"A seasoned woman is spicy," writes Gail Sheehy, the over-50-and-proud author of 'Passage's and founder of the Seasoned Women's Network online. "She has been marinated in life experience. She is at the peak of her influence and power. She is committed to living fully and passionately in the second half of life, despite failures and false starts."

This is a great time to be a woman over forty. We are no longer obliged to be...anything. We are who we are with no questions asked. For a long time women who didn't marry were considered spinsters after a certain age. How often do you hear that word now? There is no longer a stigma about being single and it won't raise any eyebrows if you are 'dating' in your forties and beyond. A world of opportunities opens up when you turn 40. Today, there are entire web sites, companies, and services devoted to the over-40 demographic.

Look back at photographs of your grandmothers when they were around fifty years old. You'll be in for a shock. They appear to be so much older than their years. Yes, it's down to a combination of the accepted hairstyles, clothing and image of the day. But you just can't help wondering what suppressed longing, desires and yearning lay behind those stiffly composed faces in the photographs. They look so...resigned.

Today – women over 40 are just getting started.

The Big Secret to Losing Weight and Keeping it Off

Whether you're 45 or 75 it's never too late to start an exercise programme. Don't think in extremes – you do not need to emulate the fitness regime of a triathlete to see any results. You just have to move. See how much overall general activity (such as walking to the shops, cycling to work or gardening) you can incorporate into your day.
Have you ever seen a group of Rambler's Association Walkers in the UK on a weekend afternoon? The average age of the group is usually knocking on for sixty five and you will rarely witness a more agile and nimble lot in your life. Scrambling up inclines and snaking along coastal paths with ease. The activity has it all – open to all ages and abilities (mostly), easy socialising and the mood enhancing factors of beautiful scenery and all that fresh air.

Broadly speaking there are two main groups of exercisers. The grumpy gym-goers who tolerate their thrice weeky ritual and those who will happily don their trainers at the drop of a hat. The easiest way of moving from the former group into the latter is simply to find something that you enjoy doing. There are hundreds of activities on offer out there. I refuse to accept that you detest all of it. It reminds me very much of my aversion to cooking – I hate most of it but after really giving it some thought and experimentation I do kinda enjoy special occasion cooking. So, what's your 'special occasion' sport? I assure you that it's out there.
"Why exercise won't make you thin" by John Cloud is one of the top read articles on Time magazine's website. Is this because we desperately hope it will turn out to be true? That all that pumping iron, sweat and heaving lungs is in vain if

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we're hoping to lose weight? Then we're looking at this from the wrong angle; once you discover your favourite activity then you will look forward to it with pleasure rather than dread. It's the carrot and not the stick. Maybe at first it's simply the social aspects and group support that drives you to attend each session but in time as you get better at your chosen exercise and fitter – and you will – the accompanying feelings of achievement and well being will kick in as motivators too. Now you're on a roll.

It's around about this time of year that ladies thoughts turn to Christmas. To office parties, celebration meals and seasonal events and the remote possibilty of squeezing into that LBD. If we begin now, we figure, we just might pull it off. Great idea but the problem usually lies in how we interpret the word 'begin'. For most this means enduring a grim few months on the latest miracle diet followed by a blow out over the festive period. For the huge majority this would be the usual route of choice. Their actions would be well intentioned but they would be wrong. And herein lies the big secret to losing weight and keeping it off – and it's so important I'm going to hit the CAPS key – MAKE FITNESS – AND NOT WEIGHT LOSS – YOUR GOAL. And watch the numbers on that scale edge steadily down.

How Much do You need to Exercise to Lose Weight?

One of the most frequently asked questions I receive around weight loss and cardiovascular exercise is – "Can you please explain in simple terms how much I need to do?"
In order to lose weight you need to do one (or both) of two things:

1. burn more calories than you consume.
2. reduce the amount of calories that you consume.

A quick Google search will reveal that in order to lose one pound in body weight we must burn 3,500 more calories than we are consuming. Therefore, if we view this as a weekly objective and aim to create a 500 calorie deficit every day either by upping the exercise or cutting the food, we can shed around one pound in seven days. Absolutely right – but quite difficult to implement in real terms. There's no getting away from it - whether you're grimly resigned to sipping so-called 'diet' milkshakes or struggling to work out your ideal exercise plan – calorie counting sucks.

By far the most successful tactic is to concentrate on upping your energy expenditure by incorporating more physical activity into your lifestyle rather than relying solely on calorie counting. How frequently and intensely you exercise, as well as how long you work out, determines how much fat you burn. So let's look at the bare bones of this:

How often?

Exercise on most — at least five and preferably all — days of the week.

How hard?

Use the American Heart Association's 'conversational pace rule': if you can still just maintain a conversation whilst exercising, you're probably going at the right pace. If you can chat easily (as if sitting on the sofa), then you're probably not working hard enough. And if you cannot squeeze out a single word or if you have to keep stopping to take a breath or rest then you are working too hard and need to slow down. What about if you're out exercising alone? Just do the talk test by experimenting with a few encouraging words to yourself!

How long?

At least 30 minutes

And there you have it. Or do you? What if you've never worked out a moment in your life? What if you're still holding on to excruciating memories of school PE? Then those 30 minutes can seem downright daunting. The answer is to just begin. Do what you can to start with and when you can do more, stick with it. A little bit really can go a long way. Try exercising for 10 minutes today and add 5 minute increments until you work up to 30. The worst thing you can do is to feel so overwhelmed by the enormity of exercising for a full 30 minutes that you don't bother at all. 30 minutes may be ideal, but anything less is still beneficial. Do what you can for you. Any exercise is better than living the life of a full-time couch potato! One of the most sure-fire ways to give up on an exercise programme before you've even laced up your trainers is to make it so inconvenient and daunting that it's downright unachievable. Don't beat yourself up for not meeting someone else's idea of what is good enough.

Don't overdo it. Making sure that you don't over exercise is very important as too much exercise can result in more risk of injury as well as not reaching your weight loss goals as quickly. You must have some days to rest and recuperate. The worst thing you can do when starting out is to get burned out. Committing to a lengthy workout every day without any time off is an easy way for this to happen. Experiment and you will find what is right for you.

There is no one size fits all when it comes to how much is enough exercise. There is no miracle supplement to melt away excess weight and the latest 'easy' diet will always be far from it.

Keeping fit is a choice, a decision and a lifetime commitment to living your best possible life.

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Beat the Plateau

Blood, sweat and tears. You made a plan and stuck to it. You exercised til you (and your whole body) cried and forget the mere 5 a day – you're a walking juicing machine. So why has your weight loss screeched to a devastating, grinding halt? You've hit a plateau and you're bereft. Do not retire to bed with a tub of cookies and a DVD. Your body is an amazing piece of kit which quickly gets used to new dietary habits and exercise routines. You need to keep presenting it with renewed challenges. Simply persevere with a few tweaks to your plan and the plateau will go away eventually. Consistent variety is the key to a successful weight-loss program. Go ahead and confuse your body!
Plateaus happen, they are common so expect them - but unless resolved, most people simply discontinue their workout regimens. Here's what to do:

1. Take a honest look at what you're eating.

You may have cut all junk food from your diet but – it's not fair I know – you can still take in too many calories from healthy foods. Healthy does not equate with 'all you can eat'. It's misleading. If you're sure your diet is tip top healthy then remember to only eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full.

2. Do not overcut calories

Starving yourself in an attempt to blitz a plateau may work short term but you risk inducing a counter-binge and completely messing up your metabolism. We're in this for the long term, right?

3. Vary your exercise

If you're currently swimming for cardiovascular benefits then try jogging. Or cycling. Mix it up. Vary speed, duration and frequency. If you do the same activity every day, your body will become accustomed to it and will gradually be able to perform the task without expending as much energy. By trying a new sport, fitness class or outdoor activity, you will challenge your body to work even harder. In addition, new activities allow you to cross train, reducing your chance of injury or burnout.

Add to your potential calorie burn by paying attention to your muscles. Begin a light weight training programme and over time your body will look leaner and more defined as well as being a more efficient calorie burner. If you are motivated by working towards definite goals (and who isn't) then find and enter a local challenge such as one of the upcoming Christmas fun runs. It will give you focus, purpose and a whole lot of new friends on the day. Not to mention the chance to wear a set of antlers.

4. Take up a new hobby

No, not fell walking or basketball – something non-physical (unless you love exercise more than anything else!) that interests and absorbs you to the extent that you forget about your 'plateau' obsession, diverts your attention from food and gives you great pleasure. Only you will know what that is. For me it would be joining a book club or studying a new subject such as aromatherapy.

5. Don't give up!

I know you feel frustrated and hopeless and just like giving up. Channel all of this emotion into constructive energy and pour it into creating your new plan incorporating some or all of the advice above. Then stick to this new programme for at least three weeks before thinking of tweaking again. Don't flit about you'll be gleefully sliding down from that stubborn plateau in no time.

Feeling or Fuming?

What springs to mind when you hear the word prejudice? Perhaps an association with skin colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion? What about obesity prejudice? Society places a premium on fitness and (although not always accurate) we invariably equate this with slimness. We see fit people as committed, disciplined and hard-working and the flipside of this is that the overweight are viewed as lazy and lacking in self control. This attitude generates enormous prejudice in the workplace, especially when it comes to opportunities for promotion and especially for women.
Very recently we have seen airlines toying with controversial plans to impose excess charges on individuals over a certain body weight along with debates on whether the obese should be entitled to medical treatment for illnesses deemed to have developed as a consequence of their condition.

So what's new? You follow the news, you know all this. Listen up. What has really grabbed my attention recently is reports of public opinion on the subject. Overall, do we sympathise with the obese in our society? Are we planning to fight their corner on these sensitive and potentially divisive issues? No, we are not. We are hopping mad when they call in sick at work, we can't resist casting a critical eye over their shopping baskets and, if truth be known, we are even loathe to accept a table in a restaurant next to an overweight individual. Shocking stuff.

And the most vehemently vocal in the anti-obesity arena are...the previously overweight. If they can grit their teeth, knuckle down and shed the weight then, they figure, everybody can. Those who choose not to are simply lazy, greedy and deserve the critiscism. And – a piece of advice here – if you are currently struggling with your excess weight, don't say it's because you don't have time to address it. To a successful slimmer (who did make time) this is tantamount to saying that you are busier or that your time is more important than theirs.

One school of thought suggests a biological basis for our negative reaction to excess weight. The theory goes that

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in its role as super protector in ensuring our survival, our subconscious mind may perceive obesity as a threat; as a sign of disease, as something contagious. Our primitive human survival mechanism is alerted by anything out of the norm and when in doubt about the level of threat will always err towards over reaction rather than complacency. So, when presented with obesity the signal could be: reject and run. Preposterous, grossly unfair and cruel? Maybe but, if true, this reaction is inbuilt, genetic and thereby largely unavoidable. Obesity is not.

So how about you? When you see someone grossly obese sitting at a burger place shoving fries in their mouth are you sympathetic? Or disgusted?

A Bit of Positive Negative Thinking

How many times have you been told that in order to lose weight you must embrace the power of positive thinking? This is true – to a point. US philosopher William James once declared "The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind." What this means is that you can if you believe you can. Do you believe that you can lose weight? Do you believe that you can lose weight and keep it off? Now that's an entirely different question which requires an entirely different plan.
I would say that the most successful slimmers adopt a daily policy of feeling good for as much and as long as they can...along with facing the likely roadblocks inevitable along the way. Positive people with a sprinkling of negativity. The key is to acknowledge the negative aspects of your weight loss journey but to focus predominantly on the positive. And so it is with my company Slim Focus – to experience success you must concentrate singlemindedly on the benefits of where you want to go or how you want to be (in this case, slim). What's in it for you?

In order to lose weight, this is what you must do:

1. Absolutely believe you can
2. Absolutely admit that it won't all be plain sailing

3. Absolutely design a plan of attack and just get on with it.

And start off with some positive negative thinking (if you follow my drift):

1. All the affirmations in the world won't matter a jot until you face the fact that your eating behaviours, habits and choices must change if you are to change your body weight. Have you ever found yourself fork at the ready hovering over another cupcake whilst affirming yourself as a slim, vital person? You won't be the first one. So take a long, hard look at all your destructive patterns – and install new ones. Just like that.

2. If you've always hated exercise then you need a drastic rethink on how to incorporate lots more movement into your day. Because, no question, it has to be done. Just stating 'It will be different this time' changes nothing.

3. You are overweight because you eat more than your body requires. Not because of your genes, your metabolism, your job or because 'people like you' always struggle with weight issues. Face up to your excuses and ditch them.

4. This latest 'Ben and Jerry's diet' that everybody is raving about is not your answer. Never has been, never will be.

In order to move valiantly forward focusing on your positive vision you cannot take all your baggage with you. You must leave lots of it behind. Have several clutterbusting sessions until you feel less burdened by your old food and exercise habits.

So, before you succumb to yet another frenzy of positive thinking, remember that many times, the reason why we don't succeed is that we really don't believe that we can do it. This is the sort of negative thinking that we MUST change right at the outset.

The Winning Habits of Successful Losers

Ninety-five percent of all dieters gain the all weight back. And more. For all the multitude of weight loss diets, pills, plans and gadgets there are even more depressing reports reminding us that absolutely nothing seems to work over the long term for about 19 out of 20 people who try them.

Yet we persist. We are dogged in our determination to find the magic bullet out there which will finally allow us to live in peace with our alarmingly yo-yoing body weight. "Several studies indicate that regular dieting is actually a consistent predictor of future weight gain," said Janet Tomiyama, a UCLA graduate student of psychology. One study found that both men and women who participated in formal weight-loss programmes gained significantly more weight over a two-year period than those who had not participated in a weight-loss programme at all, she said.

There are some common factors shared by folks who are most likely to regain their weight. Not surprisingly lots of time spent in front of the television and computer is one of them. Losing too much weight too fast, either by fad or extreme dieting will dramatically increase the likelihood of rebellion and feelings of deprivation and triggers binges. And I would also add not having a compelling enough reason for wanting to stay slim. The unfortunate illusion for many is that a person can temporarily deprive him or herself and then, once having

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achieved the "right" weight, can go back to all the old habits that caused the person to gain the weight in the first place.
But what do successful weight maintainers have in common? Most dieters are very successful in actually sticking to their newly adopted plan and losing the weight. Any diet plan in the universe that results in you taking in less calories than your body requires to function will result in weight loss. It's what you do post-target weight that makes all the difference. If your 'diet' was too faddy or wacky then returning to eating 'normal' food is a challenge in itself. That's why the best eating plans are composed of the foods you will continue to eat for the rest of your life. Here are 5 behaviours commonly shared by successful maintainers:

1. Most are physically active and have made a decision to incorporate exercise permanently into their lives. We're not talking triathletes here – in fact one of the most common activities is walking.

2. They have a very positive approach to their revised lifestyle and feel liberated from the terrible ongoing anguish of constant dieting rather than feeling resentful.

They persist with any new healthy habit for long enough to see the benefits and over time it becomes easier to do than to avoid

4. They surround themselves with constant reminders of why they want to stay slim – often in the form of vision boards – and realise that constant vigilance (not dieting and not obsession) is the key to weight mastery.

5. They strive to create a life they love...which sees food slowly tumbling down their list of priorities.

Putting the massive dieting industry aside, we are starting to move in the right direction by advocating physical exercise and healthy eating whilst discouraging dieting. Lynn McAfee went on her first diet while still a baby. She says there is study after study showing that dieting doesn't work. "You can't just yell at us louder. That's not working," she says.

The Comfort Food Fallacy

Currently moving home, changing job or swapping partner? Then according to the latest research this may be the ideal time to embark on other lifestyle changes such as losing weight. Dr Stacy Wood of the University of South Carolina found that when people are in a state of upheaval, they are LESS likely to resort to traditional comfort foods and MORE open to trying something new and embracing change. This unexpected result could have interesting implications for governments currently battling the overwhelming obesity crisis.

People may be more open to starting a new exercise programme during times of crisis such as a recession "That's when people might be drawn naturally to different choices", says Wood "not when things are status quo, but when things are in a state of flux".

Prior to the study, the overwhelming consensus of market analysts was that consumers would turn to nostalgic comfort foods during economic recession. But no. Contrary to our expectations, comfort foods appear to be chosen more often when we're comfortable.

The theory was tested further with movies and music people with the result that people experiencing more change were less likely to choose old favourites. These studies suggest that we are automatically more open to new options in times of change and upheaval – when we may find ourselves adopting a "change mindset" - an ideal opportunity to break away from unhealthy comforts such as junk food.

There is an underlying sense of logic in this response. We all have our own closely guarded comfort zone(s) which differ from person to person and also depends on situation and past experience. A comfort zone is a type of mental conditioning in any area of life such as eating, exercise, career etc that causes a person to create and operate mental boundaries.

Such boundaries create an unfounded sense of security. When a person steps outside their comfort zone, they must inevitably experiment with new and different behaviours, which will provoke new and different responses within their environment.

Thus the comfort zone is expanded as the person becomes familiar with (and no longer fears) the newly imposed changes. Hence once we venture out of our comfort zone and step into the unknown then embracing further challenges to our self imposed limitations is usually much easier. So we apply for a new job that will challenge our perceived current ability. We get the job. We knuckle down and prove our capabilities - thus confidence soars.

Now we feel emboldened - we feel capable of taking on greater things. Shift an extra stone? No problem. Learn a new language. Absolutely. The message is simple; every time you challenge yourself and win - don't simply stop and bask in the glow of achievement but challenge yourself some more. Ask yourself "If I can do x, then maybe I can also do y and maybe, just maybe I can aim for z.

Why you need a Slimsystem

Have you ever decided on the spur of the moment to squeeze in an activity - something as ridiculously simple as a supermarket trip, for instance - which is normally far more effective with a little pre-planning? I'll wager that your purchases were erratic and disorganised (can you really make a meal out of anchovies

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and chocolate muffins?) your stress levels high and your wallet emptier than normal! Shopping needs a system in place, some prior menu planning, a list of necessary purchases and a pre-determined budget. It's very much the same with a weight loss plan. If you take the time to devise a functional 'Slimsystem' beforehand you are far more likely to see the desired results. What do I mean exactly? At the outset you need to address three things:

The what = the goal is to lose weight (and how much)
The why = the reason you're going to lose the weight
The how = the way(s) you will achieve the weight loss

And you need to address this in daily chunks.

Plan your morning. What will you eat for breakfast, at what time and will you exercise in this part of the day? If so, what will you do, at what time and for how long? How will you avoid those notoriously difficult times such as office coffee breaks or colleagues proffering biscuits?

Prepare your afternoon and evening plans in the same way. Don't baulk at this. Minute planning in this way is crucial when you are facing any major lifestyle change. Think of it as scaffolding on a crumbling building, providing the level of support required to hold up your fluctuating determination, resolve and levels of motivation.

I don't need to remind you of just how much time we all lose each day reading and responding to emails along with mindless web surfing. If you had a system in place that served you then this would not happen. Before you switch on your computer you need to know how much time you intend to allocate that morning to dealing with email etc. Then stick to it.

A Slimsystem is simply a pre-considered, highly detailed (some will say too onerous) written plan designed to support you constantly in your quest for a slimmer body. It saves you so much wasted time locked in indecision – you've already decided what you will do. Once you have a system in place, you will be able to clearly judge how well you're sticking to your plan along with what's NOT working for you . It then becomes much easier to see the way forward to develop even better ways of doing things or coming up with new routes to reaching your goal.

Your Slimsystem must be continually evolving and open to improvement, adaptation or even complete rewrite – if it's just not moving you towards achieving a slimmer, fitter body for whatever reason - then ditch it.

Do Large Numbers of Repeat Customers Mean that Your Business is Successful? Not if You're a Diet Agency

News is out this week that the Australian government is finally cracking down on the multi-million dollar weight-Loss industry in an attempt to tackle the burgeoning obesity crisis. Weight loss products will have to prove that their effects are long term – lasting 2 years in fact. Every month the numbers of such products emerging for sale continues to rise...and so does the nation's weight.
One diet agency at least confirmed that repeat customers comprise at least half of its clientele. THIS IS NOT A MARK OF SUCCESS. If there was a diet that worked (and I don't know of one) – you'd go on it, you'd lose weight. Job done. In fact we know that this NEVER happens. We undereat, we lose 10 pounds, we overeat, we gain 12 pounds. This is the stark reality for 95% of overweight people.

Dieting is big business. And everybody wants a slice. Due to our absolute refusal to accept the truth we are succoured into each new tantalising offering. We buy into it with our hopes and dreams inspired by a notion that we will be healthier, sexier, more shapely, more energetic and happier. The quest for the perfect body is for sale everywhere. And the advertising is powerful, tempting...and outrageously misleading. Don't think that the word 'natural' or 'herbal' equates with safety just because it occurs in nature or comes from plants. After all, many plants are poisonous!

Although herbal weight loss products are advertised as 'natural', they aren't necessarily natural to the human body. In the same way the label 'scientifically proven' or 'medically endorsed' doesn't mean the product actually works. There is no magic bullet. Pills and capsules promise to burn, block or flush fat from your body – with the reassurance of a money-back guarantee. Oh really? A quick internet search of real life case studies will reveal that you have as much chance of getting your money back as having the product do what it claims. The result of this brainwashing is the current epidemic of obesity, diabetes, cancer and heart disease in the Western world.

Nothing is more important than your health. Don't put your healthcare on hold until you have more time. You may not get it. It's when you are in the throes of a hectic career that taking care of yourself is more important than ever. Several years ago some of the richest people in the world were surveyed and asked: If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be...what would you do differently? The #1 answer was: I would take better care of myself. I would eat better, exercise more, and have less stress.

The mechanics of weight loss are strikingly simple.....less energy in...more energy out. Eat less, move more. Just commit

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to endless practice with your daily routine until you hit on a formula that works for you. Easy, you'd think. And it can be if you remember this: If you can't do what you did to shed the pounds for the rest of your life, then you can't maintain the weight loss.

Achieve Awesome Results with Your Own Personalised Wellness Programme - Part 2

Ready to finish the plan we started last week? Here goes.
Take tiny steps.

You've got your overall goal – to achieve a fit, healthy, strong and slim body but this is simply your destination. What you have to decide is how you're going to get there. Compare it to taking a trip from London to Paris. Your first step is to leave London and there are several ways you can choose to do this (by car, by train, by air...) along with different times you can set off and a plethora of route possibilities to consider. It's the same with improving fitness – in my last blog post I talked about the importance of knowing where you are on the map when you design your plan, of establishing exactly where you are right now. So let's just take a look at the fitness aspect of your wellness programme. Assuming you know your current fitness level – how will you go on to improve it – are you a gym bunny, a football fanatic or a would-be runner? Whatever you decide to do, you must schedule every little step involved in your daily planner. So it might read something like this:

Day Monday

Time 8am
30 minute session

Where - from home

What - 10 minute warm up brisk walk then a further 10 minutes of alternate jog 1 minute, walk 2 minutes. 5 minute cool down walk to finish

Day Wednesday

Time 6pm
30 minute session

Where - Swimming pool

What – practise slow crawl with lots of rest breaks

And so on. Baby steps.

Know what's not working.

Nothing in life goes smoothly from A to B without a few hitches along the way. As you begin to follow your wellness programme the important thing is not to feel a sense of failure when things don't go entirely according to plan. Don't get demoralised. If you find your beautifully designed exercise sessions really difficult to achieve then simply acknowledge that, right now, they are a little too challenging and then make some adjustments. It's not failure, it's feedback. It's very important that you experience success with your plans so if it's not working, then fix it.

Ditch the links.

You will find that certain habits and actions are not conducive to you sticking to your goals. They have to go. If you have in the past forged a habitual association between driving and snacking then I don't need to tell you that this may sabotage your dreams somewhat. Create a new association. Could you listen to plays or educational cd's in your car? If you do this often enough you will automatically reach for the audio button whenever you jump in the car.

Forget about the Jones.

Don't keep comparing yourself unfavourably to other people. Yes, the guy at the gym may be in better shape than you but the only difference between you and him is that he started on his plans earlier. And if you're five feet two inches with pale skin but long to be tall, dark and willowy like your neighbour then get real! The only barometer to compare yourself with is earlier versions of yourself. Look back to the days when you would get out of breath simply changing channels and marvel at how far you've come.

Incentivise.

Just as the boss of a company will often offer incentives to his staff in order to motivate them to reach for various targets, then you must do the same. What will be your reward if you stick to your programme for one month? For one week? Have substantial treats such as a spa visit along with smaller 'well done' tokens such as going to the movies.

Follow these ten steps and this may be the most successful route to fitness and health that you'll ever experience.

Achieve Awesome Results with Your Own Personalised Wellness Programme – Part 1

Everyone knows that the more a programme is attuned precisely to your individual needs and preferences, the more likely you are to see it through. So before you embark on yet another quest towards peak health and fitness – take some time out to design a bespoke plan.
Create a wellvision board.

Decide exactly what you want the end result to be - as Stephen Covey said 'Begin with the end in mind' and create a physical representation of this – make a wellvision board by collecting

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together as many visual images as you can find which portray what you are trying to achieve. For example a body shape you aspire to, a sport's trophy, a strong and healthy heart. Taking just a few minutes (even seconds) to look at these every day will provide a terrific daily boost to your motivation. Either roll up your sleeves and get busy with glue, card, scissors and a whole stack of magazines or open up a suitable programme on your computer and import images from the endless array available on the web.

Be brutally honest.

What's currently hampering your quest for a slim, heathy, fit physique? What obstacles always appear? Do you always fall short of your planned exercise sessions because you convince yourself that you're just too busy? Do you find it impossible to stay on track when eating out with friends? Yes – I know – they pressurise! Whatever your usual downfalls are then admit them, face them and make contingency plans. Decide in advance how you will react and what you will do when these situations crop up. And they will.

Have a weekly plan.

What specific actions are you going to take next Tuesday? Or Thursday? And how have you decided to overcome family pressure next Wednesday when you're all meeting up at that new Italian restaurant? I know it's tough to forego dessert when everyone else is pitching in but if you're truly committed to your wellness programme then if you're not hungry, if you're already feeling satisfied by this stage, then your body does not need any more food. You have to learn to cope in this sort of situation if you are determined to achieve great health. Very soon it will become second nature to decide if you're hungry before automatically scanning the puddings list. It does get easier. Refer to your plan regularly throughout the week and just follow it. To the letter.

Keep a diary.

No, not one of those punishing food diaries but a record of your progress, your feelings, your successes and your challenges. Most importantly, make a note of anything that really helps you to stay on track. Maybe you found on one occasion that grabbing your ipod and launching out the door for a brief, brisk walk was just enough to get you over a sudden and overwhelming craving for ice cream. Make a note of it – before long you will have a personalised record of solid tactics that you know for sure work for you.

Know where you are on the map.

In order to change any aspect of your lifestyle and begin to move ahead you need to know exactly where you are right now. Where are you in terms of current fitness level? Do you already jog three times a week and swim with the kids on Sundays or is your current level of exercise absolutely zilch? Do you mostly make healthy choices when it comes to food or is your diet loaded with high levels of sugar and fat?

Part two coming up...

Better to Slob-Out, than to Work-Out?

Ever since John Cloud shared his controversial viewpoint in last week's edition of Time I've been hooked on the resultant backlash. In 'Why Exercise Won't Make You Thin' John revealed his belief that if we truly want to shed the pounds, we may be far better advised to slob out, than to work out.
Aside from all the well established and accepted benefits of a physically active lifestyle in warding off a whole plethora of medical ills – could John have a point when it comes to simply looking at the effect of exercise on weight loss? Here's my take on it.

The mood boost generated by exercise also boosts commitment and resolve. It's well known that in order to successfully achieve any goal, you must remain positive and feel as good as you can as often as you can. It's so much easier to stay motivated if you feel excited and are generally looking forward to your day. You can learn to be a happy person. Decide to be happy from now on. Very few downbeat souls manage to change any thing in their life. Struggle does not give you results.

Interestingly, John hates exercise. So of course it's a chore. It's imperative to find something we actually like doing – even just a little bit at the beginning because oftentimes as you become more competent, you'll get to like it a whole lot more. If you dread each session then I guess it's easier to reach for the calorie laden foods afterwards in a rebellion. Well, don't you deserve a little reward after going through all that? If this sounds like you then not only is your exercise programme entirely out of kilter – so is your mindset.

Contrary to John's experience of increased post exercise hunger, I find that the huge majority of people experience a drop in appetite after an exercise session – however, I do hold my hands up when it comes to swimming which for some reason invariably makes us ravenous! John says " After we exercise, we often crave sugary calories like those in muffins or in sports drinks like Gatorade". Maybe. But we can train ourselves not to.

There's a bit of confusion here about willpower and mumblings of self control. John says "Many people assume that weight is mostly a matter of willpower – that we can learn both to exercise and to avoid muffins and gatorade". Achieving a fabulous physique has very little to do with will power and self control and a lot to do with belief and desire. Burning desire. If you truly believe that exercise will help with your weight loss goals and you develop a burning desire to reach them then there's simply no way you'd reach for the muffins as well. Job done.

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Whether you believe you can or believe you can't, you're absolutely right. Henry Ford.

Why do You Turn to Food?

Don't overlook the power of this simple, light-hearted quiz (no digging deep) as your answers will reveal fairly accurately your reasons for turning to food.

1. When you were a child...

a. If I was good, I was often rewarded with food
b. My family always shared mealtimes together

c. My mother controlled and restricted my portions

2. What is your attitude to food and eating?

a. When I'm miserable I tend to comfort myself with food
b. Most times I only eat when I'm hungry

c. I constantly monitor my eating and exercise regimes

3. If you find you've lost some weight...

a. I treat myself...usually with food
b. I treat myself by shopping/buying myself some non-food treat

c. I try even harder next week!

4. Given a choice between a tiny amount of one of your favourite foods or a larger portion of another 'healthy' food what would you opt for?

a. My favourite food because I often forbid it
b. Can I have both?

c. The larger portion – I would still be hungry after a tiny amount of food

5. You've had one of those really stressful days at work. Afterwards do you...

a. Walk through the front door and aim straight for the fridge
b. Go for quick snacks – and try and keep them healthy

c. Rack the music up, take a bath, watch a movie...

6. Life is good at the moment. How do you react?

a. I eat
b. I generally eat less when I'm happy

c. My eating patterns don't change much

7. Happiness is...

a. My favourite foodie treats
b. Being with friends and family, an empty beach, a great book...

c. Knowing I have my life under control

Mostly a's

Emotional Eater

You have assigned far too much power to food in your life than it deserves. For you it is much more than fuel – it is a calming device. The first action for you is to experiment with other forms of comfort or reward in order to convince yourself that there are many effective ways to restore the status quo.

Mostly b's

Relaxed Eater

You have a healthy relationship with food. However you're liable to be tempted into mindless snacking and may find that the pounds creep slowly on. Find a compelling enough reason for maintaining a slim, healthy body and you will!

Mostly c's

Controlled Eater

You possess lots of willpower and take pride in your ability to exert control over your life. People may often describe you as driven. You refuse to compromise your high standards. This can be a great recipe for success but just be sure to build enough relaxation and fun activities into your days.

Whatever category you find yourself in – remember – do not resort to dieting as for every period of food deprivation there is ALWAYS the eventual rebellion in the form of uncontrolled and excessive eating (the binge). Find a compelling enough reason to achieve or maintain your body ideal and then provide yourself with constant reminders of your 'why' – there's a whole host of highly effective tools out there from vision boards, affirmations, visualisation, motivational cd's – find whatever works for you and look at it, listen to it or imagine it as often as you can.

How to Deal with the Dream Snatchers

You know the feeling. As soon as you announce your plans to lead a healthier lifestyle they come crawling out of the

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woodwork. The dream snatchers. The people who, for reasons maybe not really even known to themselves, trash your plans, stamp on your vision and destroy your still fragile confidence. They rain (nay, pour) on your parade. Why? Well, it's usually for one of two main reasons:
1. Fear of the unknown

People are threatened by your plans to change. They know you, the entity (albeit overweight) of you is reassuring, comforting and consistent. People crave certainty. What will happen if you emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon? Who knows?

2. Concern...for themselves

Your drive to create a different life for yourself is mighty unsettling. It dumps a great, big question mark over everyone around you and prompts them to examine their own life choices and often opens up the disturbing possibility that the life they currently have is not the one they want.

"You're going to lose a stone? You'll never do that! You know you love your food – and you'll have to exercise. Oh, you won't stick to that. You know the weight always goes back on. Why put yourself through the misery?" Why, indeed.

How on earth can you handle all this barrage of resistence and stay on track with the exciting yet challenging plans you have for yourself? First of all, be very selective about sharing your plans. If you suspect that someone will react badly then you're probably right so – don't tell them. At least, not at first. You see once you put your plan into action, once you start to experience weight loss, increased fitness levels and vitality then of course it will become obvious to those around you that 'something's going on here'. However, now your plans will have momentum, results and direction and the dream snatchers will have a much harder task of deflecting you. From fragile to fabulous.

There are certain instances when selectively sharing your plans can be beneficial. We often experience heightened commitment towards our goals when we are accountable. You've told 'em so they'll be watchin'! Great idea – just avoid choosing a dream snatcher as your confidante! You know (or strongly suspect) who they are.
And if you're one of those people who simply loves to prove others wrong then letting a dream snatcher in on your secret may actually work in your favour. If their endless protestations stoke up your fires of motivation and resolve – then, by all means, use them!

Just make your plan, make a start and make a life. So – shhh – just between you and me – what are you up to?

Would You Lose or Gain Weight for Money?

It's every serial dieters nightmare – having a job which actually required you to gain and lose pounds at the click of a director's fingers. Renee Zellweger gained roughly 28 pounds for each of the Bridget Jones movies and now she's about to do it again for a third time. There are even whispers of a possible pregnancy for this next movie – just how much weight is Renee expected to pile on?
Many women are curious about how to fluctuate their weight in this same way. To pile on the pounds Zellweger reportedly stopped working out and forced herself to eat when not hungry in the slightest. I know that many women would be terrified at tampering with their body in this way – fearing that once they became accustomed to ignoring natural body signals then they'd never be able to stop. Pigging out on all your favourite high fat foods may sound like fun but the junk food and lack of exercise made Zellweger feel sluggish and she joked of her body "It doesn't know what has happened because it thinks there's supposed to be a baby and there's no christening." She also had a tough (if pampered) time in losing the weight; post-filming Zellweger can obviously benefit from the luxury of the best trainers and spas offering daily exercise and carefully controlled meals...and the hefty fee per film must be a serious boost to motivation.

Interestingly we can apparently be motivated to lose weight by the promise of a lot less than Zellwegers reported $6 million per movie. In the past employers have offered cash, gift cards and even cruises to employees who take steps to get in shape. Not surprisingly, research demonstrates that companies can save huge amounts of money if their employees are healthy and that healthy employees are more productive. A town in Italy also once offered euros to encourage its residents to drop the pounds. And it works – to a degree. Many people are reward-driven – the positive benefits of building treats and the like into a proposed exercise programme is well documented. People will go for that run on Monday and Wednesday if their diary promises a massage reward on Friday. It's interesting that the simple rewards of much improved health and fitness just never seem to cut it for many people. When you're thirty years old the thought of staying trim and pounding the streets in order to prevent health problems in middle age just doesn't work. The link up is just too tenuous.

So, how about you. Would you lose or gain weight for money? And should we be offering cash incentives to encourage weight loss in our increasingly overweight population?

And as for Renee – if it wasn't for all the flesh-baring in big knickers as Bridget – surely she could just insist on a fat suit.

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