



The No-diet Diet – For Anyone Not on a Diet

I won't beat around the bush with this one because it's too important. To start with, how do you lose a few pounds without feeling deprived? Next, can you keep them off? Finally, will it make you happy? All of these things matter if this is to work. With a positive attitude, you should be saying: "Yes, yes," and a big: "YES" to the enjoyment question. Don't get the wrong idea, though. You won't achieve much in a day, or a week, but if you stick to the plan, it will pay off.

As with most challenges, preparation is the key to eventual success. Above all else, you have to really want to win. Your reasons will be personal, but whatever they are, don't labour on them. Just make the decision and go for it. I won't bother detailing why you should or shouldn't eat certain ingredients because you've already heard that from someone else. You'll hardly notice the benefits of the no-diet at first, but over time, the pounds and inches will have disappeared and you'll feel a lot healthier. In terms of effort and sacrifice, these are what you had to pay with all those diets that didn't work. Just forget about them. My suggestion is much simpler - carry on eating the same things, but reduce the amount of the wrong stuff over a long period. Enough of the blurb - let's get on with it.

The first week sounds easy because you will be changing absolutely nothing. All you have to do is literally "watch what you are eating" and write it down, all of it. From the time you get up in the morning to when you go to bed and everything in between, record what you eat and drink, how much or how many (cakes, drinks, additives like sugar, etc.), and include those on-the-run snacks you grab when there isn't time to sit down to a meal. The more particular you are with this report on your eating habits, the better the no-diet will work. Pay special attention to quantities. Don't just put down coffee and cookies at 10am: jot down how many of each. One last observation to note is your level of comfort - were you starving, or just peckish before eating, and were you satisfied after, or still hungry? If you manage to stick with this tedious exercise, by the end of the week you will have a detailed report of what has caused you to think about dieting in the first place. Hopefully, you will have realised a few things and may even be surprised by your eating habits. This is what you are going to fix.

Over-eating is generally a psychological need incited by stress, hunger and habit, none of which have much to do with the body's nutritional requirements, except in a mysterious chemical way. I'll be discussing stress in the next issue of Healthy Living, so won't go into cause and effect now. All I will say is that if you tend to rely on food as compensation for being uptight, the extra weight gained as a result only makes the situation worse. Hunger pangs are easier to recognise and manage, being a physical message from the stomach telling you it needs something to fill an empty space. The bigger the stomach, the more it wants. Habit causes it to stretch when we pile in more food even when we don't need it, often because it is simply there. This is one of the first problems you must address. Only make food available to satisfy hunger, and then just sufficient for that particular time. For now, you can continue with the cookies and snack biscuits, but resist making a mound on the plate or in the bowl because, if they are there, you *will* eat them! Stick with the no-diet and your stomach will begin to shrink, little by little, but neither it nor you will notice it happening.

Obviously, when you start cutting back on quantity, there will be a psychological reaction - where's my extra food? Fortunately, there's a simple solution - water and soup. A glass of plain water drunk slowly before an eating session will fill a small corner, refresh the palate so that you can enjoy the taste of the food that comes after, and reduce the tendency to eat too fast. The soup is an anytime hunger-buster that can be substituted for those casual snacks, or a bit extra to compensate for whatever you are cutting back on. Being low calorie, it won't add to your weight. It will, in fact, help to reduce it by minimising the desire for more food as it is being digested. You

can have as much as you like during the day, just as long as you don't increase your normal food intake on top of it. Use the soup to keep hunger at bay while you work on weaning yourself off some of the naughties. You'll find the recipe in - would you believe! - our Recipes section. It's easy to make and good to eat.

Now to the rest of it - food, that is. Although you will continue to eat much the same as you have, changes need to be made if you are going to lose weight. Start by reducing the amount of food you put on a plate, keeping it within the central area and not allowing it to overflow the rim, or at least an inch (25mm) from the edge if it doesn't have one. The same applies to the top rim of bowls. Beware of mounding up the food to compensate. Later, you will be able to reduce the actual size of the plate, but for now all that would do is give you the appearance of a mean meal and send you running for second and third helpings. That's a no-no! What you see is what you get, and no more till the next food break. After a while, you will find yourself really looking forward to that time and your enjoyment of it will increase simply because you've made yourself wait. And don't forget - you aren't being deprived: nothing much has changed yet.

Have a look at your report, in particular a week ago today, to see what you had and when. Try to replicate this as closely as possible with respect to types of food at specific times, and see where you may be able to fit in a bowl or cup of soup. It may not seem to go with that chocolate éclair; but if you think about it, where's the difference having the soup first, then the cake - it's only like a main course followed by dessert. Just slot a glass of water in between. And if you don't feel much like the cake after the soup, put it aside for later when you can honestly enjoy it. When having the soup with something else, take away a small amount of the rest. So, if you normally have three sandwiches with a bag of potato chips for lunch, give yourself two and a half sandwiches, half a bag of chips and a serving of soup. And remember to begin with that important glass of water. Over a period you should be able to reduce the fat-producing food to the point where you can still enjoy eating, but can control your weight far more easily. That's your eventual target.

The main foodstuffs to cut down are the ones your body doesn't need. Unless you are leading a very energetic lifestyle, most fats sugars and carbohydrates are surplus to requirement and will be stored as body fat. As the primary provider, you can reduce your intake of these by making a few simple adjustments; if someone else is preparing your meals, ask them to help you with your no-diet; and when dining out, order less and leave some on the plate - by that I don't mean just the salad! Check through your notes and put a red cross next to those foods which you know contain any fat or sugar, also the ones that are high in carbs. Put two crosses against the real naughties like cakes and cookies. To get some idea of the problems they have caused you, check out a cook-book recipe for biscuits and you'll see that most are loaded with calories. Reducing these by only a small amount will make a difference. Cutting back on the frequency will be even better. Wherever there is a red cross, the calorie-culprit needs pruning back - but just a little to start with.

It is easy enough to cook less potato, pasta and rice for the meal. Make this one of your priorities, taking off about 10% to 15% from the serve of carbs you've been having in the past. If your normal practice is to present food in dishes for the diners to serve themselves, try not to put out too much; and if there's some left over, don't you be the one to finish it. Preferably, serve up individual plates. When additional fats and sugars are part of a standard recipe, experiment by reducing them, just marginally so that the taste isn't noticeably affected. Over time, you will get used to the new mix and will ideally be able to cut it back even more. Mashed potato, for example, tastes great with butter and full-cream milk to make it creamy. A bit less fat, skim milk and some seasoning isn't much different. Or you can leave out the butter and milk altogether, then fry it as patties in a pan that has a bare coating of Canola oil for a really tasty, cholesterol-free veggie with very little fat.

Pastry can be a problem because it isn't easy to make a good one unless you rub in enough fat - usually just under half the weight of the flour. I've had reasonable success using:

120g plain flour	30g self-raising flour	15g maize meal
50g margarine	¼ tsp salt	50ml cold water

Mix the dry ingredients together, rub in the fat until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs, then add the water a little at a time to produce the pastry dough. This makes a light, textured pastry suitable for many savoury dishes. I know it doesn't sound much different with respect to the fat content, but every little helps. And that's your guideline - bit by bit.

Here's another variation you might like to try:

120g plain flour 30g self-raising flour 35ml Canola oil 40ml cold water

Mix dry ingredients together, work in the oil using the back of a fork, then add water. This pastry is more pliable than usual and once rolled will line baking tins and dishes for pie bases with less chance of cracking. The bonus, however, is that you have a lower-fat, cholesterol-free, no-salt pastry that you don't have to be an expert to make. If I were you, though, I'd still relegate your favourite pie to one meal a week. Same with the cookies and cakes - try not to have any of these fatty dishes too often. Substitute fresh fruit to give yourself plenty of variety and your metabolism a break.

You probably love take-out. The trouble is, you can't buy two-thirds of a burger, and pizzas are usually fattening. Make these yourself and you can control what goes into them. For a reduced-fat alternative to the usual, check out our No-cheese Pizza – Recipe 06, and replace the smoked sausage meats with low-fat cooked meats. Also, boil the ham and bacon in plain water for five minutes, then drain to reduce fat and salt content. And what about finger food? There seems no sense in heating up just a couple of dim sims or curry puffs. Actually, though, it does make a lot of sense, so do it; but think of these foodstuffs as special treats which you have only once a week, always assuming you can survive that long without them. In conjunction with a cup of soup, you have quite a tasty feed. If you can't go without for seven days because you usually have this type of food every day, try resisting for a day, or two. Don't make the mistake of total abstinence in the beginning - you'll most likely fail and that will wreck the no-diet completely. Even French fries aren't all that bad as long as you steer clear of the take-out ones - they are deep-fried in oil and usually loaded with calories and cholesterol. Buy some no-cholesterol, oven-bake fries from the supermarket. A recent survey in Australia proved them to be a far healthier option. They are our treat once in a while, and we reckon they taste pretty good.

While on the subject of snacks, see if you can get yourself off grazing - that's when you have a constant supply of crisps, savoury nibbles, cookies, etc, that you keep dipping into. It becomes an automatic hand-to-mouth process and is often an accompaniment to a distraction like TV or a casual chat with friends. If you can't do without some kind of food during these sessions, try preparing some club sandwiches. Use plenty of salad filling and cut them into quarters, then nibble them while having your soup.

Along with the kind of food you eat and how much you serve of it, the way you eat has an important bearing on hunger and satisfaction. Taking small bites and chewing properly not only aids with digestion, but also helps satisfy hunger without stretching the stomach. Even the amount you put on the fork or spoon can help with your no-diet. If there's so much that it keeps falling off, that's too much. And if you can't talk and make yourself understood with food in your mouth and without spraying it all over the place, then you probably have bitten off more than you can comfortably chew - it doesn't impress present company, either. Taking time over a meal increases the enjoyment of it, and the satisfaction will last longer.

Drinks are one of the worst traps for the weight-watcher. They swell the stomach, but only temporarily, and introduce many unhealthy additives. Even diet sodas can be detrimental and are not recommended for children because of certain metabolic and psychological side-effects. As an adult, you may not be bouncing off the walls, but don't make the mistake of believing they are harmless to you. Aside from the effect of the additives, the fizz alone will blow you out and once the liquid and gas has been disposed of, the space it took up in your stomach will need filling. Treat soft drinks the same as alcohol - a serve of one, then a glass of water, and so on. When you are really parched, keep off the soda and beer, only drinking water until you are back to normal. Hot drinks in themselves are acceptable as long as you don't have too many

throughout the day; but sweeteners and high-fat dairy products can be a problem. Try reducing the amount of sugar - not too much at first - or experiment with honey as a substitute. Also, rather than switching straight away to skim milk, mix a small amount with the full-cream in a jug, increasing the percentage of skim over time. Eventually, you'll be quite happy to use just skim. We hated it at first; now it's all we drink and the full-cream seems too sweet and far too rich.

You've probably heard that little and often is the way to go. It actually is because it doesn't stretch the stomach and it allows the metabolism to do its job without working overtime. Changing to this routine immediately is more than likely a sudden wrench that will put you off weight-watching altogether. There is, however, something to be learned from the concept. By keeping the main eating sessions to specific times of day - breakfast, lunch, dinner, and supper if you can't go without - and reducing the amount so that you avoid overloading yourself, you can not only justify the in-between snacks as metabolism boosters, but can also use them as stepping stones to the next main meal. That way, you won't have to wait too long for the forthcoming major food break and, with luck, will be able to resist the habit of constantly eating. And if the wait is simply unbearable, fall back on the water and soup. Obviously, when you are out and about, even soup in a cup is impractical. Then again, surely the reason for being in transit wasn't to eat because you could have done that at home. Why not wait until you return? But if you truly are desperate, buy something filling that is reasonably low in fat, sugar and carbs, find yourself a place to sit and enjoy it. Scoffing a burger or a bucket of fries on your way through the shopping precinct isn't on the no-diet agenda!

Exercise should always be part of a health program, provided it is in consideration of an individual's present weight, level of fitness and any existing medical conditions. If you aren't used to energetic and strenuous exercise, my advice is to steer clear of those popular classes and sports that have you leaping about like a teenage mad thing. Save this for later when you've lost a few pounds and can sustain a reasonable pace of activity without getting breathless. Even jogging can do some serious damage if you are on the heavy side and unused to it. Walking, however, is an ideal partner for the no-diet. The ultimate goal is a thirty-minute brisk walk every day. But to start with, especially if your only "walking" has been back and forth to the kitchen, or a shuffle round the shops, introduce it in stages. Plan to go out before one of your normal food sessions, and resist the temptation to "fuel up" before you leave. Have that glass of water instead. No soup, though - you haven't earned it yet. The first week, try ten minutes a day - an easy stroll which you do without stopping. If you find it a bit hard after five minutes, catch your breath with a short rest, then head back. You may be ravenous after this, but hold off eating straight away. Sit, have another glass of water and let your body and mind return to normal. Once you feel you can no longer demolish a four-course meal in record time, then you can eat - exactly what you would have, had you not done any exercise.

As with your eventual change in diet, exercise needs to be increased gradually. Even the frequency may be spasmodic at first because it interferes with your normal routine. At least, it might seem that way; but if you are really honest, you could probably substitute the walk for one of those 'tween-time snack sessions. There will be days when you just don't fancy it, or the weather is lousy - so, don't go and, more important, don't feel bad about it. You'll drop off the wagon occasionally - everyone does. Just enjoy the experience in the knowledge that you've already done some good work and will be picking up again tomorrow. Same with the food. Avoid binge eating like the plague, but if you succumb, enjoy every mouthful. It hasn't wrecked anything. It's simply a small hiccup that you'll have from time to time. Just make sure it is never all the time, ever again.

To summarise, the idea behind the no-diet is to adapt gradually so that you hardly notice the difference. Don't plan on cutting anything out completely or immediately. Your body will react and will complain to your mind, if it hasn't already figured the change out for itself. Take the reduction of the "bad" elements in very small stages over a long period, especially when starting. This will help you adjust. If you find any sudden alteration so obvious that it has ruined the taste of a dish, reduce the reduction and try again. When you have an amended percentage that is tolerable, stick with it until it is accepted as the norm before cutting back even further. You don't need to go without the real naughties, just relegate them to once-a-week treats and a well-earned reward for your persistence.

Above all, remember that you are the one implementing the changes, and you can't con yourself. Make it a pleasant experience and be patient. Nothing is likely to happen over a short period - it may be weeks before you notice a difference. BUT, remember also that this isn't a diet. You can continue enjoying the same food that caused you to be overweight in the first place - you'll just be eating slightly less of it. Then, one day you'll realise that you have guided yourself to the healthy habit of everything in moderation, nothing to excess.

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