

THE SECRETS OF

SKINNY CHICKS



How to Feel
Great in Your
Favorite Jeans—
When It Doesn't
Come Naturally

KAREN BRIDSON



THE
SECRETS
OF SKINNY
CHICKS

How to Feel Great in Your Favorite Jeans
—When It Doesn't Come Naturally

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McGraw-Hill

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Introduction

SKINNY CHICKS. WE ALL know at least a few of them. Those tiny-butt girls in their size 6 (or smaller) jeans strutting around with complete confidence. They don't have to so much as think about covering up bulging bellies or standing "just so" to minimize the girth of their thighs. Their bodies are firm, their clothes fit perfectly, and they seem *so* comfortable in their own skin that they don't even appear to give a second thought to whether their bums look big. Meanwhile, for most of the rest of the female world, the nonskinny chicks, weight and bulges and food and bathing-suit season are, to some degree or another, a problem.

I am fortunate enough to have lived in both worlds and, in essence, continue to keep one foot on both sides of the line. I often call myself a fat chick who runs every day. I used to weigh forty-five pounds more than I do now and was completely out of shape. Wearing black from head to toe and teasing my hair out as much as possible (hey, it was the 1980s) was my way of averting attention from the size of my flabby, unfit, gradually widening body. My self-esteem was in the gutter, I couldn't bear to see myself naked in the mirror, and I'd keep my head up the whole time I sat in the bathtub because looking down at the rolls of fat beneath my breasts horrified me.

I reached the point where I didn't want to get even one pound bigger. So I turned it all around. I started running in my bedroom, graduated to laps in my parents' tiny basement, and after long, hard work eventually ran my first 10K race. I started eating much more healthily, and, slowly but surely, thirty pounds came off. I was thrilled. My self-esteem soared, and I was a new woman. I discovered what it was like to have

to ask a salesperson to bring a smaller pair of pants to me in the changing room, I felt the joy of being able to get up off of the ground with ease, and I caught myself looking at my naked lower body in the mirror and actually liking what I saw. Feeling good in my own skin became addictive, and I never wanted to end up back where I'd been before. And I did stick with it. Today, I've run five marathons and have made women's health and fitness (in particular, helping women on this same journey) a major focus of my life.

But my voyage into the world of health has a more recent chapter. Over the past five years I have shed another fifteen pounds off of my frame. While I was strong and fit and healthy fifteen pounds ago, I wanted to see just how fit and fabulous I could get. I studied my personal trainer manuals and serious exercise magazines for details on what the chicks with fabulous bods actually did to look the way they do. What I hadn't expected, however, was just how hard it would be. As I shed more and more weight, I was really surprised by what it took to get down another size. And the more I read about what other women with 24-inch waists did to get their fabulous forms and the more I talked to them myself, the more I marveled at just how ill-informed the rest of the world is about what these women with fabulous bodies do to look *that* great.

Most skinny chicks don't starve themselves on lettuce and cabbage-soup diets, but most of them are not blessed with naturally fast metabolisms either. Being a skinny chick is hard work, and the women I spoke to spend lots of time, energy, and thought mastering their skinny chick lifestyle. (Note: none of the women profiled in this book has had liposuction or other surgeries to help them achieve their slim frame.) Behind every pair of size-5 jeans is a woman who exercises daily and counts her calories. She is conscious of what she needs to fuel her body properly and how to feel good about herself every day, even when she slips up.

And so, this book pulls back the curtain and exposes once and for all the truth about what it takes to get fit and fabulous when it doesn't come naturally. These skinny chicks have lived in secrecy for long enough. It's time for the rest of the women of the world to know—and know in detail—what it is these women are doing and, more importantly, how we can do it too. And we can.

Now, this book is meant to empower women. It's not just another diet book telling women they need to be thin. I do think women should work to be within a healthy range for the sake of their own self-esteem, mental health, and physical health. But teaching a woman how to be a skinny chick is not necessarily the point of this book. You can use it to get a fabulous body, just like the women profiled inside. And if you think that's what you want to do, I encourage you to do it. But for most of you reading this book, I hope it provides all the information you've ever wanted to have about what it takes to be thin but healthy (finally exploring this end of the thin-fat scale) so that once and for all you may be able to make peace with *your* emotional and physical “healthy place” on the fitness spectrum.

You may look at these women who work out two or more hours a day and eat just 1,600 calories most days and say, “I will never, ever be willing to live my life that way.” And that's just fine because for the most part, we are all in the same boat. We don't have the time, energy, or, in some cases, the money to spend on health foods and gym memberships. That's why I wrote this book.

We will inspect fifty secrets of skinny chicks and figure out ways to implement them into a “Skinny Chicks Plan for Real Women.” The skinny chicks we meet throughout this book will inspire and encourage you to integrate many of the secrets they live by into your own life. These women were picked for this book because they have to work to keep their bodies in the

fabulous shape they are in. (They are not the kind of women who have super-fast metabolisms, can eat whatever they want and not exercise, and still look the way they do.) You may not want to go to the wall with each tip the way these gals do, but know that living your life this way, to whatever degree you are comfortable, will help you to be healthier and happier. If you are at an unhealthy weight, I hope this book helps you on your way to getting fit. For you, *that* may mean a size 8 or it may mean a size 14. Skinny is, after all, a state of mind. But it's imperative that you get moving and start eating well. Too many of us today are eating far, far more than we need to and exercising far, far less than we should.

The skinny chicks in this book will show you the thin end of healthy; it's up to you to decide how close you want to get to that for your own body type and lifestyle. Or perhaps you don't have a weight problem at all and would just like to lose that last, stubborn five, ten, or fifteen pounds. The Skinny Chicks Secrets will help you do just that. Ultimately, what I hope all women will take away from this book is the information needed to choose what point on the fitness spectrum is right for them. This book is about demystifying the lives of skinny chicks. It's about choice. And, ultimately, it's about being inspired to take action.

Note: Before starting any diet or exercise regimen, consult your doctor.

PART 1

Deciding to Make That Change

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Our Eating-Disordered, Unhealthy World

WOMEN ARE KILLING THEMSELVES trying to get thin. An estimated ten million North American women suffer from anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Without treatment, up to 20 percent of these women will die. That's potentially two million women each year. Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychological disease.

I started undereating, overexercising, pushing myself too hard, and brutalizing my immune system. The amount of time I spent thinking about food and being upset with my body was insane.

—Courtney Thorne-Smith, actor and star of “According to Jim” and “Ally McBeal”

While it is clear most women suffering from these disorders have emotional problems going deeper than a desire to be thin, it's often Western society's glorification of a gaunt frame that starts these women down this deadly path.

At the other end of the spectrum, an estimated twenty-five million American women suffer from binge eating

disorder (BED), in which a person binges without purging or using laxatives afterward. This disorder is a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic sweeping North America. Approximately 127 million adults in the United States are overweight, 60 million are obese, and 9 million are severely obese. Obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States.

But it's not just people at these two extremes of the spectrum who have unhealthy relationships with food. It's estimated that 80 percent of North American women are dissatisfied with their appearance. And they spend \$40 billion a year on diets and related products in an effort to do something about that. However, an estimated 35 percent of "normal" dieters progress to pathological dieting, or nonstop dieting, that can lead to eating disorders and cause damage to the metabolism. Of those, 20 to 25 percent go on to have partial- or full-syndrome eating disorders. And these problems are also on the rise outside of North America, where disordered eating had been less of a problem in the past. Ultimately, for far too many of us, food is not simply something we use to nourish our bodies. Food is at the core of a lot of emotional and physical pain.

Given that the stakes are as high as they are—life or death—showing women how to navigate the muddy waters of food and exercise is very serious business. While a book called *The Secrets of Skinny Chicks* may sound like yet another contribution to the eating disorder problem, that's actually the opposite of my intention. Rather, my goal for this book is to give women the information they have been denied for so long and to empower them to use this information to make the best lifestyle choices for themselves. Women are hurting themselves trying to figure out how to look like these skinny chicks. Too many of us have been flailing around in the dark, without access to the truth, trying to get the bodies we have always wanted. This book is about empowering women with information so they can make informed choices about what point on the fitness spectrum is

right for them. But before we get into a discussion of diet and exercise secrets, it's critical that we take time to learn more about how this journey can go terribly, terribly wrong.

A Closer Look at Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is a very serious, potentially life-threatening problem that is characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss. According to the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA), the four main symptoms of this disorder include the refusal to maintain a body weight at or above a minimally normal weight, an intense fear of weight gain or being “fat,” feeling “fat” or overweight despite dramatic weight loss, and loss of menstrual periods.

NEDA Warning Signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- ✱ Dramatic weight loss (Two pounds lost per week is considered safe, more than that can be a problem.)
- ✱ Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, fat grams, and dieting to the extent that it interferes with your life and causes you to miss opportunities
- ✱ Refusal to eat certain foods, progressing to denying yourself whole categories of food (e.g., no carbohydrates)
- ✱ Frequent comments about feeling “fat” or overweight despite weight loss
- ✱ Anxiety about gaining weight or being “fat”
- ✱ Denial of hunger
- ✱ Development of food rituals (e.g., eating foods in certain orders, excessive chewing, rearranging food on a plate)
- ✱ Consistent excuses to avoid mealtimes or situations involving food
- ✱ Excessive, rigid exercise regimen—despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury—in a need to burn off calories
- ✱ Withdrawal from usual friends and activities

- ✱ In general, behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting, and control of food are becoming *primary* concerns

As a result of the cycle of self-starvation, the body doesn't get the essential nutrients it needs to function properly. Ultimately, the body is forced to slow down all of its processes to conserve energy. This slowing down results in very serious medical problems, including an abnormally slow heart rate and blood pressure, reduction in bone density, muscle loss and weakness, severe dehydration (leading to kidney failure), fainting, weakness, hair loss, dry skin, and growth of a downy layer of hair called lanugo all over the body, which can keep body temperature regulated.

A Closer Look at Bulimia

Characterized by a cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors, such as self-induced vomiting designed to undo the effects of the bingeing, bulimia is a very serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder. It involves eating large amounts of food (more than a person would typically eat at one meal), often in secret. Then, the person tries to get rid of those calories through vomiting, laxative abuse, or overexercising. According to NEDA, symptoms of bulimia include repeated alternating episodes of bingeing and purging, feeling out of control and eating beyond the point of comfortable fullness during a binge, and frequent dieting.

NEDA Warning Signs of Bulimia

- ✱ Evidence of binge-eating, including disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time or the existence of wrappers and containers indicating the consumption of large amounts of food

- ✱ Evidence of purging behaviors, including frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting, presence of wrappers or packages of laxatives or diuretics
- ✱ Excessive, rigid exercise regimen—despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury—in a need to burn off calories
- ✱ Unusual swelling of the cheeks or jaw area
- ✱ Calluses on the back of the hands and knuckles from self-induced vomiting
- ✱ Discoloration or staining of the teeth
- ✱ Creation of complex lifestyle schedules or rituals to make time for binge-and-purge sessions
- ✱ Withdrawal from friends and usual activities

Ultimately the recurrent binge-and-purge cycles of bulimia can take their toll on the digestive system and lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body, affecting the heart and other major organ functions. It can also lead to gastric ruptures, inflammation of the esophagus from vomiting, tooth decay and staining from stomach acid, chronic irregular bowel movements, peptic ulcers, and pancreatitis.

A Closer Look at Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

Binge eating disorder (BED), also known as compulsive over-eating, is diagnosed in situations in which a person binge eats again and again but does not engage in any activities that compensate for the binge. The disorder is characterized by frequent episodes of eating large quantities of food in short periods of time. People suffering from this disorder eat when they are not hungry and eat in secret. They also can be of a normal or heavier than average weight. It's estimated that between 1 and 5 percent of the general population suffers from BED. The

disorder can lead to many of the same health problems associated with clinical obesity, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and gallbladder disease.

NEDA Binge Eating Disorder Warning Signs

- * Frequent episodes of eating large quantities of food in short periods of time
- * Believing that your eating behavior is out of control
- * Feeling ashamed of or disgusted by the behavior
- * Eating when not hungry
- * Eating in secret

Anorexia Athletica

Many of the women in this book exercise a great deal. Therefore, it's important to talk about the serious problem of compulsive exercise, also known as anorexia athletica. Even though anorexia athletica is not recognized as an official medical diagnosis, according to the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) this term is being used more and more within the health-care community to identify people with a preoccupation with food and weight who exercise compulsively in an attempt to gain a sense of power, control, and self-respect.

Symptoms of Anorexia Athletica (NEDIC)

- * Exercising beyond the requirements for good health, which could mean burning more than 3,500 calories a week from exercise (Note: Burning more than this number of calories per week can be healthy for some people, but since this does go beyond the requirements for good health, it can also be a warning sign.)
- * Being fanatical about weight and diet