



**The
Reverse
Diet**

**Lose 20, 50, 100 Pounds or More
by Eating Dinner for Breakfast
and Breakfast for Dinner**

**Tricia Cunningham
Heidi Skolnik, MS, CDN, FACSM**



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This book is dedicated to all Reverse Dieters who have committed themselves to becoming happier and healthier individuals. To my daughters, Brittni and Noelle, for all you have endured and for bringing the greatest joy to my life. And to Sean, my best friend, partner, husband, and one true love.

—Tricia

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—Heidi and Tricia

Tricia's Story

One day six years ago, I woke up and decided to do exactly the opposite of what I had been doing my whole life. Up until that point, I had spent most of my life struggling with a weight problem. I yo-yoed between bingeing and fasting and eventually tipped the scale at 280 pounds on a 5'8" frame.

Until that time, even throughout my childhood, I thought nothing of being 150 to 160 pounds. I wasn't one of the thin girls. My weight became a way for me to protect myself from the abuse I suffered at home. If I made myself ugly, I figured that I was less of a target for my first stepfather's unwelcome attention. Even though I eventually moved to live with my grandmother, this habit stuck with me. Fear of being attractive created a lifelong struggle with my weight.

My weight fluctuated for many years. I tried everything, including starvation and just about every fad diet, all of which failed miserably. Ultimately I gained more weight than I lost. Nothing seemed to work. My family tried to convince me that I was "big-boned" and that there was nothing I could do about it. But when I married my

first husband, Ron, at age nineteen, he didn't accept that logic. He wanted me to be super-thin, and he wasn't patient. I was back to starving myself and binge eating. By Christmas 1991 I managed to get down to a size 9 and felt great. Valentine's Day 1992 came with a special surprise: I was pregnant with my first child, Brittni. Of course I welcomed this blessing, but it presented a whole new challenge.

Having struggled with weight all my life and then being told that I had to gain weight, I was in an emotional whirlwind. I thought I had a free pass to eat whatever I wanted. Ron worked as a supervisor for a local snack food company, and just about every night he brought home as many snacks as he could carry. Three-pound bags of potato chips, Slim Jims, cookies—you name it. I was in heaven. At the end of the pregnancy in October 1992, I weighed 220 pounds, having gained 70 pounds. After I had Brittni, my eating habits didn't go back to the way they had been before the pregnancy and therefore neither did my weight. In March 1993, I learned I was pregnant with my second child. I was delighted, and once again I had a free pass to eat whatever I wanted.

Not long after Noelle was born, Ron was back on the subject of my weight. He hounded me about not losing weight after having Brittni. He was constantly comparing me to a woman in his office and complaining that I wasn't nearly as skinny as she was. It didn't take long before I realized they were having an affair, and soon after that my marriage with Ron dissolved. Over the next few years, I had a few short romantic relationships, and my weight would fluctuate accordingly. Bingeing and starving were my two best friends. I ate a lot during stressful times and nothing after I had done something wrong—that is, anything less than perfect. I was a perfectionist and an overachiever in all aspects of life except where my weight was concerned. That was the one thing I felt I couldn't control.

I was the heaviest I had ever been, maxing out at 292 pounds. I kept starving myself and losing as much as 40 pounds, but it always came back. I just couldn't keep the weight off.

Then on August 28, 1999, everything changed. I woke up exhausted from a party the night before. We had been celebrating the

life of a friend we'd lost, and I was still dealing with my emotions as I slowly made my way downstairs. I moved slowly because I was wearing a cast on my right leg, which I had broken a few weeks earlier during a tumble down the steps. I couldn't see my feet over my belly, tripped, and went flying. It was nine-thirty in the morning and the house was crowded with people over to watch a sporting event. We ordered a pizza, and I had my usual drink, Caffeine-Free Diet Pepsi, along with my morning cigarette—I was smoking two and a half packs a day. Everything seemed normal. After four puffs of my cigarette, three bites of pizza, and a half a glass of my drink, my heart felt like it was getting ready to burst. Everything was spinning out of control; it felt like there was a swarm of bees in my head, and I dropped everything and ran into the bathroom.

I was suffering from the worst panic attack I had ever experienced. As a trained nurse, I knew what to do; I started running my wrists under cold water, but that didn't work. My daughters were trying to talk me down. Even so, my heart was racing. The girls ran a cold bath for me, and I soaked in it for two hours. I still didn't feel right. I was afraid to go to a doctor; I feared that something awful was happening. The attack went on for the next five hours before finally subsiding. I went back into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. I hated what I saw; I hated myself. There I was with two beautiful daughters, years of education, and the world in front of me, and I was killing myself, destroying my body, and ruining my future.

After the panic attack, I tried to figure out what had brought it on. I thought it must have been something I ate, drank, or smoked, so I refused to eat or drink for the rest of the day (and I have never had another cigarette). I did not eat or drink anything for the next three days. On the fourth morning, I woke up and knew that I couldn't keep starving myself. I looked into the mirror and didn't hate what I saw, because I began to realize that I could change it. I knew that everything I had done up to that point with my weight and health had been wrong. I knew that I couldn't keep living the way I was living. I had to reverse course—to flip-flop everything—to change my life. That was the beginning of the Reverse Diet.

I went into the kitchen that fourth morning extremely hungry, but still frightened from the panic attack and worried that food would cause another attack. I stuck to basic ingredients, nothing exotic. The first breakfast included a plain chicken breast, a baked potato, and some broccoli. No butter, spices, or salt. I took my time, checking my pulse every few minutes. Everything seemed fine, and I felt good. Within a couple of hours, I was hungry again, so for lunch I had more chicken and veggies. My belly always growled by dinner-time, as it was the only big meal I typically had, but this day there was no growling. I wasn't hungry and ate very little: just a small serving of plain, dry, shredded wheat. The next morning I was very hungry, so I ate the same things because I knew they were safe. For the next week, I continued the same routine: my dinner in the morning, a smaller meal for lunch, and a small breakfast for dinner. I saw that my clothes were getting loose and I was shedding a few pounds, but I didn't know that I had lost 12 pounds in a week! By the time I got my cast off in September, just a month later, I had lost 40 pounds.

I started to think that something was wrong with me—there was no way I could eat that much food every day and lose weight without something being wrong. While I definitely watched the foods I ate, my meals weren't tiny and unsatisfying as they had been on every diet I had ever been on. Instead, I ate until I was full. How do you lose weight by eating more? This didn't make sense to me. I made an appointment with my doctor, who did a complete physical and told me that I was entirely healthy—in fact, healthier than I had ever been. I couldn't believe my ears. Not only was I not dying, I was actually going to live longer. I became obsessed with the concept of *eat more food, lose more weight*. I bought diet book after diet book, searching for the answers to my questions, but I was on my own. I'd have to figure this out by myself.

Some of the changes to my lifestyle I just fell into. It started with me trying to have the fewest ingredients for a light dinner. I chose cereal (shredded wheat), but I didn't want the milk. I used to drink orange juice every morning, so one day I just decided to mix it in. I know shredded wheat with orange juice sounds weird, but I really

liked it, plus it satisfied my sweet craving. Other aspects of the plan took research and experimentation.

That New Year's Eve, I went to a party wearing a size 9 dress. I had gone from 250 pounds in August down to just 150 pounds. I had set a goal weight of 130 pounds and knew that I could reach it. By March 2000, I was at 130. I even got as low as 112, but that was too thin for my build. I went back to 130 and have stayed that weight ever since. Now I work as a motivational coach for fellow Reverse Dieters and have dedicated my life to helping others reverse their lives the same way I did. All that I have learned is in the pages that follow. I have teamed up with Heidi Skolnik, a knowledgeable nutritionist, and together we've made this diet something that can work for everyone.