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DEVELOP A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD &
REACH YOUR NATURAL WEIGHT WITHOUT DIETING



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THE
BODY
LOVE
MANUAL

ELIZABETH 'LILY' HILLS

Stop Yo-Yo Dieting and Learn How to
Love the Body You Have & Attain and
Maintain Your Healthiest Weight!

The Body Love Manual

***How to Love the Body You Have as You Create
the Body You Want****

by

Elizabeth “Lily” Hills

2020 Kindle Edition

<http://www.LilyHills.com/>

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Winner USA Book News National Best Books
Award – Health, Diet and Weight Loss!

Finalist Foreword Magazine's Self Help Book of
the Year!



What Others are Saying About The Body Love Manual...

“A work of monumental importance to modern women everywhere.”

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By gently leading you beyond gain and loss to an awareness of you loving essence this book, *The Body Love Manual*, can change your life. I highly recommend it. –

Dr. Leonard Laskow, *Author of Healing With Love*

“This is the best book I have read on weight loss and body image. Lily knows from which she speaks, and I thought as I read it, "She gets it!" She has discovered a loving way to deal with the issue, which is both simple and transformative. She also speaks to you as your body, to give you a perspective on what you are doing to yourself. We all know "diets don't work", and this is not another diet book.”

Kathrine, *Amazon Review*

“*The Body Love Manual*, singled out by USA Book News in the health category, is filled with concrete suggestions and practices that, if followed even only in part, will help those,

as its subtitle suggests, “love the body” they have and “create the body” they want.”

Leslie Katz – The San Francisco Examiner

“A must have book for mastering your inner power, and applying your “unlimited potential.”

Mindquest Reviews

Note to readers.... Don't forget to check out the free gifts and additional resources referred to at the end of the book or go to www.LilyHills.com

The Body Love Manual

How to Love the Body You Have as You Create the Body
You Want

By Elizabeth “Lily” Hills

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Disclaimer

This book is intended as a guide to understanding natural and non-compulsive eating, not as a medical manual. It is not intended as a substitute for any treatment that may have been prescribed by your doctor. Consult your medical practitioner before beginning this or any new eating program, especially if you are dealing with an illness of any kind. As I am not a medical professional, or doctor, I am making recommendations based upon a set of lifestyle practices that have allowed me to overcome a compulsive relationship with food and achieve my healthy and natural weight and I am not offering medical care, advice or treatment of any sort.

<http://www.TheMindfulEatingMethod.com/>

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Dedication

To all of the loving and gentle people I have met on my life journey who have helped me to find a loving and gentle voice within myself. I am the woman I am today because you touched my life.

“The single greatest contribution you can make to this world is to know, appreciate, respect and love yourself, exactly as you are today.”

–Anonymous

Introduction

Our Story

What Happens When We Don't Love Our Body

Do you ever feel like you can't stop eating, even when you *really* want to? Do you find yourself eating large portions of food that you're really not hungry for and then beating yourself up for your lack of willpower? Have you been trying to lose weight for so many years you've lost count? Is a huge amount of your self-esteem connected to what you weigh? Do you find yourself ashamed of your body, even sometimes resentful of it? Have you been so desperate to conquer your food and body image issues that, short of walking down a crowded street completely naked, you would do just about *anything* else to be rid of the obsession?

I can relate *intimately*. For well over a decade of my life, I had a compulsive relationship with food that dominated my thoughts virtually every waking moment. I was utterly addicted, plagued beyond comprehension by overwhelmingly powerful urges to eat far more than I was truly hungry for. I could hardly go a few moments without thinking food-related thoughts, such as:

“I ate too much.”

“When can I eat again?”

“Is this bread allowed on my diet?”

“I’ll start my diet tomorrow, and I’ll have that pizza now.”

Anyone who has experienced it knows that thinking obsessively about food gets old...fast. It is incredibly tiring, stressful and depressing. Additionally, my mind was all too often fixated on a never-ending loop of thoughts that were highly toxic:

“I look terrible.”

“I’ll never lose weight.”

“I have no self-control.”

“I hate myself.”

“I wish I had a body like that girl.”

This obnoxious tape of debilitating thoughts played over and over in my mind, and I felt totally powerless to stop it.

My unrelenting focus on the same obsessive, disempowering thoughts took a big chunk of the joy out of every day. While still a happy and fulfilled person in many other ways, I knew my compulsion with food was a giant barrier to my true potential for happiness.

I ate for a *huge* variety of reasons, very few of which were related to being truly physically hungry. My binges were misguided and futile attempts to make myself feel better, to feed emotional hungers for greater levels of love, appreciation, fulfillment, affection, excitement, peace, connection and happiness. I also ate because I was avoiding my uncomfortable feelings, especially worry, frustration, confusion, fear, boredom and insecurity. Food was my sole stress management tool. My compulsive eating was an attempt to shut out the negative and sometimes downright mean “voice” in my head, the one that was making me feel bad by picking on me:

“You didn’t get enough done today.”

“Your thighs are too big.”

“You are not good enough.”

Or getting me to worry about something that might or might not happen in the future:

“You’re not going to make it on time.”

“You’ll never get it all done.”

“Something might go wrong.”

I tried to escape the discomfort created by this negative internal dialogue not just by eating, but also by zoning out in front of the television, or shopping, or cleaning or overworking. When I was alone and I *really* allowed myself to take a good hard look at how I was living my life, without any of my usual distractions, I would get deeply depressed. As I didn't like feeling sad and dejected, I'd quickly return to my default distractions so I could numb myself to my inner turmoil once again.

Having anesthetized myself through food for so long, I became increasingly unwilling to face and feel some of my intense feelings of worry and insecurity. Just as with avoiding paying bills, the longer I delayed dealing with my emotions, the larger the “fees” I paid. At the time, it was much easier for me to sneak an extra snack, or five, to quiet the uneasy feelings that were making me want to escape my body than it was to dig in and deal with them directly. I didn't even know where a lot of these uncomfortable feelings originated. What I did know is that if I denied myself food when I wanted to eat, I felt high anxiety, which is why I didn't often resist eating for long. Like a friend, food provided solace when I was stressed or fearful, entertainment when I was bored, and a welcome distraction when I was overwhelmed or confused.

In addition to my extensive laundry list of excuses to binge, I also ate because I was depressed over having gained so much excess weight. Although admittedly eating did give me a *temporary* break from my uncomfortable feelings, the distressingly tight clothing that was a consequence of all those binges gave me another reason to feel bad about myself—and another reason to eat. So I ate more and more, until I couldn't take another bite, until my stomach protruded painfully, and I'd swear to myself for the umpteenth time that this was my *very last binge*. It was the classic, ugly vicious cycle.

My weight fluctuated erratically for twelve years. I felt ashamed of my body because it looked so disproportionate to me, so different than I wanted it to look, so unlike the cultural ideal of slenderness I saw in magazines, movies and virtually every other media channel. As the number I saw on my bathroom scale went up, my sense of self-worth plummeted. During this period of my life, it was rare for me to appreciate and value any of my other qualities—my sense of humor, my loving heart, my intelligence or my creative talent. All of these qualities became secondary in comparison to my weight. I believed the voice in my head that often told me that *who* I was wasn't nearly as important as what I weighed. I had no idea I could ignore that voice if I wanted to, or even silence it altogether.

On top of being angry with myself for what I perceived as my lack of self-control, I was also incredibly angry with my body. I believed it was my body's fault that I had gained so much weight. I felt it had betrayed me by "making" me eat, and so it became the chief target of my hostility. It never occurred to me that my body was the victim of the emotional appetites I was attempting to feed with food. I didn't know that my body was a physical expression of the turmoil I carried deep inside. Each time I looked in the mirror and saw evidence of what I believed were my physical flaws, I blamed my body for it, relentlessly picking out all the ways it didn't live up to my expectations. The remorse and dislike for what I saw when I looked in the bathroom mirror only further eroded my self-esteem.

In my desperation to "get my old body back," the healthy and athletic one I'd taken for granted when I was a teenager, I tried every weight-reduction method imaginable. I gained and lost hundreds of pounds over the years, trying so many diets and diet products that I could officially be listed in The Dieter's Hall of Fame. Sticking to a restricted diet of any kind was incredibly difficult for me. When I did manage to stay on one, I'd end up losing a few pounds, but none of the weight ever stayed off for long. Rather it came back at warp speed, along with a few extra bonus pounds.

After umpteen unsuccessful efforts to lose weight through dieting, I had to begrudgingly admit to myself that diets

were not working for me. In fact, I finally realized that they seemed to be working *against* me. The question that then plagued me was, “Well, if diets *don’t* work, what the \$#%@&* does?”

Out of sheer anguish, I embarked upon a personal experiential research project in which I was the guinea pig, to discover, once and for all, the healthiest, most effective and most enjoyable way to lose excess weight...and keep it off. I threw myself into the research unreservedly, reading anything I could get my hands on that I thought might help me to meet my goal of “losing” extra weight. (I now refer to it almost exclusively as “releasing” excess weight because “losing” anything doesn’t sound as empowered or appealing.) I surfed the net for information, sought the help of a therapist, attended dozens of seminars, joined support groups and started working with a personal coach. I was relentless, voracious and passionate in my quest. I even went so far as to approach people in passing who were in great shape to find out their secret to looking so fit.

After all the data was in, I was surprised to find out that it was my body, the one I had been judging so harshly for so many years, that would provide the key to releasing all of the weight I had gained through overeating! It was an epiphany that served me powerfully. Ironically, my *lack* of awareness of its extraordinary value had prevented me from understanding that my body could offer me far more

wisdom than I'd ever find in any diet book. I realized I'd been drowning out the one qualified voice that could lead me directly to my natural, ideal weight. So I began to listen.

As I reviewed my own history in terms of my relationship with my body, it became obvious to me that my progressive judgments toward my body paralleled the intensity of my compulsion with food. I was far more likely to want to eat a candy bar (or twenty) after looking in the mirror and judging my appearance harshly. When I was *mentally* down, I was far more likely to *chow* down. In other words, the more I judged my body *and* myself for overeating, the more I ate and the more weight I gained. Judging myself in order to get motivated to lose weight was like shooting myself in the foot before the finals of a dance competition. It was supremely foolish, destructive and self-sabotaging.

The realization that “Body Judgment = Compulsive Eating” didn't come as a complete surprise, but somehow breaking it down to this simple equation deepened my understanding of what I needed to do to break the cycle. If I wanted to achieve my natural weight, the weight at which I would experience optimum health and energy, the *first* thing I had to do was stop judging my body, and myself, so unfairly and unkindly.

It took me a long time to stop judging my body and even longer to start loving it. I didn't have a “body love manual”

to follow, and my long-standing belief that I was most attractive when I was super-lean was deeply imbedded. But I stayed committed to treating my body in a more loving way (exercising, choosing predominantly healthy foods, taking vitamins, getting enough rest and limiting my negative thoughts about it), and consequently my emotional appetites diminished and excess weight began to disappear.

With each passing year, I have reached deeper levels of friendship with my body. It no longer feels like a huge burden, but rather an extraordinarily generous gift from the Universe. Instead of repeatedly experiencing daily food hangovers that leave me feeling sick and exhausted, my body now feels healthy, excited, energetic and alive. And that, my friend, is what is in store for you!

I have maintained my natural weight for over ten years now, with only minor fluctuations. This feels phenomenal. What feels even *better*, however, is the fact that I live free from my intense compulsion around food. On a scale of 1 to 10, I would say that my compulsion was once at a 10 plus, and it is now a mere .05. I wake up in the morning without immediately thinking of eating, or of the boring foods I am restricted to on the latest diet I am trying, or how self-conscious I am about my how my body looks. I no longer have the urge to binge eat, having finally learned how to nurture myself and breathe through difficult feelings. I thoroughly enjoy eating without feeling guilty or worried that I'm going

to return to my old compulsive eating patterns. I couldn't eat at that old level of compulsion even if I wanted to. Now *that's* the ultimate freedom!

Understandably, after my long and painful struggle with compulsive eating and body shame, the connected, accepting and appreciative relationship I have with my body today is a deeply treasured gift. The time I have devoted to loving my body has provided me with benefits far above and beyond reaching my natural weight. Perhaps most importantly, I have learned to value myself independent of how I look, and I am experiencing peace and happiness on levels I didn't know were available to me.

The Body Love Manual will support you as you begin to shift from being critical of your body *and* yourself, to being deeply appreciative. So that you too can know joy every day, I'm going to share with you *everything* I have learned on my road to recovery. Every perspective, practice and habit that helped me to overcome body rejection and compulsive overeating is now yours.

I recommend taking your time as you read *The Body Love Manual*, putting it down periodically and giving yourself time to digest the material offered. It is a book to be revisited again and again, and each time you do so, new insights will come to you.

As we take this journey together, you will learn, as I did, that your body has a language all its own and it communicates to you through your physical *feelings*. You will, with practice, start to decipher your own body's unique language, the specific ways it conveys its limits, needs and preferences to you. As you learn to recognize its specific signals for “hungry” and “satisfied” and to honor those signals consistently, you will naturally release your excess weight without dieting, obsessive exercise, counting calories, taking appetite suppressants or denying yourself *any* of your favorite foods.

I call eating in synchronicity with your physical hunger “*Eating in Alliance*” with your body. There are ten practices in the *Eating in Alliance* program. Following these practices allowed me to overcome my compulsive relationship with food and achieve my natural weight, without dieting or denying myself any of the foods that I love (yeah)! If you follow the guidelines offered in this book, it won't be a question of *if* you are going to achieve your ideal weight; rather it will be a question of *when*.

There will be recommendations for healthy ways to reconnect with your body throughout the book. Experiment with all of them, choose the ones that feel right for you and leave the others behind, for now. You are a unique individual, and ultimately you will add your own stamp of originality to

your journey to body love by defining, through experimentation, the specific combination of practices that will allow you to experience peace with food, your body and yourself.

I also offer a thirty-day program in which you can partner with another person who is struggling with their relationship with food so that you can team up and expedite your own healing process. It is not required that you have a partner to work the program. Although it is undeniably easier, it is not a mandatory component. Rather it is an additional asset that will support your intention to reconnect with your body and achieve your natural weight.

Learning to love my own body, and in equal measure, myself, has supported me in creating not only a healthy, beautiful body but also a life that has exceeded my greatest dreams. Through my life experience, I have come to know that love, in its many forms, is the strongest force on earth. If you focus that powerful force on your body, you will break through the confines of food compulsions and body shame and free yourself to experience all the joy life offers. You deserve it. We all do. My intention is to support you in embracing and loving your body, as well as yourself, so that you can live your life in *tremendous* joy with a much greater realization of the sacred and loveable being you are. Welcome to the first page of the rest of your life.

I feel privileged to be a part of your journey.

Lily

“Nothing in the world arouses more false hope than the first four hours of a diet.”

–Anonymous

Chapter 1

The Diet Deception

Why Diets Do Not Work!

As I look back on the battle I waged against my body, I have a lot of regrets. One of the biggest is that I subjected my body to an *endless* succession of futile and ineffective diets. Crazy, unhealthy fad diets and “doctor recommended” diets, I tried them all. It took me over a decade to discover what every veteran dieter knows: diets don’t work.

These are not the bitter rantings of a woman who couldn’t stick to a diet (although Lord knows I couldn’t). It is a confirmed fact. Diets fail *ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of the time*. And by fail, I mean that although you may lose weight *initially*, you will inevitably gain it back, and most of us will pick up a few extra pounds along the way. Research indicates that only ten percent of dieters keep the weight off for two years, and just *two* percent keep the weight off for seven years. More than 26,000 diet methods have been

published since the 1920s, and yet, with *extremely* rare exception, none provide more than a temporary weight loss. That should be *more* than enough proof that diets are ineffective, and yet the diet mania persists. The fact that diets work *temporarily* is a big part of the problem. Dieters get hooked on the high of their short-term weight loss and this high keeps them coming back again and again *in spite* of the fact that they almost always regain the weight...and then some.

Not only are diets not *helpful*, they are also often tremendously *harmful* in terms of both your emotional and physical well-being. Knowing what I now know after studying and participating in every diet that crossed my desperate path for over a decade, I believe with all of my being that, just as there are health warnings from the Surgeon General on every package of cigarettes, there should be a warning label attached to every diet program which should read: “Danger: Diets are almost always ineffective for long-term weight loss, can create additional weight gain, a deep dive in self-esteem, a hugely compulsive relationship with food and, all too frequently, a full-blown compulsive eating disorder.

I know how emotionally debilitating and dangerous dieting can be from my own painful experience. My unhealthy relationship with food and with my body began my senior year in high school when I went on a diet for the very first time.

Prior to then, my relationship with food had been normal and healthy. As a child and throughout most of my teenage years, I ate when my body told me to; I stopped when I felt full, and I rarely thought about food unless I was physically hungry. I ate any and every food that appealed to me, and my energy levels, weight and overall health were great.

While I can't say I loved my body the way I do today, back then I truly liked my body and appreciated how it looked.

In my early teens, as my interest in boys developed, I became more preoccupied with how it would appear to others. Like any typical teenager, my desire to be attractive to the opposite sex intensified. *Seventeen* magazine, which I used to devour whenever I got my hands on it, featured *exceptionally* lean young models and almost *always* included the most recent diet trend. Although no one came right out and said it, I still got the message loud, clear and in stereo: Thin was beautiful, sexy and desirable. I didn't see any full-figured girls in the magazine, so the assumption I made was that full figures were simply not as attractive as lean ones.

As I was slowly indoctrinated into this cultural perspective, I started stepping on the scale every day to make sure I wasn't putting on extra pounds. A mild, but slowly escalating paranoia started to develop, but my weight stayed steady throughout high school, up until my senior year. At that time, many of my friends were already dieting, or at least closely watching what they ate. Boneless, skinless

chicken breasts, fruit, vegetables and green salads with low-fat dressing or no dressing at all, became staple meals for many of them. At just over five feet, six inches and weighing in at one hundred sixteen pounds, I had no legitimate need to worry about my weight. But because there was so much emphasis on being thin at my school, within my own family, among many of my friends, and in American culture at large, I gradually found myself joining the ranks of those who were overly obsessed with being thin.

I remember with total clarity the circumstances that prompted me to go on my very first diet. It was almost at the end of my senior year and a handsome, sweet college freshman named Peter had asked me out on a date. I had a huge crush on him and when he invited me to go to the beach with some of his college friends, I was thrilled beyond belief. I went out the very next day to buy a new swimsuit, so I could be absolutely sure I looked my best. I remember choosing a one-piece suit with soft pastel rainbow stripes and a matching belt. The suit was adorable. But as I examined myself in the dressing room mirror, under the full glare of the unforgiving lights that changing rooms are notorious for, I started to compare my shorter, more athletic figure to those of the super-lean and tall girls I had seen in movies and fashion magazines. I felt my reflection fell short of their kind of beauty, and an awful feeling of insecurity

washed over me. As I stared at my mirror image, my judgments began to snowball as I found other reasons to pick at myself. Suddenly, as though I had donned cultural spectacles, I saw my breasts as too small and my thighs as too full, with far too much cellulite. I can remember grimacing at my reflection and thinking, “I need to lose weight and firm up these *jiggly* legs, and *fast*.”

I changed back into my clothes, went out to the cash register and paid for the swimsuit, but my enthusiasm about the beach date was deflated like a bounce house at the end of a county fair because I was so worried about how I would look. I went straight home from the shopping center, stepped on the scale and saw that I was, in fact, a few pounds over my usual weight. That number, one hundred eighteen pounds, depressed me for the rest of the day. Oh, the insanity of it all!

I started to worry that if my date saw me in the bright light of day in my swimsuit, he would no longer find me attractive. Absurdly, those few pounds made me feel so unworthy and inadequate that they impacted my *entire* state of mind. It no longer mattered to me that I was kind, smart, funny or creative. All of my self-esteem was suddenly wrapped up in how my body looked—or how I *thought* it looked. Sadly, it never occurred to me that Peter would be *far* more focused on what *was* attractive about me than he would be on my

“flaws.” *I* became so obsessed with my weight that I projected that *he* would be, too. Ridiculous, yes of course, but only in retrospect. At the time, that was my reality and you would have been hard-pressed to talk me out of it.

With only two days before my big date, I decided I to go on a crash diet. I chose an all-vegetable diet, which I had read in one of my teen magazines was one of the fastest ways to lose weight. I didn't know the first thing about cooking, so I basically ate canned and pre-cooked Del Monte string beans for two days straight. In my heart and in my body, dieting felt *completely* unnatural from the start. I felt anxious, fussy and uncomfortable. Normally a happy teenager, I was cranky and out of sorts for those two days. I began to intensely crave and obsess over the foods I would be able to eat when I finished my diet. I couldn't wait! Instead of looking forward to being with Peter for a fun day at the beach, I was now excitedly anticipating the *end* of the date so I could eat what I wanted once again.

I did manage to diet myself down to one hundred sixteen pounds before the date, but that didn't last long. The day after the date I went on a massive eating binge. Having denied myself regular food for just two days, my eating patterns became distorted and unnatural. I regained the two pounds I had lost on the diet, plus an additional two pounds the following week.

That summer, after I graduated from high school, I became even more obsessed with getting thin. Because I was leaving for college and wanted to feel confident at my new school, I dieted constantly, and then, in reaction to the deprivation, I began to binge regularly.

In late September I packed my bags and left for college at Santa Clara University. My transition to college was *far* more challenging than I had anticipated and brought on an entirely new level of stress that I definitely wasn't equipped to handle. While it was exciting to be living away from home for the first time, it was also intimidating. I was insecure and immature in many ways. The college lifestyle was far less structured than the one I had at home, and I struggled to find a balance between meeting the academic demands and enjoying my new freedom. The new pressures *and* my lack of coping mechanisms added to my already significant obsession with food.

Unlike living at home, there were virtually *no* rules in college. I could eat whenever and whatever I wanted, stay up as late as I chose and pretty much do whatever I pleased without anyone watching. The lack of boundaries, though fun in many respects, did not serve me well. Instead of the three square meals my mom had almost always prepared for me, I had *unlimited* access to dormitory meals. I started using food, especially breads, candy, cookies, ice cream and rich desserts to relax, nurture and comfort myself. During

my freshman year I gained about twenty-five pounds, a common tradition among first-year female students that was known affectionately as “Benson Butt” in reference to Benson Hall (where the cafeteria was located). The more weight I gained, the more fanatical I became about losing it. I became a dieting maniac, so obsessed with my weight that I would jump on the scale two to three times a day.

As if my relationship with food wasn't already dysfunctional enough, one late night a close girlfriend pulled me aside after we had polished off a pizza together and introduced me to her weight-control method, purging. I *despised* purging from the first time I tried it. It totally grossed me out, but my desperation to lose weight overrode my disgust. After I added purging to my bingeing, I began an even deeper descent into my imbalanced relationship with food. Between the purging and dieting, my body must have felt like it was under attack.

I was a typical yo-yo dieter, getting into a pattern in which I'd gain two pounds, lose two pounds, gain five pounds, lose two, gain fifteen more, and on and on it went. Those who have experienced compulsivity around food know that psychologically and physically, food for a compulsive overeater is *every* bit as irresistible as a drink to an alcoholic or a fix for a drug addict. It was crazy, even to myself, that almost every thought I had seemed to be about food: when I was going to eat, how much I was going to eat, and even where I

was going to eat without being watched. I could have completed my Master's degree, gotten a Ph.D. and learned to play the tuba with all the time I spent worrying about my weight and thinking about food.

Post-college, with each passing year, my addiction intensified and my weight continued to climb. In total desperation, I experimented with dangerous diet drugs, laxatives and diuretics. For months on end, I would binge and purge at least twice a day. Not surprisingly, I experienced many of the dangerous side effects that accompany all of these unhealthy choices, including disorientation, diarrhea, heart arrhythmia, shaking, nausea, dehydration and exhaustion. Too embarrassed to expose my eating problem to even my closest friends or family members, I silently rationalized my behavior. I was more afraid of being overweight than anything I could think of, and I would do, and did, almost anything to be thin. I lost sight of how precious my health was and my ability to see almost any good in myself was shattered.

My negative body image and lack of self-esteem made life's ordinary challenges seem *much* bigger. Small inconveniences were blown out of proportion, and I would turn to food to turn the volume down on my intense emotions. If I was frustrated or stressed for any reason—about work, relationships, an upcoming test or a traffic jam—I would head to the kitchen and reach for a treat in an attempt to curb my

angst. The food never reduced my emotional discomfort for more than a short while, and it left me with the added burden of guilt and self-condemnation for overeating. It seems crazy now, but I just didn't know any other way to take care of myself at the time.

Over the years, I gained and lost hundreds of pounds, my weight fluctuating between one hundred and sixteen and one hundred and eighty pounds. Even when I had a temporary success and came close to reaching my goal weight, I could not fully enjoy the results because I was still utterly fixated on food. Additionally, I lived with the constant worry that I would regain my weight. No matter what the scale said, I was never really satisfied with the way I looked and was often envious of girls who looked thinner and who appeared to maintain their figures effortlessly.

As I look back on those years, I can remember feeling incredibly frightened, lonely and isolated in my addiction. I used to lie awake at night and wonder if I was going to end up accidentally killing myself from the variety of ways I was abusing my body. I had read about the growing number of deaths related to bulimia as well as the appetite suppressants and diuretics I was taking. Those years were the most challenging of my life, and it is still very painful to recall how poorly I treated my body and myself.

I am well aware that my story is not unique. I wish it were. But the fact is that millions of women, and now an increasing number of men and girls, are living with their own painful version of my struggle. Tragically, chronic dieting is now considered normal behavior. Women *and* men are starving themselves and following diet regimens that have little to do with being healthy and everything to do with losing weight as quickly as possible. Shockingly, it is *still* not common or accepted knowledge that diets don't work and there are many people who believe, as I did, that they are alone in their inability to stick to a diet.

At one point, I didn't *want* to believe that diets didn't work. I can remember telling myself, "It has been my lack of self-control, not the diet, that prevented me from losing weight." I rationalized, "I just haven't found the *right* diet for me." Part of me must have fought against realizing that if I accepted that diets *didn't* work, I would be admitting I had spent close to a decade using a flawed approach. I didn't want to be wrong about something I had invested so much time and energy in. Somehow it felt safer to stay with what was familiar, even though it wasn't working and it was making me miserable. As crazy as that seems to me in retrospect, I was so consumed by that way of living that I simply could not see clearly. I clung to my dieter's mentality like a hungry baby clings to its mother's bosom.

Gradually, I began to see and accept that the devil I knew (dieting) was preventing me from getting over my obsession with food *and* was keeping me from releasing my excess weight. My history with dieting was the best proof of that. As I became more willing to let go of dieting and instead explore a whole new way of relating to food and my body, the doors to the mental cell I had created for myself swung open and I was freed, just as you will be. Self-imposed prisons are sometimes the most challenging to break out of, but when you choose to unlock the door *yourself*, the sense of liberation is indescribably wonderful. Releasing yourself from the dieter's mentality is an important step in your journey.

You probably know from your own years of dieting and innumerable failed weight-loss attempts that diets don't work. Even so, in the face of ubiquitous radio, television and magazine advertisements that make seductive weight-loss promises, you might find that it feels almost impossible to resist the impulse to take yet another stab at the latest "breakthrough" program or product, only to be devastated when you regain the weight and then some. The difficulty of breaking this cycle (and indeed perhaps even an addiction to dieting itself) is why we need to take a little time to understand *exactly* why diets don't work.

The Physical Reasons Why Diets Don't Work

During my extensive weight-release research project, I learned that the most basic reason that diets don't work is that they run counter to your body's most basic survival instincts. What do I mean by that? Well, in the days of our earliest ancestors, there were no guarantees that they would be able to feed themselves and their families. Instead, there were times of feasting and times of famine. When food was abundant (summer and spring) everyone ate well. In the lean times—during winter when it was difficult to hunt, gather or grow food, or when drought, flood or vermin wiped out food supplies—people survived on what little they could find and the few items they could store, such as nuts and root vegetables.

Our ancestors avoided starving to death because their bodies helped them to adapt to severe shortages of food. How? By storing fat more efficiently in part through slowing down the *metabolism* (i.e., the rate at which the body burns calories) so that it simply did not require as much food to survive.

So what does that have to do with dieting? Everything! Your body interprets a diet as a famine. Every time you restrict your food intake, your body goes into *survival* mode, slowing your metabolism because it thinks that, by doing so, it is ensuring your survival!

As you can see, diets work overtime against your efforts to release excess weight. Current statistics show that after only one diet, your metabolism can slow by as much as forty percent. *Forty percent!* Furthermore, it can take up to a year for your metabolism to return to its pre-diet calorie-burning capacity! This metabolic slowdown would explain why people tend to gain *more* weight back after a diet, typically around ten percent.

Here's how the metabolic meltdown might work in your case. Let's say you weigh one hundred sixty pounds and you normally burn 2,000 calories a day. You start a diet that restricts you to only 1,100 calories a day. Your body, recognizing that it is getting far fewer calories than normal, interprets this as *starvation* because it doesn't understand that you are *intentionally* reducing your food intake. It then *purposefully* starts reducing the number of calories necessary to keep you functioning by *lowering* your metabolism (slowing down the rate at which you burn calories). That way it can help you "survive" on the small portions you are eating.

Let's say after a few weeks on a diet, you manage to make it to the end (no small miracle) and you drop ten pounds. Now you go off the diet and start to eat what was, before the diet, normal for you. Unfortunately, your body has now adjusted to 1,100 calories a day by lowering your metabolism. When you go back to eating 2,000 calories a day, in the

worst-case scenario, your metabolic rate has dropped forty percent! Your body now thinks it is getting an *excess* 900 calories, which it will then store and hoard as fat. So, when you return to your regular eating habits, not only will you gain back the ten pounds, but you may also put on a few more. And, if you are one of the unlucky forty percent, it could take up to a *year* for your body to recognize that the “famine” is over and raise your metabolism back up to the pre-diet rate! Yikes! That explains a lot, doesn’t it? No wonder dieting and losing weight has been such a struggle! All the physical discomfort and emotional frustration of dieting is wasted because the temporary weight loss achieved is frequently offset by the long-term damage done by a lowered metabolic rate.

And these virtually unquestionable arguments against dieting represent only the *physical* side of the story. There are equally valid and inarguable psychological reasons why diets are predestined to fail.

The Psychological Reasons Why Diets Don’t Work

Diets are mentally disempowering in part because they are so restrictive *and* because your dieter’s mentality overrides your willingness to pay attention to your body’s communications. Your body says, “I want to eat. I’m really hungry and I’m feeling like I need some carbohydrates for energy.”

But your dieter's mind says, "No, you've already had your allotment for the day. Have a celery stick if you are hungry."

The diet becomes like a very strict parent trying to control a child's natural appetites, like the mother who says, "Don't eat that, wait until dinner!" even when you are *really* hungry. Dieting sets you up to experience an immature psychological state of powerlessness much like the one we may have experienced in childhood when our parent(s) had control over so much of our lives. In the course of their development, children fight against not being able to make their own choices by testing limits, pleading, whining, sulking and even throwing tantrums. Without adequate opportunities to make decisions for themselves, they rebel against being overly controlled. It is part of their becoming individuals, and they'll fight for their independence, even when it means breaking the rules. They'll even sneak and tell lies to experience autonomy. Now fast-forward to adulthood and the model of dieting with its tight food restrictions, which can make you feel confined both physically and mentally. It's only reasonable to expect that you will feel frustrated and powerless and it's equally reasonable to expect that you, too, will rebel.

Psychologically, the deprivation of dieting causes a reaction that Neal Barnard, M.D., calls the "restrained eater phenomenon." In his book, *The Power of Your Plate*, Dr. Barnard states that when we deprive ourselves of food, even by

choice, the physical and emotional stress can lead to emotional roller coasters, low self-esteem and irrational behavior (like eating when you're not hungry). So, when your body tells you it is hungry and you ignore the cues because you are attempting to stay on a diet, your mind will fixate on the food you are withholding, like the child who has been told not to touch the presents underneath the Christmas tree. It follows that a restricted diet virtually *ensures* that you will be emotionally and psychologically drawn to doing what you (the restrictive "parent") have told yourself (the hungry "child") you must not do. It is not surprising, then, that children who are put on diets are *far* more likely to binge than children who are allowed to eat according to their own healthy appetites.

No matter what your age, there is a childlike aspect to who you are, which is often referred to as an "inner child." *Healthy* expressions of the inner child include being silly, spontaneous, carefree, adventurous, curious, imaginative and playful. *Wounded* aspects of your inner child include a sense of powerlessness, rebelliousness, defensiveness, hurt, guilt, irrationality, confusion, impulsivity, insecurity and fear. These wounded child qualities are usually over-amplified in people who didn't feel safe, loved or appreciated in their childhood or who experienced some form of insensitivity, neglect or emotional or physical abuse.

It is in large part your wounded inner child's worries, fears and self-doubts that stimulate the uncomfortable feelings you attempt to avoid by eating compulsively. In many cases, the more challenging your childhood, the more a negative and disempowering voice can dominate your thoughts about yourself and your life circumstances. Oftentimes, the harder your parents were on you as a child, the harder you will be on yourself as an adult. How does this relate to dieting? Well, somewhere in the midst of your diet when you eat more than you think you should, you become your own angry parent. You punish yourself with self-judgments like a frustrated parent would punish a disobedient child.

For many years I couldn't see that judging myself harshly, without understanding or compassion, was a form of self-abuse. Although I knew that allowing someone else to treat me unkindly and unfairly was most certainly self-destructive, I didn't know that when I internalized my self-judgment and was unkind to myself, it was every bit as debilitating. When you judge *yourself* for going off your diet rather than laying blame on the true culprit—the diet itself—it is like punishing a child for an innocent mistake. *Dieting* is the problem, not you!

The fact is that dieting prevents you from learning to trust your own body. Like a child being forced to eat whatever is being served, even if they hate it, a diet impedes your ability to make selections based upon what your body *truly* wants

and needs. Your body may need protein in the morning when the diet calls for fruit. You may be best served by eating a bowl of oatmeal upon waking when instead you are eating the recommended eggs and bacon. Your appetites are unique to you alone, and only *you* and your body know what food choices are most appropriate on any given day. Blanket diet programs simply can't fit every body's unique and varying requirements.

If you have been struggling with your relationship with food for a while, you may have lost confidence in your ability to decide *what* to eat and *when* to eat it. You might find it somewhat comforting to follow a diet program exactly as it is written, rather than facing the uncertainty of choosing from unlimited food options over and over again each day. But if you're like me—and like most people who've ever dieted—after the initial rush of starting a new structured program, you soon find yourself frustrated by the restrictions of the plan, and a backlash occurs. That may involve a momentary lapse where you eat a few things off your diet, going on a free-for-all binge in the middle of it, or giving up entirely on the program out of pure frustration.

Fortunately there's a middle ground. There's a way to develop a new approach to eating that recognizes your unique preferences and needs, within a framework that will help you keep your choices on track. We'll discuss this in detail in Chapter 6 ("*Eating in Alliance* with Your Body"). For

now, just start to consider the possibility that you *and* your body have the wisdom to choose foods that are right for you, that will allow you to reach and maintain your ideal weight *without* relying on a restricted menu dictated by someone other than you. My intention is to support you in developing a connected relationship with your body that will allow you the freedom to eat *any* type of food your body physically craves. A healthy connection with your body and a true understanding of its needs will support you in learning to differentiate your physical hungers from your emotional hungers, so that you can take back your power, choose the food that's right for you and let go of the self-sabotaging rebellion that we all resort to when dieting.

Diets Don't Address the Root of the Problem

Finally, a significant reason that diets don't result in permanent weight loss is because they don't address the *real* cause of excess weight—your emotional issues and their related hungers. Any time you eat for reasons other than physical hunger, you are most likely attempting to escape uncomfortable emotions such as fear, worry, anger, sadness, tension, confusion or boredom (or even pleasurable emotions that are rare for you). Alternately, you might be using food as a way to generate a *positive* emotion such as pleasure, calmness, satisfaction or happiness.

“Escape eating” is most common among compulsive eaters because most of us don’t know how to deal with intense and uncomfortable feelings. It takes being curious, patient and courageous to face and cope with your full range of emotions. As members of the human race, we are all hard-wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. We’re all joy junkies at heart, so dealing with the messiness of some of our emotions is *really* unappealing. Given that we’d rather feel good than *anything* else, it is frequently easier to head to the refrigerator to find something to fill up that unpleasant or empty place inside. But eating when you are not hungry in order to make yourself feel better is like pumping air into a leaky tire again and again, rather than finding the *holes* where the air is escaping and patching *them*. By overeating, you are attempting to deal with the symptoms of the problem (uncomfortable feelings) instead of the root cause (emotional hungers).

One thing’s for certain. There isn’t a diet in the world that will patch those leaks, and we’ve already seen the damage that dieting does to your body and your psyche. In order to break the bingeing cycle, one of the keys is exploring the specific reasons you eat when you are not physically hungry. It will take more than a burger and fries to heal an emotional wound, and the sooner you identify the “leaks” in your life, the faster you can patch them and be on your merry way. Farther along in the book, we will explore the

specific issues that often lie at the heart of compulsive eating and address specific *beliefs* that fuel compulsive eating habits. You'll get to the root of why it is so difficult for you to process certain emotions and you'll learn techniques to ride the wave of the difficult ones until they dissipate, like an ocean wave does when it hits the shore.

Final Warning: Diets and Diet Pills Can Be Deadly

My own brush with the potentially fatal side effects of dieting came from taking the prescription diet pill and appetite suppressant Fen-Phen. At the time I was only about twenty-five pounds over my natural weight, and as usual, I was looking for a quick way to lose it. I found my answer on a walk with my friend Carrie. She had started taking Fen-Phen, had lost about ten pounds and looked great. Impressed with *her* rapid weight loss and desperate to do the same, I made an appointment to see her doctor. As I waited in the examination room, I was hoping the appointment wouldn't take too long because I had another commitment across town. I needn't have worried. The doctor was in and out of the room so fast it made my head spin. He gave me a prescription for Fen-Phen after only an extremely cursory review of the medical history sheet I had filled out and after quickly eyeballing my body. However, I was *thrilled* to have a new diet pill to try. Surely, I thought, *this* will be the trick

that gets me down to my goal weight once and for all. Then I'll start eating healthier foods and working out more. (How familiar does that story sound?)

I took the recommended daily dosage and sure enough, my appetite was radically diminished, and I started releasing weight. But the doctor neglected to tell me there would be a number of *overwhelming* side effects. Perhaps if I had been warned in advance that I would begin to feel my heart beating as if I had just run a marathon, I wouldn't have been so alarmed when it happened. Maybe if I had realized I was going to feel extremely agitated and edgy, like I had just downed about ten cups of coffee, I would not have taken the pills in the first place. Maybe if the doctor himself had known that there were some women who had died of complications after taking Fen-Phen, he wouldn't have written out my prescription with such nonchalance. In spite of my body rejecting the drug, I soldiered on in desperation.

When I finished my first bottle of pills I had lost about thirteen pounds, which predictably, I promptly regained once I went off the drug and went back to a normal eating regime. I called the doctor and asked for another prescription, which he gave me without even asking to see me again or asking about my well being.

I later found out that Fen-Phen was an amphetamine, essentially "speed." At that time the long-term effects of this

drug and its potentially fatal side effects were not widely reported, so I had no way of knowing I was risking my life to lose weight. I also didn't know that obesity researchers had discovered that Fen-Phen causes brain damage in laboratory animals, destroying the neural axons that produce serotonin, the calming, feel-good chemical in the brain, the very one that makes you feel happy. Once I found out Fen-Phen could potentially kill off the very chemical that made me feel good *permanently*, and, even more frighteningly, could be fatal, I decided to flush the remainder of my new prescription of diet drugs down the toilet. I vividly remember staring at the two dozen or so brightly colored yellow pills swirling around the bottom of the white porcelain bowl.

That flush was a strong statement to myself that I was no longer willing to risk my health, let alone my life, to be thin. It was also an important step in my learning to trust my own judgment rather than handing off my choices about food and my body to someone else—not even a doctor. Trusting my body was and continues to be one of the smartest choices I have ever made. When you do the same, you will connect with a powerful resource that will enable you to transform your relationship with food – for good.

In Laura Fraser's powerful expose of the diet industry she wrote, "Although every diet may not lead to an eating disorder, almost every eating disorder begins with a diet." I know

my own compulsive relationship with food was *unquestioningly* set off by my first diet attempt, perhaps you will find upon reflection that the same is true for you.

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders estimates that eight million Americans suffer from either anorexia or bulimia, both of which can result in very serious medical problems, even death. Treatment for anorexia and bulimia are beyond the scope of this book, but if you're struggling with an illness of that kind, I have listed a number of resources at the end of this book (Appendix A) to support your healing. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I suffered from bulimia for many years. If I could go back and do it over again I would have gotten help much earlier. As soon as I saw myself sliding down the slippery slope of an eating disorder, I would have begun to look for a competent therapist who would support me in my recovery as soon as possible, and I encourage you to do the same. Eating disorders typically get progressively worse, so take it *very* seriously, and do not underestimate the danger to your health. Be brave and make a phone call. Honor yourself by taking the bold step of asking for help.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Throughout the book I offer what I call "Awareness Opportunities." These are exercises specifically designed to bring

you into deeper relationship with yourself and your body. You may be tempted to gloss over them, to answer them briefly in your mind and move on quickly. I wanted to do the same when I was reading many a self-help book, to take the short cut because it seemed boring or inconvenient to spend time with the questions. But the growth comes when you dive into the questions with your full heart and mind. Don't shortchange yourself by taking the easy route. Push yourself beyond your comfort zone and allow yourself to see each question as an opportunity to know your *self* on a more intimate level. The deeper the questions you ask yourself, the more your self-awareness will grow. Writing your answers stimulates all sorts of new understanding. You access a part of your mind (the subconscious) that stores memories that might have been long forgotten or others that are only vague recollections. If you give your all to each Awareness Opportunity, it will support your intention to love your body and yourself and thereby release your excess weight, which is, after all, why you're reading this book. You can use a beautiful leather-bound journal or a plain old spiral notebook, but get yourself something to write with and let's get started.

Awareness Opportunity

Take a moment and review your dieting history. If you need to, Google the word "diet" or "appetite suppressant" to jog

your memory about the diets and diet products you've tried.
Briefly answer the following questions for each:

What diets have you tried?

How did the diet (product) make you feel when you were on it?

How much weight did you lose on the diet(s)?

How much weight did you gain back?

After reviewing your history, how do you feel about dieting today?

Now that you have a stronger understanding of why diets *don't* work, it is time to explore what *does*. The saying "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result" has been attributed to various sources, including Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein and old Chinese proverbs. Regardless of who said it originally, when put in the context of dieting, *it is time to end the insanity*. It's time to try the *sane* approach, one that actually allows you to release excess weight! The next chapter explores one of the primary relationships that will support you in doing just that.

*For the rest of the book find The Body Love Manual on Amazon -
[amazon.com/Body-Love-Manual-Have-Create/dp/0981938809](https://www.amazon.com/Body-Love-Manual-Have-Create/dp/0981938809)*