



The Non-Dieter Mindset



Never Get On Another Diet Again!

*10 Ways to Become a Savvy Non-Dieter in
a Food Phobic World*



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Diets Unmasked

You don't need me to tell you the nasty truth about diets--they are not designed to work in the long haul. Big news there right? We all know that this is a big industry and *hope* is what they sell. They know that people will bite the bait, because they need to believe that the ultimate diet which would solve all their weight problems is out there, and if only they just tried another diet. Perhaps this time....

So you're probably asking, "so what is the alternative?" I can't manage my weight on my own. At least diets give me something I can follow and much needed discipline. If not a diet, then what?

Well before we go further into this subject let us discuss what you can expect from this book. What it is not is a magic formula. A formula is great to predict chemical reactions with precise accuracy in a controlled environment. But you are not a predictable chemical reaction. Every person reading this book right now is in a different environment, under different circumstances. There is no one thing that will work for everyone. This is the premise of diets, and this is what we are trying to get away from.

What the Non-Dieter Mindset seeks to do however, is to promote the *attitude* of the non-dieter; to attempt to deprogram you so that you will never put yourself through the agony of another diet again.

So Why Don't Diets Work?

Perhaps this is the question of the century, and there's hardly one answer to it. But if you've ever been on one or two or 50 diets, you've probably answered this question by way of a trail of stories from here to infinity. But really, there are 5 fundamental reasons why diets don't work in my opinion.



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#1 Reason Diets Don't Work: They regulate and dictate to you what you should and should not eat, taking all of the pleasure out of eating, and making it feel like a chore. Now probably you are that unique type of person who loves chores, but for most of us chores really suck. Having an enjoyable meal is one of the greatest pleasures of life, and to put it frankly, diets spoil all the fun. Most diets get the boot before they pay off in pounds lost what they cost in dollars. Let's face it; we humans are not very good at doing non-fun things for too long.

#2 Reason Diets Don't Work: Someone who has most likely never met you or knows the lifestyle that you lead is dictating to you a 'cookie cutter' magic weight-loss formula. If you're the regular dieter, then you've probably purchased oodles of books and guides and programs developed by this or that fitness guru. You believed what they say, because after all, they're the expert, right? Try as you may, if the diet plan they're offering does not fit into your lifestyle or requires a dramatic overhaul of your everyday life that you are either unable or not ready to take on, then you are not likely to stick with it.

#3 Reason Diets Don't Work: Putting all our eggs in one diet. Many see a diet as the end-all, magic solution which it was never meant to be. Diets are never meant to be long-term, but in most cases achieving and maintaining your desired weight is. There is the possibility that a diet, for the duration of time that it lasts, could initiate an improvement in your eating that you are able to carry through long-term. However, diets can't replace good and healthful everyday eating practices.

#4 Reason Diets Don't Work: There are just too many diets out there, making it easier for people to simply drop off one hot diet craze, to get on another. If you want to loose weight, like yesterday, then you want to see results quick, and most diets play on this urgency that most dieters have to loose that weight. In fact, they often use this as part of their pitch line. "Loose 50 pounds in two weeks". You're desperate and you would do anything, so why not try it? Two weeks later you've barely lost 5 pounds, and you're beyond despondent. So you try another diet, because something must work. Slowly you're becoming a chronic dieter, and the vicious diet cycle begins.



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#5 Reason Diets Don't Work: One word-*Deprivation*. We are surrounded by a bountiful supply of exciting and varied foods, but many diets force you to deprive yourself of entire groups or types of food at a time. The High-Protein Diet (Anti-starch), the Juice Diet, even the Bread Diet. But what about all of the other foods out there? Self-deprivation of this magnitude might pass for a day or two, but hardly survives for a long time.

Your Best Line of Defense: *Developing The Qualities of The Non-Dieter Mindset*

The term 'Non-Dieter Mindset', isn't simply about not dieting, but about developing a philosophy that allows you to focus on ways to enjoy food and still keep healthy. Giving yourself permission to step away from the fear and guilt around food, which diets thrive on, involves qualities which become part of your every day life.

So what are these qualities of the Non-Dieter Mindset? Well they include:

1. First, being unconventional and setting your own rules. Dieting is the norm, and to step away from it is stepping into a new interpretation of what your relationship and attitude towards food and weight management will be.
2. Loving food and enjoying the experience of eating, but not needing food to feel good.
3. Having a healthy enthusiasm for all aspects of a meal, from the ingredients, to the preparation to off course consumption
4. Refraining from negative food labeling-'good' vs. 'bad' foods
5. Being Open minded
6. Staying clear of eating hurriedly



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7. Avoiding skipping meals
8. Avoiding what I call ‘food impersonators’ -Highly processed foods stripped down to a fraction of their original, natural self with the addition, subtraction or substitution of ingredients.
9. Finding a balance between everyday eating and indulgence, and realizing that indulgence is not a dietary offense.
10. Having one or more activities which serve as a “positive focus”, so that one thing does not become your sole pleasure. That way, you can enjoy food, but not depend on it for enjoyment.

Not all these qualities may apply to everyone, and you might have some of your own. But the idea here is that building a non-dieter mindset starts with adapting behaviors that become healthy *daily* practices. For these healthy practices to be adapted and thrive, restrictive eating as promoted by dieting has to be addressed.

So Let’s Address These Qualities:

Quality #1: Being Unconventional

While you can certainly learn from others, I think that in developing a good attitude towards eating and weight management, you can’t always rely on what others are doing. Your goals and mindset have to be set according to your own standards and life situation. So in that sense, it pays to be unconventional.

Often times the conventional way to do things is seen as the realistic and sensible way. However, I believe choosing the conventional, *realistic* path, in this case dieting, makes us more vulnerable to circumstance. Realism can force not only identification with, but also conformity to what is accepted and represented by society or our friends and family. It’s a think-inside-the box concept which makes it difficult to set goals based on personal needs, desires, tastes, lifestyle etc.



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To me that's what happens with dieting. Although it does not work for most, it still continues to be a multi-million dollar industry, because going on a diet to lose weight is still considered the 'realistic' thing to do.

Therefore:

- Do what is believable for you.
- By all means free yourself from doing things the way that everybody else chooses to do them, and rock the boat a bit.
- And set weight goals which are realistic for you and your life circumstances.

Qualities #2 & 3: Loving Food and Enjoying the Experience of Eating, and Having a Healthy Enthusiasm for All Aspects of a Meal

Becoming a *Food Lover not a Food Fighter* is perhaps one of the greatest defense against Diets. But I know you must be asking "Why are we talking about loving food? Isn't that the reason I would be on a diet in the first place? The problem is I love food too much!"

But really what we mean when we talk about love for food is really to appreciate food in a healthful way. As a Dietitian, I would certainly say that I have a healthy obsession with food and I totally embrace that fact.

However, it is all about not being consumed by food, but rather enjoying the pleasure that eating a satisfying meal (without guilt) brings. A first crucial step in doing so is to:

Be Aware of the Guilt Factor

The labels we place on our food and our eating experiences can create the kind of guilt and self-punishment which Diet marketers prey on. Negative emotions connected with food is the fastest path to becoming a diet junkie. We have that constant *whip of*



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condemnation permanently attached to our backs, rating our worth based on our intake. Depending on the extent of our perceived overindulgence or lack of discipline, we administer appropriate punishment in terms of how we allow ourselves to feel on a scale of ashamed and guilt ridden to very ashamed and very guilt ridden.

To help get some of that guilt out of your system try to:

'Depersonify' Food: When we personify food, we make it a friend, companion, counselor, pacifier, etc. 'Depersonifying' food means that you can see it more clearly, so that you see the food itself, not the identity you've forced on it. Food is not just for subsistence, but it certainly isn't meant to play human roles either.

Identify more intimately with all aspects of the meal from preparation to the table: One definite way to accomplish this is to actually cook a meal, be part of, or at least watch a meal being prepared from scratch. The entire process, from deciding what to cook or finding a recipe from a magazine, cookbook or food show to gathering ingredients needed either at the supermarket or from the kitchen pantry, demands full involvement. Such involvement can really intensify the connection to the food being prepared.

Greater appreciation for the meals we eat doesn't however give us a free pass to go crazy and eat just for eating sake. One reason I believe that we overeat and eat so hurriedly is because our thoughts are on *instant gratification*; to get our *sugar fix* or *chocolate fix* or *salt fix*. Identifying more with all aspects of the meal, not only the final taste satisfaction factor, may help make us less 'absent minded' at our meals and aid in us eating more wisely.

But you need not become a cooking diva in order to identify more intimately with a meal. As I said before, just being present in the kitchen or being part of some aspect of the actual food preparation or looking with intent at a cooking show can help. If you are one who blesses their meal before eating, this process also presents an opportunity to gain a deeper, more positive connection with your meal.

There is a version of blessing a meal I'd like to suggest which would easily suit even those who are not deeply religious. It comes from Louise Hay, who is well respected in the field of self-improvement, and the blessing comes from her 'Morning and Evening Meditation' audio. She suggests that every time you eat 'to bless the food with love and thank it for giving its life to nourish you', the emphasis here being on gratitude.



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This concept is even more meaningful when the general ‘thank you’ to the food is directed to the specific parts of the meal. For example for even a simple fried egg and breakfast sausage meal, gratitude can be extended to as far back as the chicken who laid the egg or to the pig or cow whose life was sacrificed to make the sausage to finally the person who devoted time to preparing your meal.

So if you are of a certain religion, mealtime grace need not end once you’ve thanked which ever Higher Power you believe in. The extra minute or so really thinking of the path this food has taken to get to you and acknowledging that journey to some degree through a simple ‘thank you’, is equally important. So you say “*thank you*” to the hands which tended the field to grow the roasted veggies on your plate, or the apples plucked from trees to make the cold glass of apple juice you later sip with your dinner meal etc. How can you then have any negative emotions about food you’ve taken this little extra time to reacquaint yourself with?

Qualities # 4, 5, & 6: Refraining From Negative Food Labeling, Being Open Minded, and Staying Clear of Hurried Eating:

The ‘Bad Food’ Fallacy:

What is a bad food anyway? There are foods which make us feel better when we eat it, nourish our bodies more, help us to grow stronger etc., but every food has its piece in the equation. Once you see something as bad, you connect emotion to it; it’s bad, so you have negative feelings towards it.

Be Mindful: When a person says a food is bad, it is often their overindulgence of it they refer to. It is excess of anything that is the true ‘bad’. Essential minerals have toxic levels, too much fiber without adequate hydration causes constipation, and a sweet treat gone overboard translates into conversion to fat in the body. It is only when we find a healthy balance that we can refrain from getting caught up in this ‘good vs. bad’ food labeling.



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Giving greater credence to one food over the other based on beliefs or the information out there is fine; that is our personal choice, but then you have to truly let it go. It becomes unhealthy when we practice disdain towards the food that has been labeled ‘bad’. You don’t become a healthy eater by constantly reminding yourself and others of the bad foods that are out of your life, or scorning those foods every time they’re within 5 ft of you.

And in my opinion, you can never truly embrace what you perceive as good and healthy, if your attention is always focused on what you perceive as bad. It’s like finally meeting the man of your dreams, and constantly bringing in the ill actions of a terrible ex. What kind of relationship would that be?

One way to start stepping out of the ‘bad/good’ food labeling and embracing more varied, enjoyable eating is to allow yourself to miss your food a little bit and to consume sensible amounts of it. Let’s face it, you appreciate anything less if you are having too much of it at any given time. As the phrase goes ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’ and so it is with food as well.

One way to create such a ‘fondness’ would be to designate a day or time of month etc. around a food theme; for e.g. ‘Pizza day of the Month’ or ‘Spanish Night Out’ to help curb overindulgence and make eating more enjoyable. Balance is the key concept here. A truly balanced eating pattern is inclusive of all foods, but with a sensible mix that you can actually live with.

Realize that it is *natural* to love food. What is unnatural is denying yourself access to the array of wonderful and interesting flavors out there. Natural and enjoyable eating involves, among other things:

- slowing down at all meals which cues you in better to when you are full (i.e. automatic portion control without measuring cups or food scales).
- giving real thought (i.e. being mindful) to taste and flavors,
- and making calories count by choosing the best quality, wholesome foods.

Being aware to not label food so much is necessary to becoming a non-dieter, because diets are fueled by categorizing foods into ‘good’ and ‘bad’. This kind of awareness can really work wonders to curb some of the guilt you may associate with your everyday eating, helping you to become less vulnerable to diets.



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Getting ‘Smoochy’ with Food vs. Emotional Eating

Be Mindful: Ask yourself, “How much of what I’m eating makes me satisfied and content (i.e., I’m no longer hungry), and how much am I taking now to make me feel comforted for some reason or another?” When you can no longer taste the food or feel nauseous from eating it, then that’s your cue to stop.

In order to begin combating Emotional Eating:

- Have a number of activities enjoyable to you to help channel your attention towards other things you feel good doing.
- Connect with others to form a meaningful and supportive social network. Even though you have little or no friends and your family lives far away, reaching out to people is possible. You can do it on the internet by starting a blog or joining an online support group, or you can do some research and find just one group in your community sharing a similar interest as you. Being socially engaged is so important, because the embarrassment and shame of emotional eating can cause isolation which can worsen the problem.

Also, there is a difference between emotional eating and ‘mindful’ eating. Perhaps you may say well this concept of mindfulness is somewhat New Age, perhaps something you’ve heard of in a spiritual context. But if you really take the time to understand what the term means you will immediately see how much it applies to eating and promoting positive experiences with eating.

Mindfulness means paying full attention to something and being fully engulfed in it without judgment. It’s about being consciously aware and directing your thoughts entirely to the experience of what you are doing. Hurried eating is not mindful eating.

Regardless of the ‘superwoman/superman’ suits so many of us walk around with, convincing ourselves that we can do everything at the same time, the truth is our minds can only give quality attention to one thing at a time. In the case of eating, how many times have you been eating a meal and worrying about your children or your job, or what you’re going to do about this or that?



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Or how many times are you trying to do multiple things while you're eating? Imagine trying to enjoy a meal while your mind is fixed on worrying or anticipating something, or while you are looking at less than uplifting TV programming like the local news. Eating becomes secondary, and therefore the pleasure from eating becomes secondary.

The following is a great description of mindful eating:

“Knowing that you are eating is not the same as eating mindfully.

Let's take that example of eating and look at it a bit further. When we are purposefully aware of eating, we are consciously being aware of the process of eating. We're deliberately noticing the sensations and our responses to those sensations. We're noticing the mind wandering, and when it does wander we purposefully bring our attention back.

When we're eating unmindfully we may in theory be aware of what we're doing, but we're probably thinking about a hundred and one other things at the same time, and we may also be watching TV, talking, or reading — or even all three! So a very small part of our awareness is absorbed with eating, and we may be only barely aware of the physical sensations and even less aware of our thoughts and emotions

....Having the purpose of staying with our experience, whether that's the breath, or a particular emotion, or something as simple as eating, means that we are actively shaping the mind.”

Source: <http://www.wildmind.org/applied/daily-life/what-is-mindfulness>

It's important to direct our mind towards the full and enjoyable experience of eating, not the myriad of negative and conflicting thoughts and emotions we constantly bring our attention to during mealtime.



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Quality # 7: Avoiding Skipped Meals:

Skipping meals, especially lunch, is quickly becoming an epidemic. It often comes down to a choice between committing to the demands of our daily lives, which are at their peak during the day, or eating.

The results of skipping even one meal can be detrimental. You may feel light headed, you usually function at a lower capacity, you may be more irritable, and your concentration and focus may not be at their best.

Let's take the example of lunch. Instead of a proper lunch meal, you might simply gobble down a "quick bite" which is most likely not as healthy. Later on in the day or at dinner time, with your body in a true starvation state, you may overindulge, consuming far more than you would have, had you not skipped that a meal.

To try to avert this unfortunate outcome:

- Try to make meal time somewhat consistent, at least make it a range of time within which you must eat. That way you are training your body, and will be more likely to make time to eat.
- Release your idea of what a full meal is supposed to look like. Most of us are not Martha Stewart. Not every meal has to be as grand as a Sunday meal. A good meal can be simple and balanced.

For example, a hearty soup and salad with perhaps crusty bread on the side can be a very satisfying lunch. A hearty sandwich made with whole grain bread and high quality meats, vegetables etc with a small side is another idea.

These simple meals can indeed be filling...:

1. If you focus on foods like whole grains, beans, whole and dried fruits etc., since all of these have fiber which adds bulk and is very filling
2. Incorporate lots of vegetables especially leafy greens
3. Incorporate lean protein sources
4. Add nutrient dense foods like fish, eggs whites, yogurt, and low-fat milk etc. as much as possible.



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5. Get some healthy fats in there- sprinkle some nuts, use olive oil, and use a little dressing. Fat is still a nutrient our bodies needs and it also makes us fill fuller for longer, because it slows down the metabolic process. Just don't make it exceed 30% of your calories.
6. Have breakfast every morning. Studies have shown that a simple breakfast in the morning can significantly offset excessive caloric intake later in the day. Not to mention how energized you will feel starting your day with some nourishment. Include some type of protein like an egg, or milk in hot or cold cereal, or some peanut butter or yogurt etc.

Also include fiber in the form of a dry cereal with at least 3g fiber per serving or oatmeal, a 100% whole wheat slice of bread, English muffin, or ½ a bagel. If you can't do whole fruit, dried fruit is always a great alternative and is convenient, very portable, and is high in fiber as well.

Qualities # 8& 9: Avoiding Food Impersonators and Finding a Balance Between Everyday Eating and Indulgence

Over processed foods with multiple fillers and artificial ingredients are not best utilized by our bodies; and the groggy, unsettled feeling experienced by having too much of these foods act to lessen our positive food related experiences. Some of these over processed foods might also leave you feeling bloated, sleepy and tired.

The irony is that it is probably our Diet Craze which has contributed somewhat to the growth of some of these foods. As the fat, calories, and carbohydrate have been striped, innovated ways have been found to replace them. These replacers and their counterparts include:

- Artificial Sweeteners (low-carb. alternatives)
- Extenders (some to help stimulate the richness and mouth-feel of fat)
- Hydrogenated (i.e. Trans) Fats
- Artificial flavors and colors



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Do a little investigation and take a trip to a Natural/Organic food store like *Trader Joes* or *Whole Foods* if you haven't done so already. Even if you do not intend to buy, do a little browsing around. Good, wholesome and real food is out there and these natural or organic foods are more and more rivaling the prices of regular groceries these days.

In fact, many regular supermarket chains have an 'organic/natural' food section and in many cases have such foods among the regular brands. *Stop & Shop* has even added an affordable line of organic products under the name of 'Nature's Promise'. It's easier than ever to go organic.

- Organic & Natural is not just the 'in thing' for the moment. It is the way to go.
- Open yourself to improving the quality of food in your pantry.
- Start with replacing one item like your regular cereal with a more healthful brand like Kashi which has many wholesome ingredients in their products.
- Remember to set a serious goal to choose more wholesome, natural foods

The days of defining healthy foods strictly on the quantity of fats, sugars, and yes flavor which have been removed from them are finally coming to an end. Today, it's not so much what you can't have or eat, but what you can have and what you can eat. What this means is that we can more easily enjoy what has been coined 'healthy indulgence' on a regular basis. This is the concept of enjoying decadent foods which are healthy or healthier at least. Healthy indulgence can be found in everything from cereals to snacks to beverages.

What are some of the things setting the trend for this 'healthy indulgent' cuisine, and what should you look for?

- Bold ethnic flavors/spices and ingredients like ginger, chipotle, various curries, etc
- Foods with a high level of healthier ingredients, superfoods, and nutrients added-like whole grains, probiotics, antioxidants, herbal extracts, green tea, acai, pomegranate.
- Pure and 100% natural ingredients
- More realistic, premeasured, and bite-sized portions are becoming more widespread. For example 100-calorie or smaller sized snacks



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Quality #10: Finding a Positive Focus

Diets seem to depend on the hope that you have nothing better to do than to stick to a rigid regimen for valuable days, weeks, or months of your life. I don't know about you, but there's life going out there! There's family and friends, great events to attend, great restaurants to go to where you're allowed to eat more than a celery stick; good days and great dates to enjoy. Diets suck up all the fun, because for the most part they are designed to have your whole world revolving around them.

The Non-dieter has better things to do—People to see, places to go, good wholesome food to enjoy. After all what would be the point of losing the weight? The Non-Dieter has ample areas in his/her life which are not all about food, but about maintaining emotional wellbeing by doing things enjoyable to them. Therefore food is enjoyed, but not made the ultimate comforter in their lives.

Having an overall positive outlook or focus in your life makes it impossible to make anything—food, a house, a man, children, a dog etc—the sole source of your happiness. That's the reason why it's important to recognize the multiple of things which add pleasure to your life and keep your focus on the positive (i.e. Positive focus). For example, having various hobbies can significantly improve your positive outlook on things. Here are a few additional reasons why this is important:

- If you are clearly focused on doing something that is pleasing, like engaging in various hobbies or enjoying great entertainment, you are not likely to be preoccupied with food or your weight. Diets depend on this 'preoccupation with food' to keep you hooked.
- You can set your health and weight goals without becoming obsessed with them because you are no longer coming from a place of guilt, but joyfulness.
- Channeling your thoughts towards one or more things you love doing contributes to overall wellbeing.



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Suggestion:

Choose hobbies or interests which require some patience and focus; preferably slow hobbies like jewelry making, card making, pottery, painting etc. which require very concentrated focus on your part.

Also, Get Interactive:

Choose hobbies or interests which force you to engage some level of physical effort. These can include some type of dance, gardening, and even yoga, tai chi or qigong. I personally like Belly Dance which is possible to do at home with minimal investment.

Although the level of physical engagement may vary depending on which activity you choose, the overall point is to get your body and mind fueled and energized. You may well burn some calories, and move away from any unhealthy preoccupation with dieting and food, which you may have had prior. Plus something which is fun and just happens to serve as exercise is always a great thing.



Looking At the Overall Picture:

The Non-Dieter is very interested in overall health. Diets create a preoccupation with only one aspect of your health, but because this preoccupation is generally negative, it can actually affect overall health negatively as well. You can end up putting your body through a serious beating as you move from diet to diet, and this instability doesn't do much good for your mental state either. In order to work, long-term weight management needs to be more than about weight.

That kind of long-term commitment requires personal accountability. That kind of obligation and willingness to take responsibility for yourself is a healthy way to begin approaching the Non-Dieter principles towards reshaping your mind and actions towards food. It's all about empowerment, setting the bar high, being a bit unconventional in the way you approach your weight management goals and eating habits, and above all loving food in a healthful way and offering no apologies for that.

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