

DITCHING DIETS

**HOW TO LOSE WEIGHT
IN A WAY YOU CAN MAINTAIN**



Gillian Riley

AUTHOR OF THE UK BESTSELLER

“EATING LESS: SAY GOODBYE TO OVEREATING”

I am a psychologist in practice for 30 years, and this is the most cogent and wise approach I've encountered to date. It's the only approach I've seen that combines all aspects of this complex problem: neurochemistry, blood sugar, nutrition, the rebelliousness of the human spirit, and the power of intentional mindfulness into a practical, sensible plan for altering those addictive neural pathways.

April Martin, PhD

This book has changed my life. Most importantly I am able to integrate all this into my normal daily living. I do not have to say no to parties or social gatherings afraid I will break my diet! This is a lifelong, livable way of relating to food.

Dr Rosaire O' Donovan

This is an awesome book. Concrete and do-able, it's groundbreaking advice. Makes me feel I don't need to fall out of love with food, or disconnect myself from it, rather that I can turn my passion from a negative to a positive one. Really exciting stuff. I have spent so much of my life with my head in the sand because I thought nothing would ever work.

Having read your book Eating Less, I think this more condensed format actually gives the message a lot more punch. I feel energised and able after reading this. The ease of the read somehow syncs with ease of attitude I'm searching for. This is more compelling than ever.

Amy Marshall

I can't even remember the last time I had a huge blow out binge to the point of discomfort and pain. I can now comfortably leave food on my plate without worrying about it. I can now socialise without feeling stressed and anxious. Before, I was an all day grazer and any little graze could trigger a major big binge and that was the day in tatters.

My husband commented recently that he thinks I seem more relaxed and less uptight. I think I am a happier person with myself, and life in general.

Naomi Cresswell

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Author's Note to Readers in the United States and Other Parts of the World: This book was written in England using language as it is written and spoken in this country. You may find that some spellings, words and phrases seem unusual, and I hope this doesn't detract from your enjoyment and understanding of the book.

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INTRODUCTION • THREE QUESTIONS

Welcome to an extraordinary journey. This will be an adventure, and just like all adventures it will be challenging, risky and full of surprises. At times you might think you'll never get anywhere and that nothing will ever change. At other times you might fear so much will change you won't be able to handle it. Just stay with it and watch what happens. Let those thoughts and fears come and go. Get some support with it if you want to, someone to talk to about it all. I know you want something to change; otherwise you wouldn't be reading this book in the first place. So in a sense you've already started the journey. Just don't give up on it, however long it takes, and you will get there in the end.

First things first. You want to change something about the way you are with food, so that you can be more in control of what you eat. Now, in order to change your actions, you change the way you think. Why? Because behind every action there's always a thought. The thought can be ever so subtle, so subtle you may not even notice it, but it's there. You think, 'Another slice of cake looks good' and before you know it you've eaten it. What you can do here is to learn a new way of thinking so that you can change your actions. Then, you have the opportunity not to eat that other slice of cake.

There are, of course, some theories out there that propose biological causes, such as low blood sugar, a lack of amino acids, or other nutrient deficiencies. But research has shown that serious overeating, even in those diagnosed with 'Binge Eating Disorder', responds dramatically to placebo intervention. Although unlikely to be a long-term solution, the fact that this happens at all shows us the significance of the ways in which we think: our attitudes and expectations. (1)

Appetite hormones such as leptin and ghrelin are also highly susceptible to the placebo effect. Providing signals of hunger and fullness, they have a major influence on how much you eat, and the fact that they are strongly influenced by mental expectation is often ignored. (2,3)

It's not that there isn't also a physical, biological side to all this, it's just that changing the way you think is an extraordinarily powerful factor.

When it comes to changing the way you think about food, there are three things to keep in mind. Let's call them themes. I'm going to describe what they are, so you can understand and remember them. Then, if your eating is not what you would like it to be – you're eating in ways that you later regret – you ask yourself about these three themes.

What you'll discover is that whenever any one of these themes is out of place, you'll feel out of control with food in some way. You'll be eating too much, too often, the

wrong things or at the wrong times. When you question and find the truth about these themes for yourself, then you'll feel in control of your eating. Then, you feel at peace with food. Then, you have a good relationship with food and eat in ways you don't regret.

So what are the three themes? I'll list them here and then I'll go into more detail over the following chapters:

1. AM I CHOOSING? Most people deny choice in an attempt to cut back on their eating, whether or not they are actually managing to cut back. If you ever notice a rebellious quality to your eating, especially if you feel completely out of control at times, feeling overwhelmed by intense and persistent cravings, this is the theme for you to tackle. If you keep procrastinating, putting off making good changes or if you feel deprived when you don't eat something yummy, this is the theme for you. When you eliminate these problems, then you take control. You take control by developing a deep sense of free choice. Only then can you make genuine choices that work for you, choices you really do want to live with.

2. WHY DOES IT MATTER TO ME? Here we look at why you might make one choice over any other. For example, you might ask yourself, 'Why don't I eat some more cake?' Or, 'Why am I snacking on an apple instead of a bar of chocolate?' We always have reasons for the things we do but often we lose sight of what they are, and this is important when it comes to making lasting changes in what you're eating on a regular basis. In Chapter Two we'll see how your motivation can be made much more powerful and sustainable.

3. HOW AM I DEALING WITH TEMPTATION? This theme addresses your desire to overeat; the urge, impulse and attraction toward all that food you don't really need. In the past you may have tried to control this by avoiding temptation or distracting yourself. But it's impossible to keep that up forever, so your success gets compromised. You can begin to think differently about feeling tempted and about feeling satisfied. When you do, things really start to change. This book shows you how.

Is it really this simple? Well, yes and no. It is simple in that all you need to remember are these three themes. It isn't simple in that you need to be honest with yourself so that you don't deceive yourself with false answers. A counselor – anyone who can listen to you in a supportive way and give you honest feedback about the ideas in this book – can help.

This is about how to make a shift in your thinking that will last, and once you've made that shift you'll never need to diet again. It takes time, effort and courage to change the way you think, but it really is possible.

You can go as fast or as slow as you like. And it isn't necessary to believe in it in order for it to work.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Keep it private. Over the next few chapters you'll see how to develop a powerful and very practical sense of choice about food. When you start practicing with these ideas, it's best to keep it to yourself as much as you possibly can, without discussing what you're doing as part of your everyday conversations. Talking to a support person or support group is fine, but as much as possible keep all your discussions about eating and weight within those designated meetings and conversations.

This advice goes double if you have someone in your life who puts pressure on you to lose weight. If there's someone who makes comments about your size or comments on what you eat, that is especially the person you don't want to get involved in what you're learning here. They may well continue to make their comments but you don't have to respond to them, so don't take the bait, and try to change the subject whenever you can.

- Of course you'll need to make some decisions with others sometimes; what the family will have for dinner, perhaps, or what restaurant your group of friends will go to. But exactly what and how much you eat is up to you and is best decided by you. So, for example, if you want a second helping of something, you don't talk about it. You learn how to think it through for yourself and make a private decision about whether or not to have it.

Later on, when you've spent a while working with this book, you may want to talk about some of it with people close to you. You'll know when you're ready to do that, and you'll know by then that it's still best not to discuss it while you are eating.

- Keep it simple. One of the best things about this approach is that you don't need to make other changes in your daily life in order for this to work. Learning how to eat less doesn't depend on whether you have a wildly exciting social life or are lonely and isolated. It doesn't depend on whether you're standing up, sitting down, watching TV or reading. It doesn't depend on whether you're at work or at home. Unemployed or bringing up children. Happy and productive or depressed and bored.

You can learn how to control what and how much you eat no matter what is going on in your life. And the best thing about this is that you don't need to wait until other things in your life change before you can make changes in your eating. You can get to work on it right way, just as things are. In fact, working on things just as they are right now is the best way to proceed. You'll see why later on.

- Let it in. The first time you read this book you'll begin to understand the principles, but you're only going to get good results if you can let these ideas become real to you. It may take reading this book a couple of times before it sinks in enough to make a difference. This doesn't mean you're a slow learner or that you will never learn anything here that will make a real difference. It's just the way it is for many people. It takes a while, and this means you need to be a bit persistent. First of all you understand these themes, and then you start to live them by bringing them into the daily thoughts you have about food.

It's possible you'll come across some unusual ideas that are completely different to anything you've heard before. It may take a while before you can really let it in. Take it at your own pace. Keep returning to this book, and eventually you'll be able to own it in a way that enables you to break through the barriers and access the power in you to take control. Then, things will change. Not just for a while, but in real, lasting ways. Not because you read a book but because you changed the way you think about food.

GILLIAN'S STORY

My own progress with food has been gradual over a number of years, not too dramatic but none the less valuable. I certainly eat a good deal less than I used to and the quality of what I eat has improved beyond recognition. I've made these changes in exactly the ways I describe in this book. I've certainly got the potential to be overindulgent with food. I enjoy my food very much - but I also really enjoy being able to eat less.

People often want to know, so I'll tell you that at my largest I was a UK dress size 18, and now I've been a steady and happy 12 for many years.

Every time I lead a seminar I meet a new group, and as we talk these things through I learn more about what people need to understand so that eating less can become a natural part of their life. This book contains the experiences, the questions and the answers that have come out of this process.

There's always a wide range of difficulties because everybody's different, but there are also themes I notice over and over again. The effectiveness of addressing these particular themes is supported by scientific research, and that can give you real confidence in the material in this book.

Some of my clients have contributed their comments at the ends of the chapters that follow. It may help you to see these ideas expressed in other people's words.

1 • AM I CHOOSING?

Whenever you think about limiting what you eat, what kinds of things do you say to yourself? Do you think anything like this?

'I mustn't eat between meals.'

'I've got to stop eating all this bread.'

'I can't eat anything with sugar.'

'I'm not allowed to eat wheat.'

'Don't you dare eat any more of those.'

This style of thinking is very common so I wouldn't be at all surprised if these thoughts or something like them go through your head whenever you try to control your eating. Sometimes they flash by very quickly, so it takes some attention to catch them and realise that this is how you are trying to stop eating so much.

Some people, though, gave up any attempt to control themselves so long ago they've banished these thoughts completely and just go ahead and eat anything they want. If this is so for you, it might be that you could spot this style of thinking *after* you've been overeating:

'I've got to stop eating so much.'

'I shouldn't eat so much junk food/fried food/bread.'

'I won't allow myself any chocolate for the rest of the week.'

'I must start that diet tomorrow.'

'I can't go on like this.'

Most people try to control their eating by thinking in terms of prohibition: commands, restrictions and maybe even threats. They think like an authority figure, a stern parent inside their own heads, shouting out orders. The harder they try, the more urgently this voice shouts at them, judges them and tries to bully them into submission.

This is what most people think of as willpower. It's no wonder they say they don't have any! I know I wouldn't want any of that. It sounds like a nightmare to me. In fact, it isn't willpower. It's the opposite of willpower and that's why it doesn't work. And it doesn't work, does it? If it did, you'd be out there obeying the orders, always being

‘good’, following the rules, never overeating or eating anything that’s bad for you. The reality is more likely to be that the more you try to restrict yourself, the more you rebel and eat even more. (4)

You might be one of those people who can go along with the rules for a while, perhaps when you’re on a diet or attending a slimming club. You think, ‘I am allowed to eat these things’ (whatever’s on the diet) and ‘I’m not allowed to eat those things’ (maybe just a few but not a lot of those things because they aren’t on the diet). It works for a while but you know from experience that it doesn’t last. At some point it all falls apart. Rebellious, out of control overeating kicks in again, you’re eating even more than when you first started, and you keep putting off returning to the diet because it feels so restrictive. You think, ‘I’ll do that diet again one day, but not today. I’m too busy to think about it right now’. And so you go on, wishing you had some control with food.

You see, the problem comes from thinking in terms of following rules and restrictions. Thinking this way creates a devastating attitude, which undermines your best intentions. This is the sense of deprivation, which will always destroy your attempts to control what you eat. (5)

Feelings of deprivation are an adult version of the temper tantrum a child throws when they want something and are being prevented from getting it. This temper tantrum means you’re going to be upset until you get what you want. Maybe you don’t go quite as far as throwing tantrums over food, but see if you don’t throw a sophisticated, ever so subtle, adult version. An adult version in your head, which can be just as manipulative as the tantrums you see in the supermarkets from the kids with their exasperated mothers.

These deprivation tantrums can be so fleeting they’re gone in a second. It can be the briefest glimpse of martyrdom, just at the thought of not eating this particular item you fancy. This feeling is so negative, it need do no more than threaten to appear. This threat is the fear that if you don’t eat this thing *now* you’re really going to regret it. If you deny yourself this thing, you aren’t going to stop thinking about it, you’ll eat something else that’s even worse to compensate, and when you do get your hands on some you’ll eat ten times as many. You’ve got yourself over a barrel. You’re damned if you do - but you’re even more damned if you don’t.

This is the nightmare so many people live with. They want to eat less, and especially less of certain things, but when they feel attracted to these foods their willpower is nowhere to be found. It’s been wiped out by that sense of deprivation, even by the threat of it. And for those people who do manage to struggle through a few days, weeks or months of ‘denying themselves’, they can feel stressed, depressed and completely obsessed with food.

It could be that what I’m describing here is a fairly simple issue for you to work through, or it can be a major challenge. Often, people who really did have a dictatorial authority figure in their youth take on this style of thinking and can even apply it to almost anything in life. (6)

No matter where you begin, when you reduce or eliminate this sense of deprivation, you get to access your ability to take control. You get to eat less in a way that brings you joy and a sense of achievement instead of resentment, misery and, sooner or later, ‘cheating’ and rebellious overeating again.

I realise you can only take my word for it at this point because you don’t have your own experience to test this out yet, but what I want to explain to you in this chapter is that all this difficulty is created by a state of mind. The sense that eating less means you are ‘depriving yourself’ is nothing but an attitude, a way of thinking. All that difficulty and negativity is created when you deny your freedom of choice, and you do that by thinking in terms of commands, threats, rules, restrictions and prohibition. Check out those sentences at the beginning of this chapter and see if any of them don’t ever flip through your head. They leave you feeling like you’re being bullied. Like you’ve been locked up, forced to eat rabbit food and there’s no way out. (Z)

Loss of freedom is surely one of the most devastating things that can ever happen to a human being. This is true of any freedom that’s rightfully yours: freedom of speech, for example, the right to vote and the right to worship. These and many more are all freedoms most of us take for granted, and we would object strongly if they were ever taken away. We also have every right to eat whatever is ours to eat – and that’s the freedom you deny when you think in terms of ‘can’t’, ‘have to’, ‘not allowed’ and ‘must’.

The solution is contained in your power of choice. But before you can genuinely choose, you need to know that genuine choices exist. This means acknowledging that you’re completely free to eat anything and everything you can get your hands on. I’m not encouraging you to do that. What I’m saying is that by knowing you are free to overeat – *even to eat in ways that could impair your health and wellbeing* – knowing this first of all is what creates a genuine and deep sense of choice. You cannot make real choices unless you first recognize that real options are in fact available.

Let’s say you give a substantial amount of money to someone. Compare how you’d feel if the same person stole the same amount from you. In both cases, that money has ended up with the same person; the difference is whether you had a choice about it. If the money had been stolen, you’d be a victim – and you’d feel like one too, wouldn’t you? In some sense, that’s how you feel while you deny your freedom to overeat - and to continue to overeat.

This denial of choice can live with you for years, even decades. But as soon as you begin to think in a different way, things begin to change, and everything falls in place behind that. You stay in touch with the idea that you are totally free to eat anything you want, as much of it as you want, any time. Then, you’ll be able to eat less without feeling deprived, and without any need to rebel. You’ll find you have a far greater sense of control – and even liberation.

It’s very straightforward and it turns everything on its head. Free choice. The rule is there are no rules. All you need to do is get used to thinking in this new way.

You may, however, already be aware of a fear about this, and this fear can block your path. This fear is that if you really let yourself believe you're completely free to overeat – you will! That's why you deny choice in the first place, because you hope that if you give yourself rules you might obey them, at least for a while. It can take time to overcome this fear, to throw out the rules and let in a stronger sense of freedom around food. It will take developing trust in yourself to make the choices you really do want to live with. That's something that can take time, and it's something that will take more themes we'll be covering later in this book.

It will help you a great deal to fully own the choices you make by choosing the complete picture: not just the enjoyable experience of eating that particular food, but also the way you would expect to feel after you've eaten it. We'll get into that later on.

Are you thinking you've heard all this before? I've often come across advice about making sure you don't deprive yourself of anything, so it's possible this is sounding a bit familiar. The advice I'm talking about is 'to eat whatever kind of food you want but in moderation', and the idea is that then you won't feel deprived. That's not what I'm saying here, and it's important to understand the difference.

Perhaps you're already aware of the flaw in this common advice. Setting out 'to eat what you want in moderation' is all very well unless eating in moderation leaves you feeling deprived! After all, it is the immoderate amount you eat that you're trying to control in the first place, isn't it? The problem is that eating enough to never feel deprived means overeating, and especially it means overeating things that are aren't so good for your health.

It's likely you think being free to overeat means overeating. In other words, thinking, 'I'm free to eat everything' is the same as, 'I'm going to go ahead and eat everything.' Many people assert their freedom of choice about food by actually overeating. What follows is that even thinking about eating less inevitably feels like restriction, coercion and punishment. And this leads to feelings of deprivation: denial, stress, loss of motivation, attachment to some very compelling excuses, persistent cravings, and then a return to overeating. (8)

There's absolutely no need to go ahead and overeat in order to prove that you're free to. In fact, trying to gain a sense of freedom around food by overeating can be completely counterproductive. This is because you can become even more fearful of acknowledging free choice, and so end up denying it even more strongly.

What I'm suggesting is something else completely: that the difference is in whether or not you genuinely believe you've got real, open, free choices about what and how much you eat. The difference is in your attitude. *It has nothing at all to do with what and how much you are eating.* It's entirely possible not to eat for long periods of time and not feel deprived. It's entirely possible to feel tempted by food but not eat it and still not feel at all deprived. The reason is because you're remembering that it's your own free choice; that nothing about this is being done to you against your will.

This will take some effort on your part. This isn't an instant, magic cure, but even starting to work with this will produce some results, and hopefully this will encourage you enough to want to continue. For most people, though, it does take a while to become real, and more than just an idea you read about in a book.

Consider this, though. It could be that this is the only way you can ever develop control over your eating. This might be it! Perhaps there never will be a pill you can take, a magic formula or a saviour who will come along and sort out this problem for you. It could be that you either continue to think in ways that make this problem worse, however gradually, over the years of your life. Or, you start to make changes, however gradually, that lead to you living more as you want to: in control of what you eat, healthier and enjoying a stronger sense of self-esteem that enhances everything in your life.

The key will be for you to experience what a difference it makes in your relationship with food when you think in terms of having choices. And you can only do that when you acknowledge your freedom to eat anything and everything you can get your hands on. When you make that connection, that experience will be of great significance to you because you will know it puts everything into a completely different context.

It works better if you have good reasons for the choices you are making. In other words, you know what is motivating you, what is at stake. If you are clear about your motivation, you'll be able to make choices that you won't regret later on. That's what we'll look at in our next chapter.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Remind yourself you have completely free choices whenever you think about eating. Tell yourself, 'I can continue to eat like this' or 'I don't ever have to stop overeating' whenever you eat anything. It can take some repetition to get it to sink in and become a reality for you.

It's especially important to do this if you are eating in a compulsive way and feeling out of control. This when you are most likely to revert to prohibitive thinking, so it's crucial to counteract this and reconnect with a strong sense of choice. This means recognising that you can go on bingeing, that you can overeat all your life and that you never have to stop. You've got these choices – whether you want them or not and whether you act on them or not.

- Whenever you're in a restaurant or food shop, let yourself know that you can eat anything you want and as much as you want. And you can return the next day and eat even more. Then, you freely choose whatever works for you.

- Make complete choices by acknowledging the outcome you would expect, based on

your experience. For example, 'I'm choosing to eat this tub of ice cream and to feel nauseous and guilty afterwards'. You are free to eat anything, but different choices produce different outcomes. What you don't have much of a choice about is what outcomes follow from particular choices.

- If you feel deprived whenever you don't eat something you fancy, it's because you haven't yet created a good sense of choice for yourself. You might be paying lip service to the idea, you might understand the theory of it, but you don't yet feel it and experience it as a reality. That's OK! This is where many people start. The challenge for you is to continue to reinforce this theme of choice, so that eventually it becomes real.
- If you detect a rebellious quality to your eating, the same thing applies. Rebellion is only possible when there's a rule or restriction in place. It's impossible to rebel if you have complete freedom, so remove the sense of prohibition and the rebelliousness evaporates.
- Discussing these ideas as little as possible with the people in your life can give you a better sense of your own choices. It's your own thinking you want to focus on. No matter what anybody else says, it's your own thinking that makes the difference.
- When you ask yourself: 'Am I choosing?' see if you feel and believe that you are totally free to overeat - especially when you're not eating something that looks good to you.

MIRIAM'S STORY

I'm a mother of three, a wife and a manager of a software company. I did Gillian's seminar about a year ago and my eating has transformed, I would say. I do slide occasionally but I have many very good weeks now.

I think the major thing that still grabs me is this thing about choice. I simply refused to put myself back in prison by stopping dieting. But, I'm choosing to eat a lot fewer biscuits, for example. I know now that it's my free choice; that I can do it if I want to but I don't have to. I used to eat so much simply because I thought I wouldn't be able to later on, so I wanted to get as much in while I still could.

It was like I was always on the verge of a famine. I was completely caught up in the trap of repeatedly dieting and bingeing, dieting and bingeing, for several years. I would go to various kinds of slimming groups and find myself eating frantically as soon as I had been weighed. I used to have this thing about Sundays, because I would always start my diet again on Monday and I used to eat all day Sunday. Today, it's Sunday and I'm just delighted about the way I have eaten. I was thinking earlier I'd

have some toast, and I thought no, I'll wait for supper. It seems so normal to think that way now and yet it was never like that before. There was always so much of a struggle.

It's had an effect on other things in my life as well. I'm more conscious when I say I've 'got to' do something. I didn't get it at first, but I now realise the things I take on are my choice, so it comes back to me when I think 'oh no, I've got to do all this.' I remember that it's my choice and then it isn't a burden. In general I like being busy but often it gets too much.

The benefit to me is definitely in terms of self-esteem and it's a huge relief not to be on that diet bandwagon. I really enjoy eating and I really enjoy feeling in control. I feel liberated. I'm going to make a cabbage salad this evening. I positively enjoy that sort of thing now.

2 • WHY DOES IT MATTER TO ME?

Why are you reading about an alternative to dieting? The chances are it's because you want to lose weight. Everywhere you look – at your friends, at TV, in magazines – people are talking about wanting to lose weight. They say things like:

'I'm tired of living in this fat body.'

'I look in the mirror and I'm depressed for the rest of the day.'

'If only I was thinner my life would be so much better.'

'I'd love to walk into a room and not feel self-conscious because of my size.'

'I've struggled with my weight all my life.'

'If I could either win the lottery or be thin, I'd rather be thin.'

Of course there's no shortage of solutions offered to help you lose weight. Diets, low-fat foods and slimming clubs all promise to take inches off your thighs and fat off your backside. The problem is *weight* and the solution is to *lose it*.

It seems so simple and yet, as we all know, very few people are actually succeeding. The pressure to be slim comes from every angle, yet we are getting heavier and heavier. That should be our first clue that something is wrong. Maybe motivation to lose weight isn't as straightforward as it seems.

Why don't we try thinking about all this in a completely different way? I'm going to suggest a change in attitude by first of all making an analogy.

Let's imagine that one day you walk into your kitchen and see to your horror that your kitchen floor is flooded with water, three or four inches deep. Now that's a problem for you, isn't it? You panic, grab a mop and bucket and try to get rid of the water, thinking, 'Oh no, all this dreadful water all over the place, how can I make it go away, it's so horrible and wet, and there's so much of it.' And you mop and mop and mop.

In the middle of all this, someone walks in and points out to you that over at the sink the tap is running, the sink is blocked and the water keeps pouring out. You can see what they're saying, but you don't care very much about the tap and the sink. What you really care about is your floor, so that's what you concentrate on, mopping up the floor and fretting about the water. You have some people coming round and you're afraid they'll see the floor and all the dreadful water. You can hide the tap and the sink behind a screen and they'll never know it's there, but they'll be disgusted if all that water is there on the floor. If only you could get the water cleaned up.

You worry about the water for a long time. Whenever you talk about this problem with your friends, you talk about the water on the floor. Whenever your friends talk to you about it, they ask about the water, how deep it is and how you are doing with the mopping. Weeks go by. Then months. Then years. The water is still there, getting deeper and deeper, and you get more and more worried about it as time goes on.

This story illustrates what happens when you focus on the effect of a problem, the water on the floor, instead of its cause, the running tap. The story may seem rather unrealistic, but the chances are that you too have spent most of your time wanting to change the *effect* of your problem instead of the *cause*.

You may have tried to ‘mop up’ your excess weight by dieting. You may have set weight loss goals for yourself, such as, ‘I want to lose a dress size before my summer holidays.’ And you’ve seen success or failure by how much weight you lost or gained. In the analogy, you are chiefly concerned with the floor, gauging success by how dry or wet it is. You know there’s a tap running somewhere, but it’s not nearly as important, is it?

Clearly there’s something here that we all know: in general, dealing directly with the cause of a problem is going to work much better than trying to take care of the effects. In the analogy, if you dealt with the cause by getting the tap and the sink to do the work they were designed for, in time the water would evaporate and it will be fairly easy to keep dry. In the same way, when you eat the food that your body was designed for, in time, the weight evaporates and the weight loss is fairly easy to maintain.

Do you think you’ve been trying to do this already? Maybe, but it’s also likely that your weight has been all that matters. Glance back to the beginning of this chapter and see if you don’t identify with those first statements. Isn’t that what’s motivating you? Weight loss?

Wanting to lose weight is very likely to be the reason you’re reading this book. Assuming you are overweight, that’s a good reason, but no matter how much you want it, it is a weak motivation. It’s weak because it keeps you locked into the effect of the problem. You’re just trying to mop up the water. Endlessly. This is an important reason why so few people are succeeding, even though they want it so much.

Now when you think about it, dealing with the cause of a problem is the obvious answer, so, you might ask, why doesn’t everybody just figure this out for themselves? There are a number of reasons for this, but perhaps the most common factor is lower self-esteem. Low self-esteem can keep you locked into seeing your problem *entirely* in terms of the size and the shape of your body. Low self-esteem means that making the switch from effect to cause, far from being obvious and simple, is in fact a challenge. This will help you toward motivating yourself in a much more powerful way, so let’s understand it a bit.

Low self-esteem often means that being slimmer – improving your appearance - is all that matters. Very crudely put, it’s like thinking something like this: ‘I don’t think very

much of myself, but if I looked really good or at least better than I do now, I might convince people that I'm OK and maybe worth having around.'

This creates a dreadful relationship with food. One extreme example is someone who eats a chocolate bar for lunch, a packet of crisps for dinner and wouldn't dream of sitting down to a real meal because it has too many calories in it. Such a person places so little value on herself or himself they don't regard their health as worth supporting.

That's extreme, but it could be that you too make many decisions about what you eat based on what you look like rather than your nutritional needs. This way of thinking about food is, at least in large part, based on the judgment of others. It reinforces the low self-esteem, which in turn reinforces this way of thinking.

You might think, as many do, that if only you lost weight, your self-esteem would improve because you'd feel so proud of yourself. But it doesn't work that way, as many people who have achieved their ideal weight know too well. I've often heard people say they felt as bad about themselves when they were skinny as when they were fat. Often that surprised them because they thought that 'looking good' would solve everything.

Sometimes, though, you hear people say, 'Yes, losing weight is wonderful but it's not the most important thing, because I really enjoy so much about the way I'm living now.' That's much closer to what I'm getting to, and I want to suggest that the people who think like this tend to be more successful in the long term. What makes the difference is they found ways to motivate themselves to eat less that aren't *exclusively* about how much they weigh and what they look like.

Don't get me wrong; it's a very good idea to lose weight, assuming of course that you are overweight to start with. It's when you can put that to one side and discover other reasons to take control of your overeating that things really start to change. You lose weight too, but it's a side effect rather than the focus of everything. Then, your weight loss is much more likely to last. (9)

There are a number of reasons why weight loss doesn't work – both short and long term - as your main motivation. First of all, it gives you delayed feedback. For example, if you didn't eat some rubbishy snacks after dinner one evening, you could wake up the next morning feeling more alert and energised. That's far more rapid feedback, letting you know you're on the right track, than the tiny bit of weight you *might* have lost. It's also much more clearly connected to that particular choice you made about not overeating the previous evening. It's not so easy to say that any one binge will end up as any one particular bulge of fat on your hips!

Most important of all, though, is that motivating yourself to lose weight only works until your weight is lost. When you've lost weight, there's no longer any good reason not to overeat – and so you do! So, pay attention to all the other things that are at stake, such as feeling in control, having more energy, no stomach aches or headaches, sleeping better, clearer thinking or more positive mood.

It's these sorts of things that can motivate you – if you notice and pay attention to them – even before you've lost very much weight. This is especially important if you have a lot of weight to lose. As you may know, it's a slow process, and losing two pounds after a week, although a brilliant result, can seem a drop in the ocean. So, look for anything else that you might be enjoying because you've been eating less. Make a point to remember these things, as they will continue to provide you with motivation, greatly reducing the likelihood that you will yo-yo back up again.

This is a different way to motivate yourself and it's a way that's much more effective, especially over the course of a lifetime. (10)

It's about eating in a way that supports and enhances your emotional and your physical wellbeing. It's about correcting the balance from a situation where losing weight is everything to just having it be one factor. It's fine to have both kinds of motivation. Most of us do. We will always want to look as good as we can, and I do too. What makes the difference in achieving this is having both of these kinds of motivation in a good balance.

When you draw the focus of your attention away from your weight and towards looking after your health, you immediately start to boost your self-esteem. This is because you are affirming that you value yourself enough to give your body what's best for it. You motivate yourself toward having a healthy relationship with food rather than looking a certain way. You can have both. You can have the best of health and look great too, but if you prioritise your health and self-esteem you will connect with a considerably more powerful and enduring source of motivation. Then, the weight loss pretty much takes care of itself.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Identify any motivation you may have that's not about weight loss. It's not that losing weight is a bad thing; it's just that we need to correct an imbalance, because weight loss – what other people see and judge us by – has become much too important in most people's minds. Is there anything you like about eating less, besides losing weight? Make the effort to notice how your life is better when you eat in healthier ways. Do you have more energy to get through your day, so that you enjoy your evenings more? Fewer headaches? Better digestion? Do you notice that your self-esteem is higher? Is it simply that you enjoy being in control of your eating, that you feel at peace with yourself?
- It will help you to write these things down to make sure you remember them later on. Write as much as you can, with your own personal details. And leave out anything to do with your size, shape and weight. It might take a bit of thinking about this before you can come up with complete answers, but every time you do you'll be developing