

A top-down view of a wooden cutting board and surrounding surface filled with fresh food items. In the center, a vine of cherry tomatoes sits on a bed of green lettuce. To the left are two large red bell peppers. Above the tomatoes are several large green leaves, possibly spinach. To the right of the tomatoes are two loaves of bread, one plain and one topped with seeds, and a wedge of blue cheese. Below the tomatoes are two brown eggs. In the bottom left corner, there is a slice of lemon and a small bowl of yellow powder. In the bottom right corner, there are several cucumbers and a strawberry.

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Weight
Management

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How food advertising works

Nobody knows more about why people eat what they eat than the people who sit around the table at the big food and drinks companies.

Advertising campaigns are expertly produced to link their products to positive feelings and emotions and normalise ever larger portion sizes and eating habits – especially where junk food, snacks, and sweets are concerned. We eat this stuff because we are all susceptible to the power of suggestion, which is why we impulse buy more than we should.

Food advertising reminds us of friendship, of celebrations, comfort, reward, and happiness. If you're looking for the perfect relationship, or some quality time with the family, there's no better offering than one of Ronald McDonald's delicious happy meals.

And today, diversity is big in adverts – because when it comes to junk food, it's all about fun and friendship and everyone is invited to the party! Feeling stressed...? A B-list celebrity will persuade you to shove some chocolate in your face. There's nothing like an overdose of pure sugar to help you 'work rest and play!'

Red Bull gives you wings (super-human powers) and a finger of fudge is just enough to give the kids a treat... That's another spoon full of sugar you can eat between meals! Yes, there's a sugary confection for any and every occasion! And a woke former footballer to encourage you to gobble up a bag of flavoured crisps for starters!

The size of chocolate bars are declining, but consumers are buying larger and more expensive bars to make up for the loss!

Coca-Cola and McDonald's sponsor the Olympics and the World Cup. Coca-Cola sponsors youth football tournaments in the UK and worldwide. It even gives away team kits for children with its logo emblazoned across their chests. This is free advertising, pure and simple.

McDonald's is the biggest distributor of toys in the world. The fast-food giant gives away 1.5 billion toys with their Happy Meals every year. They give them away as one of a set with each meal – the idea being that your child will pester you for more until they've collected the whole set. And if you do this every week following a set activity, by the time the promotion is over, a habit is established.

Loyalty schemes at Starbucks work in a similar way – before you know it, you've become a regular customer.

Sugary cereals are packaged in brightly coloured boxes that appeal to children. Did you know strawberry Pop-Tarts contain barely any strawberry, yet there are lots of strawberries on the packet to make it look more attractive?

Assurances of 'whole food goodness' are aimed at mum, but the packaging is aimed at kids. Phrases such as 'packed with calcium for healthy bones' or 'one of your five a day' are just ways of getting mum to forget about all the sugar.

A study by Yale University showed that children aged 7 to 11 who watched cartoons interspersed with food ads ate 45% more snack food than children watching the same cartoon with non-food ads.

Good advertising influences your decisions without you even being aware you've been manipulated. Adverts even appear on billboards in video games and children who play those games are influenced by them. In the film industry, it's called 'product placement.' Multinational companies pay big money – millions of dollars – for product placement.

Of course, we all need food, and we also need a food industry. We want to enjoy our food but we don't want to be suckered into eating more of it than is healthy. No one advertises lettuce to kids because there's no profit in lettuce.

In 2007, the Committee of Advertising Practice (UK) introduced rules to stop the advertising of food and drinks high in fat, salt or sugar during children's TV programmes. But the ban applies to advertising on TV made for children, but not TV *watched* by children, such as The X Factor.

Advertising during family entertainment programmes means that between 6pm and 7pm we are bombarded with ads for pizza and burgers and chocolate oranges. The idea is that children will then pester their parents for pizza, and parents give in because it's just a treat... which quickly becomes a weekly ritual. Saturday night is pizza night!

Researchers at Copenhagen University, Denmark, led by Dr Jing Liu, revealed that the way food is served is almost as important as the food itself because we are essentially brainwashed by the words that are applied to food.

With a rising awareness of where our food comes from and the environmental impact dishes might have, diners are now zeroing in on another subset of words such as 'locally-sourced', 'seasonal', 'free range', and 'sustainably sourced' – all designed by copywriters to make food more attractive.

Words that describe the way in which food is prepared, such as Roasted, Grilled, Marinated, Smoked, Barbecued, Sautéed, Glazed, Battered, Fried, Steamed, etc, are all very attractive and get us salivating, playing on our unconscious desire to eat more.

Words describing the texture of food, such as Aromatic, Tender, Succulent, Crispy, Juicy, Creamy, Crunchy, Smooth, Light, Crumbly, etc. all add to our expectations.

The words we are most drawn to are fresh, spicy, tender, melting, succulent, and marinated.

Conversely, words like fragrant, tangy and whipped tend to put us off, while words such as oozing or rich will put people off because they assume it to be unhealthy.

The use of French on menus, such as pommes purée (mashed potato) and haricots verts (green beans) make the food seem more special, and therefore tastier than it really is – especially if you're eating out.

Psycholinguist Dr Sylvia Jaworska, an associate professor at Reading University, says that when we read food descriptions on a menu, our brain initiates a number of complex retrieval tasks that link the words with everything that we know about the food and the kind of associations we have with it.

Our expectations before food consumption can have a much stronger influence on our perception and judgement of food than the actual experience of eating it... You might say we literally eat the words.

Now read on...

Why it's hard to stick to a diet

It's hard to stick to a healthy diet when pizzas and chocolate cry out from supermarket shelves. Tasty (but unhealthy) food is suddenly everywhere when you're trying to avoid it!

Researchers at the University of Birmingham, led by Dr Suzanne Higgs, confirmed that even thinking about cutting out food can make you more likely to overeat.

Ninety people took part in the study which showed that ALL the participants found it harder to concentrate on an unrelated object when they were distracted by images of food.

A year later, all the participants were weighed and those who struggled the most with the task had larger increases in their body mass index (BMI).

This suggests that it's hard to think about other things when we're distracted by images of food because a person is more responsive to the presence of food in the environment.

It may be that this prioritisation of food is inextricably linked to the human survival strategy. There will have been times when our ancestors were short of food and so it would be important to look out for it.

The results, published in the *International Journal of Obesity*, showed the effect was greater for the overweight participants.

However, when the mind is fully occupied with other things, for example work or playing games, people *don't* think about food.

It has also been suggested that one reason dieting is so difficult is that the human mind is hard-wired against change – after all, humans are creatures of habit.

Dr Jason McKeown, a neuroscientist at the University of California, San Diego, added that simply cutting down calorie intake in a bid to lose weight is particularly unsuccessful because it is likely going to make you so unhappy and hungry that you'll give up and quickly regain the weight.

Online celebrities and internet platforms promote products such as laxative teas, diet pills and other get-thin-quick solutions will in many cases include products with known health risks.

This is obviously undesirable at a time when 1 in 10 young people are affected by mental health problems linked to depression and anxiety.

Young people are being bombarded with ideas, images and advertising which set an unrealistically high bar for what young people think they should look like and feel like.

In the UK, celebrity 'influencers' including Rita Ora and Michelle Keegan, have agreed to be upfront about when they are being paid to plug a product, making it clear whether they have been paid, gifted or have bought the item themselves.

Failing to do so could now land them in court.

Comfort and emotional eating

Emotional eating is usually the problem – that is, eating in response to emotional states rather than because you're physically hungry. When you're physically hungry, it's food you need to satisfy the hunger, but when you're eating because you feel sad, angry or anxious, the food will never really satisfy you.

Our emotions produce neuro-chemical changes in our bodies and brains. Particular substances (drugs, alcohol, food) and activities (free-fall parachuting, walking, laughing with friends etc) also produce neuro-chemical changes. We use either the substance or the activity to counter-act the unpleasant sensations associated with certain emotions. The one we choose is usually the one which is available at there time we need it.

So why is it so difficult to stop?

If we turn to food to soothe emotional pain and it works, that's something we're likely to do again and again because it's a convenient and reliable quick fix. This is not because we're stupid or lazy, it's because of something called Operant (or Instrumental) Conditioning.

Operant conditioning is the learning that takes place when and as we do something. As we do it, we experience reward – either a feeling of pleasure or a reduction of pain. That reward reinforces the behaviour, making it more likely we'll do it again. This part of our basic make-up is woven in to our evolutionary psychology and is hard-wired in to our nervous systems.

Food is cheap, legal and widely available without prescription, so as a drug choice it's better than many alternatives.

There are common reasons for emotional or comfort eating.

Anyone who has reached for a bar of chocolate or a packet of biscuits during a painful break up knows how soothing and calming that can be. Comfort eating works at a molecular level to lift mood, which would explain why so many people spiral into obesity when stressed.

A team of scientists from the University of Leuven, Belgium, used MRI scans to assess the emotional impact of fat after it was injected into the stomach. 12 healthy-weight volunteers had their brainwaves scanned as they were shown a series of sad and neutral images and listened to sad and neutral music.

Then, their stomachs were injected with either fatty acids or a saline solution. The volunteers were nor told which was which. This meant that they could bypass the effects of sensory stimulation and any associations with childhood foods.

Both the images and the music caused the volunteers moods to fall. However, the levels of sadness of those who had been injected with the fatty acids were around 50% lower than those who received the saline.

Sadness and anger are uncomfortable emotional states – so it's only natural that we look for something to distract ourselves. Sadness tells us we've lost something important to us and anger tells us we've been hurt or wronged.

Some people can manage these feelings and emotions by recognising them and discharging them by crying or expressing anger, or even by distracting themselves with more beneficial or constructive activities such as going for a run or playing the drums for half an hour, in which case they may not need the compensation of food.

When people struggle with sadness or anger, learning new ways of discharging those feelings and emotions will help to increase the number and availability of ways of dealing with them. A useful by-product of learning to do this is an increase in self-confidence and self-belief.

Researchers have found that hormone levels are associated with emotional eating. It seems that restrained eating may enhance these hormonal in some people, which means that restrictive dieting may have an effect on hormones which then leads to more emotional eating.

Relationship problems and break-ups can also lead to emotional eating because they are such an unpleasant emotional shock and powerful and unpleasant blow to our self-esteem. A relationship gone wrong wounds us emotionally and can hurt us more than physical wound. Wounds need healing and food [and alcohol] will often be the medicine of choice.

There are other things that are free and readily available which will also help – for example, music, exercise, a chat with a friend, a movie, reading a book, going to a concert... the list is endless. These wounds will heal in time. Meanwhile, it's ok to protect yourself and delete your ex partner from your life.

The the most important thing is to be able to recognise the link between the way you feel and the fridge. Just be aware that your relationship with the fridge [or the bottle] will have far worse consequences in the long run. It's ok to hate your ex, but you don't want to find you loathe yourself in the future when you look in the mirror!

Emotional eaters – those who eat when they're sad – often find their appetite increased and food tastes better.

Scientists at the University of Salzburg studied the way 80 female students responded to food images while in different emotional states to discover how big an impact different emotional states had on how much people eat and how much they enjoyed their food. [Women are more prone to eating disorders]

The volunteers were read scripts designed to induce a neutral or a negative emotional response. The negative scripts related to recent events from the participant's personal life during which they experienced challenging emotions, while the neutral scripts related to subjects such as brushing their teeth. The participants were then shown images of appetising food and neutral objects. During this process their brains were scanned, facial expressions recorded and they were asked questions about their emotional state.

The researchers observed that emotional eaters frowned less when shown images of food after being read the negative script compared to being read the neutral script – an indication of a stronger appetite response linked to negative emotions.

They discovered that emotional eaters had a stronger appetite response and found food to be more pleasant when experiencing negative emotions compared to when they felt neutral emotions.

These findings were published in the journal *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience*.

Comfort eating can also be the result of influences from upbringing, such as stress, rather than genes.

Those who over-eat when sad or anxious develop this emotional relationship with food early on in childhood. Factors could include whether they experienced a lot of stress at the dinner table, or how parents implemented eating practices – and the same may be true for those who lose their appetite when they feel troubled.

A University College London study, published in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*, suggests that genes are 'largely unimportant' when it comes to emotionally over or under-eating. Instead, it seems that environmental factors – such as home life – have the biggest influence.

Experiencing stress and negative emotions in the home environment such as parental feeding practices at the dinner table can have a different effect on appetite for different people – some crave their favourite snack, where others lose their desire to eat altogether when feeling stressed or sad.

An analysis of data on 197 pairs of four year-old twins in Britain strongly supports the idea that emotional over or under-eating in children are mostly influenced by environmental factors and that genes are largely unimportant for emotional over-eating in childhood.

Parents were asked to describe their twins' tendencies to eat more or less than usual when experiencing different emotions, such as when they were feeling upset or anxious. The authors then compared how similar identical and non-identical pairs of twins were in terms of emotional over and under-eating.

They concluded that 71% of the differences between children's tendency to want to comfort or emotionally over-eat was explained by environmental experiences. Due to their young age, this is likely to be connected to their home and family life. Much of the rest of the differences were explained by the children's individual experiences.

These findings are interesting because most other food-related behaviours have been shown to have a genetic link – such as whether someone is fussy about food, how quickly someone eats, and how quickly they feel full.

The findings are important because a tendency to want to eat more in response to negative emotions could be a risk factor for the development of obesity, while emotional under-eating or binge eating could be potentially important in the development of eating disorders such as anorexia bulimia. Understanding how and why these tendencies develop is crucial to understanding how to prevent or treat them.

The long-term approach to weight loss that works!

1. Set achievable goals!

No one wants to start living off lettuce leaves and lentils, *but it's EASY to lose just 1lb a week!*

In six months, you would lose 25lbs that's nearly 2 stone, or 12 kilos! Losing the weight gradually, without any major change in your lifestyle, means the weight is going to stay off.

2. Fad diets don't work!

How many of them have there been in the last ten years? The Atkins diet didn't result in long-term weight loss and strict crash diets always turn into yo-yo diets – the weight piles back on just as quickly once you finish the diet!

Crash dieting means trying really hard and that's always difficult. But as soon as you've lost a few pounds, you reward yourself for your own efforts. This excites the pleasure centres in the brain and the result is, the cravings for the things you've given up return with a vengeance.

It's exactly the same for people who stop smoking – one moment of weakness and before you know what's happened, you're lighting up again!

3. Going to the gym doesn't work!

Going to the gym turns fat into muscle and improves muscle tone, but that means working up a sweat three times a week! ***You can lose weight by taking less exercise!*** Taking a ten minute walk every day – to the corner shop, or maybe walking the kids to school, will burn enough calories so you notice the difference in your waistline in just one month!

A little aerobic exercise every day really will do the trick.

4. Avoid sugar and the pounds will fall away!!

Avoiding sugar means cutting out all the sweet things. You can still eat all the other stuff and still lose weight! If you cut down on alcohol consumption too, the weight will fall off even faster (and it's healthier too!)

Many people are overweight or obese because of emotional and stress-related eating.

In one study of 337 primary care patients aged 18-65, more than half said that emotional eating was the cause of their obesity. This is something that affects women more than men.

Your relationship with food is formed before we learn to walk or talk – it's one of our first sources of comfort, so it's not surprising that we rely on it in times of stress and anguish.

There are often emotional blocks or needs that prompt us to turn to sugary treats such as chocolate. Emotional event in our lives, if left unprocessed, can lead to comfort eating and thus weight gain.

5. Here are some things you can do about it:

Try to remember the time and place when you first started eating to comfort yourself – this is often during childhood – and then write down a list your current triggers. Then ask yourself how you feel just before you reach for that chocolate bar? And then how you feel after you have eaten it.

Understanding those feelings will help you to see the real reasons behind your eating habits and your weight gain.

Letting go of past and present trauma can, in turn, help you to turn your back on the urge to eat when you feel rejected and frustrated, so you can develop a more healthy relationship with food and lose excess weight.

Try to eat balanced meals – always sit at the table to eat, and never skip meals.

When you are tempted to eat the things you already know are bad for you, stand still and slowly count to ten. Ask yourself why you are reaching for food now. Ask yourself if you really are hungry. If you are, then eat something wholesome rather than a sugary.

If you're feeling tired, lonely, bored, angry or dispirited, and in need of comfort and distraction, there are other ways of banishing those feelings, such as a hug, a phone call with a friend, a walk, or doing something creative.

6. Here are some facts that will astonish you:

- 1 creme egg is 12 times as bad for you as 1 mini pork pie!
- A pint of beer contains 2.5 teaspoons of sugar, but a pint of premium lager contains none!
- At breakfast, a bowl of Sugar Puffs contains 5 teaspoons of sugar, but 2 Shredded Wheat contain none!
- A small bag of Liquorish Allsorts contains a staggering 23 teaspoons of sugar!
- Drinks like Coca Cola and Ribena contain 7 teaspoons of sugar!

Have a look at the list below to see what's OK and what's not – I believe it will change your attitude to what you eat for good! I can't make you thin

Confectionery

Highest

- **Marshmallows** (100g) – 14.5 teaspoons
- **Milk chocolate bar** (44g) – 5.75 teaspoons
- **Snickers bar** (57g) – 7 teaspoons
- **Milky Way bar** (58g) – 8.5 teaspoons
- **Dove chocolate bar** (37g) – 5 teaspoons
- **Starburst packet** (45 grams) – 5.5 teaspoons

Lowest (note small servings)

- **Liquorice**, 1 strip – 1 teaspoon
- **Caramel** 1 piece (10g) – 1.7 teaspoons
- **Chocolate mint** 1 piece – 2 teaspoons
- **Hard-boiled sweets**, 3 sweets – 2 teaspoons

Beverages

Highest

- **Fruit juice drink, orange, 1 glass** – 7 teaspoons
- **Red Bull (one can)** – 7.5 teaspoons
- **Cola, 11 fl. oz.** – 9 teaspoons
- **Soft drink, 1 can** – 10 teaspoons
- **Flavoured milk, 300 ml carton** – 5.5 teaspoons

Lowest

- **Milk, plain**; 1 cup – 0 teaspoons
- **Lemonade (Diet)**; 100g Serve – 0.8 teaspoons
- **Lucozade Sport**; 100g Serve – 0.8 teaspoons
- **Cranberry Juice**; 100g Serve – 2.8 teaspoons
- **Orange squash** (one glass) – 2.3 teaspoons

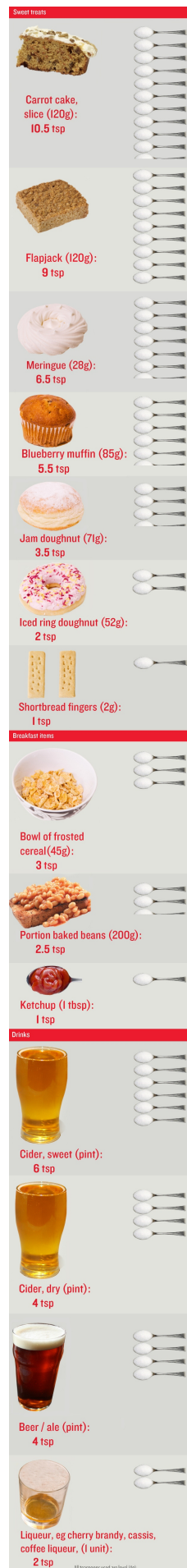
Wine

White wine

- **Sweet white wine**; 175ml glass – 1.25 teaspoons
- **Dry white wine**; – 175ml glass – 0.75 teaspoons

Red wine

- **Medium red wine**; – 175ml glass – 0.5 teaspoons



Breakfast Cereals

Highest (1 bowl)

- **Frosted Flakes** - 8.9 teaspoons
- **Lucky Charms** – 9 teaspoons
- **Cocoa Puffs** – 9.3 teaspoons
- **Cocoa Krispies** - 9.6 teaspoons
- **Froot Loops** - 10.6 teaspoons
- **Honey Smacks** – 14 teaspoons

Lowest (1 bowl)

- **Corn Flakes** – 1 teaspoon
- **Cheerios** - 1.1 teaspoon
- **Rice Chex** - 2 teaspoons
- **Rice Krispies** - 2.5 teaspoons
- **Sultana Bran** - 2.5 teaspoons

Cookies, Cakes, Desserts

Highest

- **Cake, frosted, 1/16 average** – 6 teaspoons
- **Angel food cake 4 oz piece** – 7 teaspoons
- **Chocolate cake, iced 4 oz piece** – 10 teaspoons
- **Scones – Fruit; 100g Serve** – 5.3 teaspoons
- **Chocolate Fudge Cake; 100g Serve** – 7.2 teaspoons
- **Madeira Cake; 100g Serve** – 7.3 teaspoons
- **Sponge Cake; 100g Serve** – 8.6 teaspoons
- **Country Slice; 100g Serve** – 9.9 teaspoons
- **Ice Cream Sauce; 100g Serve** – 15.9 teaspoons

Lowest

- **Bread, 1 slice** – 0 teaspoon
- **Muffin, 1 medium** – 0 teaspoon
- **Banana Cake 4 oz piece** – 2 teaspoons
- **Doughnut, 1 medium** – 2 teaspoons
- **Brownie, no icing 1 oz piece** – 4 teaspoons
- **Pound cake, 1 slice** – 4 teaspoons
- **Danish pastry, 1 slice** – 4 teaspoons
- **Milk Arrowroot, 2 biscuits** – 0.5 teaspoons
- **Savoury Biscuit; 100g Serve** – 1.3 teaspoons
- **Oatmeal cookie 1 cookie** – 2 teaspoons
- **Fig Newtons Biscuit 2 cookies** – 3 teaspoons
- **Gingersnaps Biscuit 1 cookie** – 4 teaspoons

Sweet treats	
 Carrot cake, slice (120g): 10.5 tsp	
 Flapjack (120g): 9 tsp	
 Meringue (28g): 6.5 tsp	
 Blueberry muffin (85g): 5.5 tsp	
 Jam doughnut (71g): 3.5 tsp	
 Iced ring doughnut (52g): 2 tsp	
 Shortbread fingers (2g): 1 tsp	
Breakfast items	
 Bowl of frosted cereal (45g): 3 tsp	
 Portion baked beans (200g): 2.5 tsp	
 Ketchup (1 tbsp): 1 tsp	
Drinks	
 Cider, sweet (pint): 6 tsp	
 Cider, dry (pint): 4 tsp	
 Beer / ale (pint): 4 tsp	
 Liqueur, eg cherry brandy, cassis, coffee liqueur, (1 unit): 2 tsp	

I can't make you thin

In the 19th Century, the Russian anarchist Bakunin wrote, ‘Don’t waste time on doubting yourself, because that is the biggest waste of time ever invented by man.’

For centuries, much has been written about the origins of the mind. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, even more has been written about *changing* minds. There is a mountain of self-help books, downloads, DVDs, courses, seminars – you name it!

The self-improvement industry has become a bandwagon on which the self-help gurus and modern day snake oil salesmen have been allowed to bestow upon themselves a status undeserving of their actual ability or the sometimes ridiculous panaceas they peddle. A good deal of what they have to say can be categorised as vacuous drivel, which it undoubtedly is most of the time.

The truth of the matter is that books with seductive titles like *I Can Make You Thin* promise everything and deliver next to nothing. Ask any therapist. Only YOU can make yourself thin, stop smoking, rich, smarter, happier, etc. Whether or not you succeed in any of these endeavours is ENTIRELY UP TO YOU. No one else plays any part in your decision making or life changing process, ONLY YOU. It’s ALL down to you. It always has been, and always will be!

Having said that, there are some gems of wisdom among the dross, some mental gymnastics that you may find helpful, and so I offer here a selection of the things that can actually work. No money need change hands, this is free information at no charge to yourself, for you to put into practice.

Most of the success attributed to self-improvement – or perhaps self-regulation might be a better way of putting it – is based on visualisation techniques. But the problem with a lot of the visualisation techniques punted on the Internet and in most books on the subject is that they focus on the goal rather than the process of achieving that goal. As a result, they don’t really work as well as they might.

Simply visualising the end result might provide some kind of short-term feel-good factor, but that’s only a temporary fix, and a fleeting one at that. In the long run, it’s far more effective to imagine [that is, create mental pictures of] the many steps you have to take to achieve that goal.

This ‘baby steps’ approach is much more useful. In other words, setting reasonable, and achievable goals and then working on them step by step is going to be much more effective in the long term. Nothing happens overnight – Rome wasn’t built in a day – so you will find it easier to set a realistic time frame.

When I see clients who want to lose weight, I first ask what they consider to be a realistic and achievable plan. And then we take it from there.

So, instead of imagining yourself slim and being able to fit into a size 12 dress, it’s a far better idea to imagine yourself losing, say, 1 pound per week. That is something that is much more realistic and so the process works better. In six months, it means you will lose 25 pounds, or nearly 2 stone [11 kg.] and that’s great going! Carry that on for a year and you lose nearly four stone! [23.5kg.]

Making plans that are easy to stick to is a better way of achieving success and makes it more likely the weight will stay off.

But what about all those nasty negative thoughts? The very act of trying to suppress the things that make us unhappy makes us think about them even more. It's rather like trying desperately not to think about pink elephants – the more you try not to think about them, the more they pop into your head. So actively trying not to think about something makes you think about it even more, sometimes even to the point of obsession!

It's the same problem trying to forget about cigarettes or food or anything else that represents temptation. This is a vicious circle and is more likely to increase misery rather than alleviate it. Far better to focus on the *benefits* of giving something up, and how much *better* you will feel.

What about happiness? Being happy simply means feeling better. Really! The happier a person is, the better they perform in life and generally speaking, the healthier they feel, the healthier they are.

One of the first things I learned when I was studying hypnosis was that first and foremost, you are a mind with a body, not the other way round. Being happy helps the individual to cope with all the stresses and strains of everyday life, improves relationships with others, makes life generally more satisfying *and* strengthens immune systems. I suppose that's obvious, but how can we make that happen...?

Here's a good exercise to try, because it's quick and easy:

Step 1: give yourself a general 'happiness rating' on a scale of 1 to 10.

Step 2: now make a mental note of all the things in your life you enjoy and are grateful for, spending a few seconds to visualise each one. Think about the best and most joyful moments and spend a few moments thinking about being in your favourite place and/or being with someone you enjoy being with. Picture all this in beautiful vivid colours and imagine that all this is right up close to you, surrounding you, merging with you, becoming a part of you.

Step 3: Do this at least twice a day, every day, for a week and then on the last day, check your 'happiness rating' again on a scale of 1 to 10. Bet you it's gone up!

This exercise is one of the very few Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques that are of any value. It's a mixture of creative relaxation and Emile Cue's '*every day in every way*' repetition exercise. It also involves your own imagination – images are a lot more powerful than words and therefore exert a greater influence.

Why does it work? Well... it's all about association. Emotions are associated with thoughts, so by indulging your brain in some quality time with its happy memories, your emotional happiness level will improve.

People who are materialistic tend not to value experiences, such as days out with friends or trips to the theatre, as much as people who are not very materialistic. Materialistic people tend to spend a lot more on themselves than they do on others – not just on the things they buy, but on time as well.

Non-materialistic people enjoy the company of others and spend more time going out and socialising. It's no surprise then, that non-materialistic types are generally happier people than the materialists. Simple acts of kindness to others increase levels of happiness.

Changing the way you behave toward others will change the way you think.

I'm being absolutely serious when I tell you that spending time on shared experiences is a good way to feel happier and this in itself will help you shed a few more ounces. Added to which, you will burn more calories when you are out and about than if you're sat at home.

Here's another exercise:

Stand upright but with your head down, shoulders slumped and hands hanging limply down by your side. Now try to feel happy. Can't do it can you?

Now try it the other way. Stand upright with your head held high, shoulders back, chest out, and put a big smile on your face. Now try to feel sad. Can't do that either?

Well, it goes to show that just by improving your posture, you can improve your level of self-confidence, which will in turn boost your happiness rating.

If you want to feel happier, behave happier. Maybe there was a reason we were told to sit up straight when we were at school!

The down side of this is that the happier people are, the more likely they are to sometimes make rash or unwise decisions.

The real secret is to take everything step by step, keeping to the plans that are achievable.

A more detailed list of sub goals is easier, measurable and time-based. Really, I promise you – this is the best way. For example, actors don't learn their lines in one go. First they read the whole script to give them an idea of what the story is about, and then they break it down into small chunks that are easier to memorise. And while they're doing that, they visualise (imagine) they way they'll hold themselves on stage or in front of the camera.

Musicians do the same. When I had to perform solo pieces with the Orchestra, I learned them all by heart so I could play them without the music, and I did this by breaking them up into eight bar phrases, learning one phrase at a time until I was ready to string them all together for my big moment every Saturday night. I still have every one of them in my head nearly 40 years later! NLP calls this process 'chunking' but in actual fact, it's a method that has been around for hundreds of years.

Telling friends or family about your sub-goals is also a good idea because not only can they can be a source of support, it helps to reinforce your own decisions.

Once you've achieved one sub-goal, it's easy to experience feelings of success, and this in turn spurs you on toward the next.

Every achievement, no matter how small, becomes associated with these feelings and slowly but surely, you inch toward that final goal. Each sub-goal can even have a reward attached to it, so long as it's not a bar of chocolate of course!

It's important not to overdo it! Working on any activity for just a few minutes teaches you to stick at it and see it through to completion. Everything in bite-size chunks! [No pun intended.]

It's also important to decide upon a realistic assessment of the problems as well as thinking about the benefits of achievement, and there are tried and tested ways to reduce your appetite:

- Start eating your meal at the normal rate and then slow down – starting to eat a meal at the normal rate and then slowing down has been shown to work because once food is put into the stomach, you start to feel full sooner and your appetite wanes.
- Place food out of sight – this has a big effect on consumption.
- Food gets eaten faster from a stockpiled fridge, so maybe don't buy so much all at one time.
- Avoid large plates – using smaller plates really will encourage you to eat less.
- Reducing your appetite is one way to get things moving in the right direction

Every little effort helps, so you can also move things along by treating yourself to a more natural environment.

People function better when there are trees and plants around. We know that workers don't perform as well in the concrete jungle, and we also know that a more natural environment reduces antisocial behaviour. It also makes people more creative.

You could also give yourself a more relaxing environment.

A study by Robert Ulrich of Texas A&M University showed that placing plants and flowers in offices made people an average 15% more creative. It increased the flow of ideas and flexible solutions.

Psychologists noticed that children engage in more creative play in 'green' areas. So why not try it? A bit of foliage around the place can work wonders. Psychologists have also found that looking after a few plants lowers stress levels and improves performance. It will help you too!

Make a list of all the things that make you feel stressed in life.

People who are stressed out become focussed and risk averse. They tend to fall back on tried and tested methodology. In the same way, people who are relaxed are more likely to explore new ways of thinking and seek out more creative solutions to problems.

At Nijmegen University in the Netherlands, a team of psychologists carried out a simple 'thought test' on a large group of volunteers. Some of the group were asked to think about themselves as hooligans while some of the group were asked to think about themselves as university professors.

The results of this experiment were astounding. Those volunteers who had thought themselves as brilliant academics went on to achieve increased scores on a series of simple tests.

Jens Forster, at the International University in Bremen, Germany, took the experiment a stage further. In this experiment, groups of volunteers were asked to think of themselves as either a boring person or a true artist. Again, those volunteers who had concentrated on thinking of themselves as artists displayed increased creativity when tested later.

This is all information we can use to help ourselves. The current craze is to 'Think Thin!' However, 'thinking thin' by itself won't get you very far – you have to adopt at least some – or better all – of the techniques listed above.

So far I haven't said a word about will power. This is a serious omission and you are going to have to include it in your regime. In other words, **YOU MUST STICK TO THE DIET!**

One ray of sunshine on the horizon is that most people, once they see the weight coming off, are spurred on to lose even more! That's when it will start to get easier.

Accessing your own will power is not nearly as hard as you imagine. After all, who are you doing this for? Yourself! Right?

Remember – reasonable goals are achievable! You don't have to starve yourself or live on rabbit food. Just remember the 5 simple rules:

- Eat a little less and stop when you feel full
- Take a little bit more exercise every day – don't drive to the corner shop, walk!
- Avoid snacks that are high in fat content such as crisps and nuts
- Avoid sugar and sweet things like cakes and chocolate
- Cut down on your alcohol consumption.

The most difficult obstacle you have faced so far, is the will to believe in yourself.

Don't worry, this will happen soon enough when the pounds start falling off!

And remember... diets that start tomorrow, never work – you have to start **TODAY!** Right now!!!

And that's the first baby step.

***"If you believe you can, or believe you can't – either way, you're right."* Henry Ford.**

Dieting? Alcohol will make you hungrier...

We know that alcohol contains sugar – something you need to avoid if you're on a diet. But drinking alcohol, already high in calories, also makes you hungry, hence the success of the late-night high street kebab and offal shop...

A pint of beer contains about 200 calories, a glass of red wine 160, and a glass of white wine, as many as 350 calories. Carefully conducted research has shown that even people who had unknowingly ingested alcohol would end up feeling more hungry and would also eat more within three hours.

There's a reason restaurants offer aperitifs before dinner – it's to stimulate your appetite and the practice can be traced back as far as the 5th century! The 'aperitif effect' makes you feel hungrier than you really are. A glass of wine before dinner will lead inevitably to the merciless demolition of a large slice of cheesecake after dinner.

This has nothing to do with overindulgence – it's because alcohol tricks your brain into starvation mode. According to a study at London's Francis Crick Institute, the ethanol in alcohol fires up AgRP neurons in the brain normally activated by starvation, thereby inducing feelings of hunger.

Other studies have confirmed the paradox that alcohol intake stimulates eating, and also correlates with obesity. Paradoxically, alcohol is the second most calorific nutrient after fat, but instead of filling you up, it has the opposite effect. How unfair is that? What is the evolutionary advantage? Could it be that the effect is merely hedonic hunger, where someone eats for pleasure rather than nourishment?

To put this in perspective, just a little alcohol (say, half a pint of beer) won't give you the raging munchies – but two pints will interfere with your ability to regulate your food intake sensibly. With some individuals, the drive to eat can go beyond what is reasonable, which is probably why that kebab looks so good after a few pints!

It is possible that because alcohol reduces our inhibitions, we're more relaxed about what we eat. The health conscious part of our brain seems to suddenly lose all self-control – resulting in any ideas of staying trim flying out of the window.

But this isn't the whole story. Researchers from Sussex have come up with what they believe to be an answer – alcohol directly interferes with appetite control because after alcohol, food *looks* more appetising!

The researchers have discovered that carefully controlling and monitoring the food and alcohol intake of a group of volunteers, there were other psychological factors coming into play. It could well be that a person's past experiences of alcohol and food affect what they will eat after a drink. For instance, a person who normally heads to the nearest Indian for a curry after a couple of beers is more than likely to do the same – even if they have been drinking non-alcoholic beer!

This makes complete sense because humans are creatures of habit and prefer to stick with what's comfortable and familiar. It doesn't matter how revolting that kebab slowly turning in the window may look in daylight, it's going to seem mouth-wateringly delicious after a few drinks!

Want to lose weight? Stay away from the gym!

Working out at the gym is more likely to make you put on weight!

Sudden excessive fitness regimes, like crash diets, force our metabolism into survival mode.

If you exercise for a few months and then relapse into a sedentary lifestyle you will actually put on more weight than if you hadn't bothered in the first place.

According to analysts at the UK's Leisure Database Company, in Britain, nine million people are members of a gym. But nearly two-thirds of new gym-goers give up within three months – and it's making them permanently obese!

This is because our bodies respond to sudden bouts of exertion by cutting down on calorie-burning. Our bodies also adapt to higher levels of activity and conspire to store more fat – something that was once vital to our ancestors' survival in times of food shortage.

Researchers from City University, New York, measured the daily energy expenditure and activity levels of more than 300 men and women for a week. They found that when people undertook strenuous exercise such as that on offer in the gym, the extra work they put in had no effect on the number of calories they burned compared with those who stuck to more moderate exercise such as walking. The complete report was published in the journal *Current Biology*.

Scientists at the University of Missouri showed 10 years ago that our bodies don't just negate the calorie-burning effects of crash exercising, they also retain energy reserves in the form of fat. Just three weeks of intense exercise can reconfigure our metabolism so that we store energy as fat.

Tests performed on rats found that when the animals were taken off a strict exercise regime, their bodies were more ready than normal to put on weight by growing new fat cells (a process called adipocyte hyperplasia.)

Rather than retaining their fit bodies, the rats developed pudgy stomachs. This was reported in the *Journal of Applied Physiology*.

So periods of strenuous exercise followed by weeks of physical inactivity can prompt increased fat cell production, weight gain and obesity.

Meanwhile, biologists at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, who studied more than 20,000 people over seven years, found that recreational runners who stopped exercising also put on significant amounts of weight. Worse, when they resumed the same level of running, they did not reverse the weight gain!

This study was published in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* in 2008.

Other studies involving swimmers and martial-arts practitioners have shown similar results.

So could this evolutionary survival mechanism be a factor in the obesity epidemic?

The key to maintaining a reasonable weight is to remain reasonably active all year, every year, and avoid irregular or strenuous exercise patterns.

Other studies have found that people who engage in fitness binges are more likely to reward themselves with fattening foods and drinks.

A survey of 2,000 UK gym-goers in 2016 found half of them indulged themselves with cake, sweets or alcohol after a workout.

People new to exercise often reward themselves with food, but this can backfire.

The worse affected tend to be unfit people who suddenly decide to push themselves hard in the gym.

Tests on 32 sedentary adults, published in the *International Journal of Obesity* in 2000, showed that when they exercised at 60% of their maximum capacity for 30 minutes, they were twice as likely to eat fat-rich foods afterwards than if they exercised at only 30% capacity.

Working out at the gym will build muscle because hard exercise does turn flab into muscle. But muscle needs to be serviced regularly. If you don't keep up with that hard exercise regime, the muscle you worked so hard to build will eventually shrink and turn back into fat.

Adopting a more gentle and sustainable long-term approach to exercise is the more sensible option. Half an hour's moderate exercise a day, such as gardening or walking gets the best results!

Together with a more sensible approach to eating that will more likely be the answer.

Yes, your bum does look big in this!

GPs should stop worrying about offending patients who are clearly overweight and send them to Weight Watchers instead!

Clients come to me because they want to lose weight. Most of the time, I am more than happy to agree with them. They are talking to me because they have already decided that something needs to be done about it, now we have to decide *what* should be done about it! I pity the poor doctor who only has only a few minutes to spend with a patient because he has to remain professional, polite, understanding, and suggest in the nicest and kindest way possible that his client should maybe eat a bit less.

Researchers at Oxford University have confirmed that GPs can make a difference by spending just 30 seconds of appointment time talking about the effectiveness of attending weight loss programmes. In a study published in *The Lancet*, they found that patients attending the 12-week Weight Watchers courses lost twice as much weight as those who tried dieting on their own.

The Oxford researchers studied 1,882 men and women who had visited their GP for reasons unrelated to weight loss. All those patients were urged to think about losing weight and half were referred directly to slimming clubs, while the remainder – in effect the control group – were left to diet alone. After 12 months they were weighed. Those who had attended courses lost an average of 5lb compared to only 2lb lost by members of the control group. Lead author Professor Paul Aveyard suggested GPs broach the subject by saying something along the lines of *'while you're here, I just wanted to talk about your weight.'*

Brilliant! Canny hypnotherapists do this sort of thing a lot. Perhaps cynically, for some hypnotherapists, it's a way of getting more sessions – and extra fees – out of their client and I do not approve of this practice, even though I know it does go on.

Doctors on the other hand are wary of offending patients by discussing their weight, but evidence from this trial shows they shouldn't be. On the contrary, the study found that the brief, 30-second conversation, followed by help booking the first appointment on a community weight loss programme, is actually welcomed by patients.

Weight Watchers, Slimming World, Rosemary Conley and other locally run 12-week courses are available free on the NHS for patients classified as obese. These courses cost about £100 and typically involve weekly meetings with a weigh-in followed by healthy eating and exercise advice.

Critics have questioned why the NHS should pay for slimming clubs when it's so short of money, but in the long run, the courses save money by preventing patients developing Type 2 diabetes and other debilitating and costly conditions. Obesity and weight-related health problems clog up GP's waiting rooms as well as arteries. Britain has one of the highest obesity rates in Europe – 25% of adults obese with another 40% overweight. The researchers received grants from Weight Watchers and Slimming World, but insist that this did not influence the study's conclusions.

Talking to patients in the right way can do the trick. Words are the tools hypnotherapists use to build a relationship with a client to get them to change their ways.

Seven Simple Rules for Weight Loss!

1. Crash or fad Diets don't work, so it's better to set achievable goals. If you lost just 1lb. a week, you would be 25 lbs. lighter by the time your summer holiday comes around! That's nearly 2 stone or 12 kilos!
2. Forget the gym – you're just turning fat into muscle and you always feel hungry after a workout!
3. Taking a ten-minute walk every day will burn enough calories so you notice the difference in your waistline in just one month! A little aerobic exercise every day really works! That means walking to the corner shop, not driving!
4. Avoid sugar and the pounds will melt away – and that includes alcohol and sugary drinks!
5. Eat a meal at the normal rate but then slow down – once food is put into the stomach, you start to feel full and your appetite wanes. And stop eating as soon as you feel full!
6. Place food out of sight – this has a big effect on consumption. Remember – food gets eaten faster from a stockpiled fridge.
7. Using smaller plates encourages you to eat less.

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