



THE LITTLE BOOK OF HEALTHY WEIGHT-LOSS SECRETS

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The Little Book of Healthy Weight-Loss Secrets

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The Little Book of Healthy Weight-Loss Secrets

The Little Book of Healthy Weight-Loss Secrets Intro

Welcome to this little book of hints, tips and hacks to help you achieve balanced, natural, healthy eating habits and improve your diet so that you can look and feel at your absolute best – not just on good days but every day.

Just to be clear, I'm not a nutritionist or a dietitian. I'm not a diet expert in any way – my knowledge and experience is strictly in the field of the psychology and mindset of overcoming emotional eating.

The tips given here are purely things that I and others have found to work from experience, and which I hope will be useful in encouraging you, too, to create your own healthy eating habits. It's a little book of little secrets - because every little helps.

There are twenty-one little secrets here, from what to eat to raise your mood naturally and effectively, to how to beat the supermarket gremlins that tempt you with biscuits and donuts.

You'll find out:

- Why you should be eating *more*, not less
- What one group of people did to lose twice as much weight
- What to do every night to help you lose weight automatically
- Which food reduces your appetite *and* boosts your metabolism
- How junk food tricks your brain into eating even more junk food
- Which food halts cravings in their tracks
- The one thing you're doing that's *causing* uncontrollable cravings
- How massaging behind your ears could keep you slim
- Why a full English breakfast could help you lose weight and keep it off
- How you can eat 25% less without even noticing

And much, much more...

At the end of each tip, you'll also learn a secret superhack to really up your game and take it to the next level.

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This little book is divided into three sections:

Part One: 7 Little Secrets About What

Seven easy tips about how to make relatively simple changes to what you eat and how it can improve your diet and your health

Part Two: 7 Little Secrets About How

Seven little things about how to eat that could help you get back in control of your own healthy eating habits

Part Three: 7 Little Secrets About Why

The seven secret keys to why some people are naturally slim, and the seven simple habits you can adopt to get the same results.

You can read this little book straight through or dip into it when and where you like. Some tips will appeal to you more than others, there are no rules – just enjoy each section and try out the ideas that take your fancy.



Discover the simple hacks and habits that will make natural health and vitality easy for you.

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Part One: 7 Little Secrets About What

What you eat is important. The basis of a healthy diet depends to a great extent on what goes into your mouth... and what doesn't. There is no shortage of information about what, exactly, you should be eating to get the best nutrition, what you should be leaving out, even whole diet plans – some that fit easily into normal life and some that are more demanding.

This section contains the most straightforward advice that will make the biggest difference for the least effort and upheaval to your everyday living. Because the easier it is, the more likely you are to do it, and the sooner you can begin to see the results that make a difference to how you look and how you feel.

Secret No. 1: Eat real food

You don't need special diet food. You don't need low-fat foods. You don't need 'nutritionally adjusted' meals. You don't need protein-bars or nutri-shakes. There is no special food that will automatically fill you up or change your metabolism for the better.

What you need is real food – recognisable things like tomatoes, chicken, cauliflower, peas, strawberries, apples... You know, *food*.

Real food contains all the nutrients you need – all the vitamins and minerals your body uses daily. Sometimes cravings happen and we feel 'hungry', not because we haven't eaten enough, but because our body is lacking a particular nutrient and is sending us signals that we interpret as 'eat more'.

Eating whole, natural foods that contain the proper ratio of fats, proteins and carbohydrates along with what are known as micronutrients – vitamins, minerals and other things your body needs in small, regular quantities – means that you get properly fed and your body doesn't need to send out those cries for help.

Real foods also contain things like fibre that help you to feel full, and also help to slow down how quickly food is broken down in your gut and absorbed into your bloodstream. This means that sugars from the food you eat are released slowly and gently and you don't get the sugar-spikes that set off your insulin alarm bells, followed by a sugar-crash as the insulin absorbs it all leaving you with low blood-sugar – and a raging craving for 'something sweet'!

Eat as wide a range of natural, whole food as you can, varying the sources. Make sure you include all the major food groups in your daily diet: proteins, fats and oils, complex carbohydrates – especially whole grains – fruits and vegetables.

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Secret Superhack

Vary your food sources as much as you can. If your protein at breakfast was from boiled eggs, have a tuna salad for lunch, rather than an omelette using more eggs, and opt for chicken or beans in the evening. Make your carbohydrate at breakfast porridge oats rather than toast if you're planning on having bread at lunchtime.

And when it comes to your five a day, aim to eat thirty (yes, that's 30!) *different* fruits and vegetables every week. Browse the fruit and veg aisles at the supermarket and try something new every time you shop.

Secret No. 2: Prioritise protein

Protein provides the building blocks for your body to repair and renew itself. Guidelines tell you that you need 50-60g of protein – that's actual protein, not protein-containing food – a day, and recent studies suggest it could be even more.

An average portion of protein – a chicken breast or a serving of chick-peas, for example – has around 20g of protein, so if you base three meals a day around a generous portion, you should do okay.

Protein is a real diet hero though, because it also helps to:

Reduce your appetite – eating protein reduces the level of hunger hormones in the body and also stimulates the production of ones that help you to feel full. It sends a very strong signal of, 'Hey, I've eaten', to the brain, in a way that carb-based foods don't.

Keep hunger in check – protein-rich foods take longer to be broken down in the gut, so energy is released more gradually and you feel fuller for longer.

Reduce craving and snacking – studies have found that increasing the amount of protein in the diet significantly reduces sugar cravings and the urge to snack. This may be because protein increases the amount and effectiveness of the 'reward chemicals' in your brain which, like all your hormones, are made from amino acids – the building-blocks of protein.

Boost your metabolism – at least for a short while. Protein actually takes more energy to digest than carbohydrate-rich foods, so for an hour or so after meals containing a good source of protein your metabolism will be a little higher. It may not be much, but add it up over three meals a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and it could make quite a difference.

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Increase muscle strength – protein builds muscle, and muscles burn calories. The better the proportion of muscle to fat in your body, the higher your metabolism, and the faster you burn calories. Anyone who has yo-yo dieted over the years may have actually lost muscle and a diet containing good protein levels can help to build that back up again.

Stay active and mobile – you need to maintain your muscles as you get older in order to stay strong, fit and active. As above, a life-time of yo-yo dieting can lead to loss of muscle. Recent studies have found that as we age, higher a level of protein in our diet is highly beneficial and can be classed as anti-aging.

Keep weight off – it doesn't just work while you're on a diet - keeping to a diet that prioritises protein will help to keep weight off in the long-term as well.

Secret Superhack

Snack on protein. Don't just include it at mealtimes, add healthy high-protein snacks to your diet for when you feel peckish. Good protein snacks include a small handful of nuts, natural yoghurt, a small piece of cheese or a bowl of cottage cheese, or a handful of edamame beans.

Secret No. 3: Your Fishy friends

Fish is a brilliant source of protein. White fish such as cod and hake, oily fish like salmon, mackerel and tuna, as well as seafood such as prawns are all high in protein and nutrients. Oily fish is high in heart-healthy omega-3 oil, while white fish and seafood are both low in calories and high in protein and nutrients, and they are all low in saturated fat.

Fish is a great ally to have – it will help to keep you strong, healthy, alert and full of vitality. Why is fish such a diet hero? There are several reasons. It can help to:

Protect your heart, vision and brain health – the healthy oils in oily fish contribute to keeping your heart and brain in good health, and even white fish makes a difference. Studies consistently show that those who eat one or more servings of fish a week have better heart health and a slower rate of mental decline.

It's also been shown that people who regularly eat oily fish have a lower incidence of macular degeneration – an age-related eye condition that can lead to seriously impaired vision.

Aid your immune system – the vitamin D in oily fish can help to support your immune system and make you more resistant to illness and disease. There is some evidence to suggest it can also help to relieve painful and debilitating auto-immune problems such as rheumatoid arthritis.

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Prevent depression – omega-3 and vitamin D are currently being looked at as potentially important elements in fighting depression.

Low mood, lack of interest and decreased energy are all factors that can lead to comfort eating – a single serving of salmon will give you 100% of the vitamin D you need for the day, and help to keep you happy and healthy.

Improve your sleep – it's been shown that increasing the amount of oily fish in your diet can improve the quality of your sleep, and vitamin D is thought to be the important factor here, too.

A good night's sleep is important for maintaining a healthy weight. Poor sleep disrupts important hormones and can lead to bingeing and craving, as well as the urge to seek out a sugar-high in an attempt to raise low energy levels.

Secret Superhack

Poach, steam or bake fish and seafood, rather than frying it, to preserve the healthy oils and other sensitive nutrients.

Secret No. 4: Reconsider carbs

Along with proteins and fats, carbohydrates are one of the main food groups that we need every day. They are widely found in fruits, vegetables, and grains.

Carbohydrates provide the fuel our bodies use – carbs are easily broken down to release sugars and starches that are used for energy in the body.

We need carbohydrates – but perhaps we don't need quite as much of them as we tend to eat.

The problem is that the way societies traditionally eat is based on starchy carbohydrates such as rice, pasta, potatoes, or bread. Every culture has its own basic starchy food which meals are built around.

But traditional diets were created when people were living traditional lives, doing traditional jobs – which usually involved long hours of hard physical labour. Hard physical labour required lots of energy, which meant eating lots of calories – and the cheapest, easiest way to get all the calories those traditional jobs needed was to eat lots of starchy carbohydrates.

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Foods such as rice and potatoes and bread have lots of calories, weight for weight, are easy to grow and store in bulk and make a great basis for a healthy, energy-giving diet – *IF* you are spending your day tilling the fields, chopping wood, scrubbing floors or hauling water from a well.

The truth is that very few of us are doing any of that these days – so we don't need those filling, energy-dense starches. We easily get enough calories without having to find cheap sources of extra energy.

Use carbohydrates wisely. Get most of what you need by eating lots of non-starchy vegetables and fruit, and from whole grains loaded with fibre and nutrients. Go easy on the traditional 'bulking out' foods such as pasta, rice, potatoes and bread – remember that their main purpose traditionally was really just to add extra calories, which you probably don't need these days.

Secret Superhack

Actually, this is probably an anti-superhack, because it's tempting to go overboard and cut out carbohydrates altogether. You see plenty of low-carb and even nearly no-carb diets that claim to turbo-charge weight-loss.

But while you certainly don't need the *extra* carbs that bulk out a standard, traditional diet, you do need to eat as widely as possible, and cutting out an entire food group is not the way to do that. Substitute extra vegetables and a wide range of whole grains for things like pasta and rice, and get your carbs this way instead, along with more variety and a wider range of nutrients in your diet.

Secret No. 5: Easiest win ever - cut out sugar

The one carbohydrate you really don't need at all is refined sugar.

One of the biggest problems with snacking and comfort eating is that it often includes high-sugar foods – sweets, chocolate, biscuits and cake.

The problem here is that when we eat high-sugar foods, they're quickly and easily digested and don't need much processing. The sugar in them passes effortlessly from your stomach into your bloodstream, so your blood sugar rises very rapidly.

Normally, your body produces insulin to keep your blood sugar at a reasonable level. However, this rapid flood of sugar triggers an over-production of insulin, which absorbs all the sugar in your bloodstream, causing your blood-sugar to plummet. And then, of course, your body signals that you are low on sugar, sugar cravings kick in, and you feel hungry all over again – even though you have only recently eaten – and you can find yourself on a roller-coaster of sugar highs and lows – constantly craving sweet snacks.

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The easiest way to stop this endless cycle of cravings is simply to cut out refined sugar altogether:

- Simply stop adding sugar to food and drinks
- Beware of added sugar in processed foods such as soups and sauces
- Read food labels
 - look for 'green' labels in the colour-coded system
 - most things ending in '-ose' is a sugar – glucose, maltose, fructose, etc.
 - a high sugar content is 22.5g or more per 100g
 - a low sugar content is anything below 5g per 100g
- Watch out for high-sugar breakfast cereals – go for ones that are less processed and naturally lower in sugar, such as porridge or whole-grain cereals, and add sweetness with fruit
- Swap sweet snacks for savoury ones
- If you do fall into the roller-coaster sugar cycle, don't treat a sugar craving with more sugar, eat something savoury like a piece of cheese instead
- Keep your blood-sugar stable with regular, healthy meals

Secret Superhack

You can still enjoy chocolate, but eat it after you've had a good meal. It will be digested more slowly and the sugar-spike will be lower, so you won't trigger those cravings.

Secret No. 6: Two vitamins you really need

We all need a good range of vitamins and minerals in our diets, but two key vitamins specifically linked to maintaining a healthy weight are vitamin D, and the B-group vitamins.

We've already seen in Secret No. 3 how vitamin D can be helpful for maintaining your health, and it also helps to keep your bones strong, prolonging your fitness and strength.

As well as oily fish, good sources of vitamin D are eggs, cheese and mushrooms, as well as getting enough sunshine on your skin. If you think you might not be getting enough – if you don't get outside much, for example – it's worth taking a supplement, especially during the winter months. There is also a strong suggestion that people with a BMI over 30 would benefit from taking a vitamin D supplement, as the vitamin may be stored and circulated differently in the body.

The B group vitamins also have a vital role in maintaining a healthy weight and improving well-being over all. They have a direct impact on your energy levels as well as contributing to functions in your cells such as breaking down carbohydrates to release energy, and transporting nutrients around the body. The group includes:

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- thiamin (vitamin B1)
- riboflavin (vitamin B2)
- niacin (vitamin B3)
- pantothenic acid.
- vitamin B6.
- biotin (vitamin B7)
- folate and folic acid.
- Cyanocobalamin (vitamin B12)

Vitamin B6 can also relieve stress and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety - even in people without B vitamin deficiencies – so can improve your general mood and help you to control and reduce emotional eating and comfort eating.

B vitamins are found in a wide variety of foods – another good reason to have a wide and varied diet. But if you feel you might not be getting enough, vitamin B complex supplements are available that will give you the full range. People who have a predominantly vegan diet may be short of vitamin B12, which is mostly found in foods that come from an animal source such as meat, fish and dairy, and it's well worth taking a supplement if this is you.

Secret Superhack

Recent trials suggest that if you want to shed pounds, it's worth taking a vitamin D supplement along with calcium. It can stop you feeling hungry and help you to eat fewer calories.

And not so much a superhack as a weird and interesting fact – if you leave mushrooms out in sunlight, the amount of vitamin D in them increases. Mushroom behave just like human skin in this way!

Secret No. 7: There are such things as healthy snacks

If you feel hungry, try having something to drink – water, skimmed milk, tea, etc. - before you snack. Thirst can feel a lot like hunger and that may be all that you need. However, snacking doesn't have to be a fast-track back to sugar-cravings or binge eating. The benefits of including snacks in your diet include:

- Keeping your blood-sugar stable throughout the day
- Providing an extra boost of energy if it's a long time to the next meal
- Satisfying your hunger just enough so that you don't binge later because of hunger or low blood-sugar
- Helping to curb your appetite so that you don't overeat at the next meal
- Snacks can also provide extra protein, vitamins and minerals if the snack is well chosen

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There are such things as healthy snacks – just think about high-quality nutrition and go for things like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and protein-rich foods, and be mindful of portion size:

The protein superstars:

- Nuts – have a small handful of almonds or mixed nuts
- Plain Greek yoghurt – make it full fat and add blueberries for extra flavour
- Peanut butter with celery
- Humus with vegetable-strip dippers
- Cheese – keep small, ready-prepared cubes of it in the fridge

The wholegrains:

- Popcorn – air-popped without the butter or sugar
- Trail mix
- Edamame beans
- Mixed seeds

The sweet treats:

- Fruit – any fruit makes a healthy snack. Try freezing grapes and pineapple cubes. Bananas can be frozen, too – peel, slice and wrap in foil first
- Dried fruit
- Chocolate – big surprise, dark chocolate is a healthy snack. Stick to a couple of squares, not the whole bar, though

Secret Superhack

An ice-cube tray can make beautiful, easy, bite-sized frozen snacks:

- Mix dried mixed fruit with Greek yoghurt and freeze into cubes
- Put two or three whole blueberries or raspberries in each cube and top up with yoghurt
- Put a strawberry in each cube and pour melted dark chocolate in before freezing
- Do the same with banana slices
- Mix a mashed banana with a little yoghurt and fill each cube – you could also add a swirl of dark chocolate on top

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Part Two: 7 Little Secrets About How

It's not just what you eat that matters - **how** you eat it counts as well.

Things like portion-size, the proportion of protein to carbohydrates, the timing of meals – they can all have an impact on how easily you can adapt your life to include healthier eating habits so you can lose weight, feel great and maintain it.

Sometimes thinking about how you eat rather than what you eat can suggest just the diet-hack you need to make everything just that little bit easier - and more do-able.

Secret No. 1: Size matters

Portion size matters when you want to lose weight – it's not just what you eat, it's how *much* of it you eat that's important, and in what proportions.

Serving yourself just a little less every day at every meal will add up. A couple of simple changes can help you to eat substantially fewer calories over time, probably without you even noticing.

Start with plate size

A good way to know what size of plate is right for you is to spread out your hand and measure between the tip of your thumb and the tip of your little finger.

This is the diameter of plate you need – don't include the rim, just the part you actually put food on.

You can see how easily this keeps things in proportion – a person who's small uses fewer calories and needs less food than a strapping six-footer with larger hands, and this automatically adjusts the amount of food each will get.

Keep things like cereal bowls, salad bowls and side-plates in proportion with this main plate.

Divide your plate

When you're filling your plate with food, mentally divide the plate in half down the middle and fill half of it with vegetables (anything except potatoes).

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Divide the empty half in half again, so you have a top quarter and a bottom quarter. Fill the top quarter with your high-protein food – fish, meat, beans, etc., and fill the bottom quarter with your chosen carbohydrate food – potatoes, whole grain rice, wholemeal pasta, etc.

Doing this will automatically keep everything you eat in proportion.

Secret Superhack

Eating out can be a minefield, but getting used to your own natural portion size will help.

Portion sizes have increased hugely during the last few decades, especially in restaurants. Knowing what's the right sized plate for you, and the proportions of different types of food on it, can help you judge how much of what you're served you want to eat.

Secret No. 2: Breakfast like Royalty

There is an old saying, "Breakfast like a king, lunch like a duke, and dine like a pauper," and it turns out that there's some truth in it.

We've become familiar with intermittent fasting and the idea that confining our eating to a few hours in the day, rather than grazing constantly, will help us to lose weight. But it looks as if *how* you distribute the meals that you eat can have an effect, as well.

In a study, a group of women ate 700 calories for breakfast, 500 calories for lunch, and 200 calories for dinner, while a control group ate a more traditional pattern of 200 calories for breakfast, 500 calories for lunch, and 700 calories for dinner.

The study found that the women who ate more calories earlier in the day:

- Lost more weight
- Reduced their waist circumference
- Lowered their blood triglycerides levels
- Reported feeling "more full"

While logic says that a calorie is a calorie whatever time you eat it, it's possible that eating a big meal late in the evening can disrupt sleep, and that eating early might fit better with the body's natural rhythms and help it to convert food into energy more efficiently.

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In another test, people who ate the larger part of their calories early in the day were found to have lower levels of the hunger hormone ghrelin and felt less hungry throughout the day, even into the evening.

So, it could be worth trying front-loading your calories – make breakfast your biggest meal and focus on getting a good variety of foods into it – protein, whole grain carbs, fruit and vegetables. A healthy version of the Full English breakfast, followed by yoghurt and fruit, could be just what you need.

Follow it during the rest of the day with a reasonable lunch, and just have a light snack in the evening.

Secret Superhack

Focus on protein for breakfast and make it the main feature, backed up with healthy carbs. We've seen how protein can help to fill you up, keep your hunger satisfied, and boost your metabolism, so it will make a great start to the day.

Secret No. 3: Plan and prepare

Being prepared physically, mentally and emotionally will help you to get off to a good start and keep you going through the inevitable highs and lows.

Having a plan makes everything easier and ensures that, even when the unexpected happens, it doesn't trip you up and sabotage all your good work.

Prepare a plan that suits your lifestyle

It's easy to say what you should do and how you should do it in an ideal world, but if it doesn't fit your tastes and lifestyle, you won't be able to keep to it for long. Your plan needs to suit the every-day realities of your life:

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- Is it just you that you have to think about, or do you need a plan that allows for others' needs, too?
- When do you prefer to eat during the day? When is it convenient to have your main meal? When do need a snack to keep you going?
- What are your 'danger zones' – times when you are more likely to grab a biscuit or packet of crisps? What will you do instead?
- How will you shop for, store, prepare and cook food for healthy meals and snacks?
- Can you get a healthy meal during the day at work, or will you prepare food to take with you?
- Do you need to plan your morning differently to make time for breakfast?
- Do you entertain a lot, or eat out frequently? How will you keep to a healthy meal-plan in these circumstances?
- Are you away from home a lot? What adjustments will you make for that?
- Are there potential 'danger zones', such as buffets, that you can plan to avoid until you feel more confident?
- What will you do when you feel peckish? How will you ensure you have healthy snacks available?
- What will you do when you come home feeling ravenous? What will you keep ready for this eventuality?
- What will you do when you don't have time to cook, or don't feel like it? What ingredients will you have to hand for a really quick and easy meal? Is there a takeaway or ready-meal that will fit your healthy-eating plan?

Set realistic goals for your progress

Weight loss isn't a fast process, nor is learning and adapting to a whole new, healthier way of eating. Change your eating patterns at a rate that sits well with you and focus on your health and wellbeing as the priority – think of any actual weight loss as a bonus.

You can get better results by making **progress** your goal – eating more healthily this week than last week, being more aware of portion size this week than last week, doing a little more exercise this week than last, seeing the scales a little lower this week than last. Compare how much easier and do-able this feels, rather than having one big distant goal that takes months to reach, such as losing a couple of stone.

Get to know your own hunger signals

Spending a little time becoming familiar with how you feel at all stages of eating, from physically hungry right up to fully stuffed can have long-term benefits for you.

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Find your own 'hunger scale'. For example:

10 means you are stuffed

7 means you feel full

5 means you are satisfied, comfortably fed

3 means that you feel hungry

1 means you are absolutely famished

Try to plan so that you are at about a 3 when meal times arrive, and aim to leave each meal feeling at around a 5 or 6. Be mindfully aware of where you are on your scale before you eat, and eat slowly enough to register where you are *while* you are eating. Although it takes a little time for satiety signals to register in the brain, it is still a useful guide.

If you have the urge to eat without the matching hunger signal, it could be emotional or stress eating, and you can have something more appropriate planned and ready to satisfy that craving – have a list of things that ease stress and give you pleasure, such as reading, exercising, dancing, calling a friend, etc.

Secret Superhack

When you cook a healthy dish, make enough for more than one meal and freeze in portions. Take out of the freezer in the morning and you'll have a meal ready to just heat up when you come in the door hungry in the evening.

Secret No. 4: Thirst things first

The same part of your brain that tells you when you're hungry, is also the same part that lets you know when you're thirsty. And as thirst signals are slight weaker, it's easy to mistake them for hunger.

You can see how this can lead to mixed-messages. When you think you might be hungry, try drinking some water first and wait a little while to see what happens to that feeling.

Even better, make sure that you don't get thirsty in the first place. Drink water regularly during the day – little and often is best. Set an alarm on your phone to remind you to take a water break six to eight times a day.

Adding more fruit and vegetables will help as well – they are all rich in natural juices which will help to keep you hydrated.

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Beware of coffee and alcohol – both can be diuretic and actually *dehydrate* you. So, add a bit more water if you've been drinking either, and also add more, of course, if it's hot or you're exercising strenuously.

Drinking more water can also improve your performance physically and mentally, and help boost your mood, as well as preventing false hunger signals.

Secret Superhack

Make water more interesting – freeze citrus slices, strawberries or other berries and add these fruity ice cubes to a glass of fizzy water. Add a curl of citrus peel or a sprig of mint and enjoy an attractive, refreshing drink.

Secret No. 5: Have more courses

Seriously – eat more!

Adding low-calorie courses to meals makes them feel more generous and helps you to feel fuller. And because you're taking longer to eat the meal, the signals that your stomach is filling up have longer to get to your brain and give it more time to register that you're full.

Add a low-calorie starter to your meal, such as:

- Clear soup
- Vegetables simmered in stock and liquidised into a creamy soup
- Chilled melon (no sugar needed)
- A small seafood salad – prawns, cherry tomatoes, and lettuce with a lemon, herb and yoghurt dressing
- Cucumber dip with vegetables – carrots, celery, peppers cut into matchstick strips

Add something like a small fruit salad or a sugar-free jelly as a desert and you'll have a generous three-course meal with lots of different tastes and textures to satisfy you for not that many extra calories.

If you're choosing breakfast as your main meal – see above – try something like a small bowl of whole oat porridge topped with chopped nuts, followed by poached or scrambled eggs with grilled tomatoes and mushrooms, and finish with a bowl of mixed berries and Greek yoghurt to make a three-course breakfast.

Secret Superhack

Make it a habit to have a separate salad course with meals. A bowl of brightly coloured fresh salad vegetables chopped and mixed with a light, herby or citrusy dressing and a small portion of protein will add extra nutrition, slow down your eating, and help you to feel fuller for longer.

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Secret No. 6: Add more fruit and vegetables

As well as making use of fruits and vegetables to add more courses - as we've seen above - you can just go ahead and add more of them to everything - they are real health heroes.

Add as wide a range as possible - go for as many different colours as you can find, and remember to aim to eat thirty different fruits and vegetables a week.

There are lots of ways to up your intake:

- Add extra vegetables to sauces
- Include a vegetable soup course
- Add a fruit course
- If you make your own burgers, sausages or pie fillings, add extra vegetables to the mix
- It's amazing how many more vegetables you can get into a chilli or a curry
- Use roasted vegetables in place of pasta to have with sauce
- Replace rice with chopped, mixed vegetables
- Burgers, baked beans, scrambled eggs, etc., can be layered on big, flat mushrooms, or grilled aubergine slices instead of toast or burger-buns
- You can add other mashed vegetables to mashed potato
- Look up how to make bubble and squeak, colcannon, and (best name ever!) rumbledethumps

Secret Superhack:

We tend to think of vegetables as green, so how about focusing on purple ones for a change? They are a good source of anthocyanins, which are great for anti-aging, and they also have anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, anticancer, and anti-obesity benefits, as well as preventing cardiovascular disease.

Eat your purples:

- aubergines
- red cabbage
- blueberries
- red grapes
- blackcurrants
- plums
- purple sprouting broccoli

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Secret No. 7: Always read the labels

Reading the nutritional labels on food will help you eat real food and cut out added sugar – see above – which is a great start to creating a naturally healthy diet for yourself.

The traffic-light system on the front of food containers is a simple, easy way to choose packaged foods – red means stop, green means go, and amber advises caution. Stay away from anything that has a lot of red warnings for fats, saturates, sugar and salt, and shop for amber and green rich products instead. It can often be surprisingly easy to swap a high-red product for a similar one with more amber and green labels.

Turn the package round and read the list of ingredients on the back, too. In general, the fewer there are the better:

- Ingredients are listed by weight, so if sugar comes first...
- Look out for ingredients ending in -ose, they are sugars
- Look out for things like flavour enhancers, emulsifiers, hydrogenated oils, hydrolysed protein, modified starch, and E-numbers. These can all indicate that it's a highly processed food
- So can the words 'low fat' and 'low sugar' on the front. Unless the food is naturally produced, such as skimmed milk - which is simply milk that's been, er, skimmed - ask yourself what the fat or sugar has been replaced with?

Highly processed and ultra-processed foods are the opposite of a natural, healthy diet.

Several studies have shown that consuming a high proportion of ultra-processed food can increase the risk of heart disease, dementia, and metabolic disorders such as obesity and diabetes.

They affect your metabolism and bodily functions by altering the hunger signals and the insulin response in your body.

Several substances that are formed during the production of these foods can also be dangerous. For example, there was a big problem with trans-fats – produced during the heat-treatment of oils - a few years ago, and more recently acrylamide - formed during the high heat treatment used to sterilise food – has been found to significantly increase the risk of several diseases.

It will be very much easier for your body to recognise its own natural, healthy instincts for nutritious, rewarding food if it's not being constantly confused by weird ingredients it barely recognises.

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Secret Superhack

Cut out highly-processed foods and improve your mood.

High-sugar and high-fat ultra-processed foods – junk food – target your brain directly. They trigger the release of the feel-good chemical dopamine which gives you a feeling of reward and satisfaction from having eaten them.

Unfortunately, this dopamine 'hit' disappears as quickly as it arrives, leaving your feel-good chemical a little lower than it was before, and you feeling slightly worse.

But once we experience the feeling of pleasure and reward that comes with that dopamine release, we want to repeat it – again... and again... and again... Your feel-good brain chemicals get lower and lower and you start to crave those high-sugar, high-fat junk foods to stop you feeling irritable and stressed.

Cut out the processed food and let your dopamine return to its natural level – you'll feel much, much better.

Avoid highly processed foods
that may contain ingredients
your body doesn't even recognise
as food.
Just eat, y'know... food.
It's easy



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Part Three: 7 Little Secrets About Why

Why are some people naturally slimmer than others? They seem to have a great relationship with food, with their bodies, and with their natural, healthy instincts. They eat all the right things in the right way - they don't even appear to have to think about it anymore. What are they doing that makes such a difference?

What is their secret, and how can you achieve the same apparently effortless healthy ease?

Secret No. 1: Sleep is a key ingredient

It may sound unlikely, but several studies have found that people who sleep badly are more likely to have weight problems.

It's thought that poor sleep affects levels of the hunger control hormones ghrelin and leptin so that you feel hungrier. Studies show that sleep-deprived subjects eat more calories during the day, favouring higher-fat snacks.

In addition, sleep-deprivation raises levels of the stress hormone cortisol – affecting appetite and food-choices and changing how fat is stored in the body.

Add to that the likelihood that you're far more likely to go for a large latte and a sugary snack to give you energy when you feel tired during the day, and getting a good night's sleep begins to look like a very necessary part of a healthy diet.

Good quality sleep means that you'll have increased levels of appetite-suppressing hormones like leptin, and lower levels of the appetite-boosting hormone ghrelin, and you'll also feel less stressed and more in control.

Make good quality sleep a priority:

- There is plenty of advice available about how to get a better night's sleep. Improve your bedtime routine and make sure you are including the best possible practices
- Avoid over-eating late in the evening - it can make you feel uncomfortable and disrupt your sleep
- Alcohol, caffeine, and even high-sugar foods near bed-time can interfere with sleep patterns
- When you do feel tired during the day, don't use sugar to give you an energy boost – drink a glass of water, get some fresh air or go for a short walk to clear your head instead

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Secret Superhack

Here are some slightly more unusual aids to sleep that you might not have tried before:

- Keep your feet warm – try soft, fluffy socks
- A cup of chamomile tea can be very soothing
- Massage the area behind your ears
- Massage your feet
- Eat a banana – they contain potassium and magnesium to help relax muscles
- Eat a couple of slices of turkey meat – it contains tryptophan which is turned into the soothing brain chemical serotonin
- Try a lettuce sandwich – lettuce contains a substance called lactucarium that can make you drowsy (as Peter Rabbit found out)
- Keep a lavender bag under your pillow, or try a lavender pillow spray

Secret No. 2: Mindset – think like a slim person

Do naturally slim people have different genes from the rest of us - a faster metabolism, perhaps, or different hormones?

While there may be slight inherited differences in their favour, in general, no, they don't. The biggest secret isn't in their genes or their metabolisms, it's in their minds. They simply think differently about what and how they eat.

Naturally slim people have a healthy relationship with food, with their bodies, and with their natural instincts.

They'll enjoy a meal, even eat cakes or biscuits, then just put it out of their minds. If they do put on a few pounds – over Christmas or on holiday, for example – they know their internal nutritional eco-system will right itself over the next few weeks without them having to worry about it.

They are relaxed about what they eat - and that is the secret of their success.

Those of us who struggle with our weight tend to be much more preoccupied with food. It's not that we're preoccupied with food and dieting because we're overweight, it's the exact opposite - we're overweight *because* we're preoccupied with food and dieting.

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We focus constantly on how much we eat or don't eat, how often we eat, whether we've eaten 'good' foods or 'bad' foods, whether we 'deserve' certain foods. In short, while naturally slim people don't give food much conscious thought at all, we never stop thinking about it.

So, how do naturally slim people make friends with food?

- They eat regular meals. Whether they have five small meals or the regular breakfast, lunch and dinner, they know it's coming
- When they do feel hungry, they can put up with it because they know when the next meal is going to be
- Regular meals mean that their blood-sugar and hunger-hormones are always level, gradually diminishing between meals and not roller-coastering from starved to stuffed
- They may not give eating much conscious thought, but naturally slim people usually enjoy food - some of them are even real foodies
- Because they enjoy food, they eat mindfully, savouring the flavour, texture, appearance and fragrance of a meal, making it a satisfying experience
- They enjoy the all the more subtle things about a meal, too. The ambiance and social interaction, for example
- They don't feel guilty or ashamed if they eat chocolate or cake or crisps. They focus fully on the enjoyment and don't feel any remorse about it - they don't have an inner voice that tells them that they're greedy, weak-willed or a failure if they over indulge
- And they don't feel that they've 'blown the diet', so may as well eat even *more* chocolate or cake
- They don't have rules about food - no carbs, no dairy, only green vegetables, low-fat or no-fat, chew everything forty times, no eating after seven pm, etc. No food is 'good' or 'bad', 'sinful' or 'allowed', it's all just food
- They listen to their bodies, eat when they're hungry, have what they like, and stop when their hunger is satisfied, without needing to have set rules about it

Secret Superhack:

Naturally slim people enjoy food, but they don't use it to control their feelings.

When you want to eat, HALT for a moment and consider – are you Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired?

If you're honestly hungry and it isn't time for a full meal, have a healthy snack – a handful of nuts or an apple.

If you're angry, lonely or tired on the other hand, food is not going to solve the problem. Find other ways to improve your mood that are more appropriate – take time out, nap, phone a friend, read, go for a walk, attack the cleaning. Find ways that genuinely change your state, not just mask it.

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Secret No. 3: 80/20 works wonders

You don't have to be perfect all the time. If you eat healthily 80% of the time, the remaining 20% is not going to derail you - unless you let it.

You're human and you're allowed to have the occasional treat or indulgence. What would life be if we couldn't spoil or pamper ourselves sometimes. There will be days when only a takeaway will do, and there will naturally be days when there just isn't any other choice available.

This is all part of a healthy eating lifestyle - you don't need to obsess about eating 'perfectly' 100% of the time, just relax and enjoy your food without worrying about your lack of willpower or your self-control - pleasure is part of a balanced diet.

When you do cut lose a bit, don't beat yourself up about it, just get back to eating a normal healthy diet. Healthy eating isn't about short-term diets, it's a life-long lifestyle choice that won't just help you lose a few pounds, it will improve your health and your wellbeing physically, mentally and emotionally.

You'll feel good about treating your body well and giving it a nutritious diet, and feel positive about eating healthily so that you feel vibrant and full of energy. But forbidden fruit is tempting fruit - and making a food 'off limits' only makes it seem more desirable. So don't ban any particular food, just apply moderation.

On the other hand, eating healthily 20% of the time is *not* going to make up for eating junk food for the other 80%.

Secret Superhack

The 80/20 rule gives you the flexibility to sustain healthy eating choices without rigid regulations. Applying the 80/20 principle will help you to get back in touch with your own healthy eating instincts about what is right for you, and help you to learn what your body needs by listening to it rather than adopting hard and fast rules.

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Secret No. 4: The magic of compound interest

Albert Einstein called compound interest the most powerful force in the universe.

Compound interest happens when you regularly and consistently invest something – usually money – and allow it to accumulate, so that you don't just get interest on what you invest, you also get interest on the interest that that investment earns. The returns look small to begin with, but they start to shoot up rapidly if you just give it a while.

This is not just true for money – the same principle applies to your health, your wellbeing and the skills you build to develop them. Little changes, tiny gains, add up to more than the sum of their parts over time. The key is 'over time' because it doesn't happen at once, but the longer you continue, the bigger the effect.

The secret is consistency – aim to improve by just 1% every single day. If you achieve being 1% better tomorrow than you are today, and keep that up every day for a year, you will end up thirty-seven times better than you are right now.

Which sounds good. But the really astonishing thing is that if you keep it up every day for *two* years, you won't just be seventy-four times better than you are now (twice thirty-seven), you'll be **one thousand, four hundred and twenty-seven** times better. That's the power of compound interest.

You can achieve huge things with small actions that build up over time. Adding one more tiny change every single day won't feel like much to begin with, but if you stick with it, you can achieve astonishing results. Good things are worth investing in – once they start to show returns, they really take off.

The key is to focus on your daily targets – eat a bit more protein, add one extra vegetable, say no to one more biscuit, walk just a little further – but keep an eye on the bigger picture too, and play the long game.

Creating healthy eating habits isn't a linear journey – there are always ups and downs. While fad diets and restrictive eating can produce quick results that fade as rapidly as they materialise, sustainable health and weight loss is something that happens over months and even years. You can't build a strong, confident, healthy body in a few days or even weeks – the best results are achieved when you keep 'investing' little by little every day, day after day, until the rewards become impossible to ignore.

You will get there when you invest, when you put in the work – it *will* happen. Start now and do something today that your future self will thank you for.

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Secret Superhack

This doesn't need a superhack, this is a superhack all by itself. Focus on continuous, tiny daily improvements – not just in your eating but *any* aspect of your life where you'd like to see growth and improvement – and the results will happen. They'll be tiny at first, but in time they'll grow exponentially and keep getting better and better.

Secret No. 5: The supermarket secrets

Okay, so you're eating real food, not special diet food, and real food for all practical purposes comes from supermarkets – even if we do love a farm shop or a farmers' market.

There are a variety of hints, tips and hacks that can help you to make your supermarket shop much more effective when it comes to healthy eating, by focusing on healthy buying:

- Concentrate on the perimeter aisles. Most fresh produce like fruit and vegetables, fresh meat, fish and dairy are stocked round the outer area of the store. Shop here first before venturing into the inner aisles of packaged and processed foods.
- Make a shopping list. Plan your meals and shop for the main ingredients that you want. Planning ahead will help you avoid temptation and impulse buys. Have a strategy and follow it, but allow for lucky chance as well – if you spot a new fruit or vegetable, or something healthy and nutritious is on offer, allow yourself a little leeway.
- Don't shop when you're hungry – all that stuff in the middle aisles will look irresistible. If you're a long way from a meal time, have a healthy, high-protein snack to keep you balanced and making good decisions.
- When you do venture out of the fresh produce aisles into the packaged and prepared foods, always check the nutritional information on the labels so you can make the healthiest choices. See Secret no. 7 in the 'How' section above.
- Talking of labels, beware of purely cosmetic health claims on foods. Organic biscuits are still biscuits and contain just as much sugar as non-organic ones. 'Organic' only refers to how things are grown, not how healthy the product is. Similarly, foods labelled 'low-fat' can contain more sugar than full-fat versions, while 'sugar-free' can mean artificial sweeteners have been used instead. Focus on whole, fresh, natural foods and don't be fooled by processed ones that are just jumping on the healthy eating band-waggon.
- You might prefer to choose fruits and vegetables that are in season where possible. They're often more nutritious, taste better, and are much cheaper than those that are out of season and consequently either hot-house grown or imported over long distances.

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- On the other hand, frozen fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than their image might suggest. They are flash-frozen shortly after harvesting at peak condition to retain nutrients. Frozen produce in general can help you save money, and ensure that you always have something in the freezer – just focus on the same natural, healthy produce that you would for fresh food.
- Shop the rainbow. Supermarkets have a vast array of fresh food on offer that would have seemed incredibly exotic to past generations. Make your trolley look as colourful as you possibly can – green lettuce, orange peppers, red tomatoes, purple grapes and blueberries, etc.

Secret Superhack

Mentally divide your shopping trolley into the same portions as you do your plate – see Secret No. 1 in the 'How' section above.

Fill one half of your trolley with fruit and vegetables; one quarter with meat, fish and dairy; and the remaining quarter with whole grains or starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes.

Secret No. 6: Pay attention!

Eat mindfully. Paying attention to the food that you're eating not only helps you to enjoy it much more, it also helps you to eat less:

- Eating more slowly gives your brain time to process the fact that you've eaten, so eating your food slowly can help you feel fuller with fewer calories. It's an easy way to lose weight and also to prevent weight gain in the first place. A recent review of twenty-three studies showed that fast eaters are more likely to gain weight than slow eaters.
- If you eat while watching TV, scrolling through your phone or playing computer games, you can end up overeating. Studies have found that people who are distracted during a meal eat 10% more. Absent-minded eating can even influence your intake later in the day. People who were distracted at one meal ate 25% more calories at later ones than those who weren't.
- Engage all your senses – notice colour, scent and texture as well as flavour. Making food more '3D' like this really impresses on your brain that you have eaten. It makes it a real experience - something to be enjoyed and appreciated.

Secret Superhack

"Mindful eating helps people rebuild their relationship with food. It makes eating less restrictive and judgmental, and it may ultimately lead to more feelings of satisfaction, less guilt and improved self-trust. It may also help with weight loss and digestion." *Gabrielle Gambino, a senior clinical dietitian at New York-Presbyterian Hospital.*

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And that's what it's all about...

Secret No. 7: Logging and tracking works

Keeping a record is great for tracking what you're doing over time and seeing patterns in the bigger picture.

When we think about logging and tracking when it comes to diets, the most obvious thing to count is calories. But this isn't the most useful thing to do. In fact, it might be better to keep a record of everything *except* calories.

Far more useful is a record of what you actually eat, not just the number of calories in it. A food diary can help you to identify your eating habits and patterns, making you more aware of them. It'll help you to reinforce the beneficial ones that you want, and change the ones you don't want for something better.

Research shows that keeping a food diary can be a very effective tool for changing behaviour. One study showed that participants who kept a daily food record lost twice as much weight as those who didn't.

Tracking what you eat can be pretty straightforward – when you eat something, just make a note of:

After a week's entries, look back over your diary and see what you think about what you've recorded. You might ask yourself:

- What you ate
- When you ate it
- How hungry you were before eating, then after eating (use a 1-10 scale)
- How you felt – physically, mentally and/or emotionally – before, then after eating
- Am I making time to eat properly?
- How many servings of fruits and vegetables am I eating a day?
- Am I eating a wide variety of things?
- Where can I add more variety?
- Am I eating added sugar? How often?
- Am I eating when I'm just pleasantly hungry?
- Does my mood affect when and what I eat?
- Did I try anything new this week?
- What am I most pleased about this week?

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You might notice distinct patterns. For example, you remember that on three afternoons you ate a chocolate bar. Looking at your diary, you notice that you eat healthily every day until mid-afternoon when you hit a low-energy point - which is when temptation strikes.

Knowing this, you can try eating a little more at lunch to see if that helps, or have a healthy snack of fruit and nuts ready to hand mid-afternoon.

Secret Superhack

There are 21 ideas in this book for you to try out if you want to, from what to eat to how to eat it.

Start with this Secret – start a food diary and keep it for a week. Add another Secret next week – just choose one that takes your fancy.

Keep a record of what you're trying and how it's working out for you. You should be able to look back over the weeks to see what makes a real difference and how you're changing week by week.

Keep adding one new Secret a week and keep logging your progress, and in less than six months you'll have a whole new healthy eating regime that will be transforming your wellbeing – physically, mentally and emotionally.

Good luck!

Enjoy lifelong
health, vitality
and complete
wellbeing

