



# Love your body into shape

Does your future good health involve maintaining or reducing your weight? Don't waste time on beating yourself up or punishing your beautiful body — love it into shape instead.

WORDS / MELISSA PODMORE

Take a few moments, sit quietly, gently close your eyes and visualise yourself 12 months from now. What does your future self look like? How does she or he feel — about his or her life, body and place in the world?

This forecasting is what's called "future pacing" in psychology. It's a sacred practice taken from the Native North American Indians who created this ancient ritual so we could connect with our future sage or "wise self" and access what we call in contemporary psychology the "wise mind". Future pacing is a powerful and helpful tool to assist us to get very clear on where we're at and where our life-path is leading us.

The reality is, if you are unhappy with your current weight or state of health, and not making any changes, then the future you will most likely be the same as the present you — or even more unhealthy and unhappy. However, if you dare to visualise a future you who is vibrant, dynamic and filled with health, then ask your future wise self what actions you need to take today, tomorrow and the next day to embody that future healthier vision of yourself. Ask what limiting beliefs and habits you need to release right now to move into the more authentic, invigorated version of yourself.

Please remember, your future wise self is not about pushing you into a body shape that is super skinny or against your natural tendency — that is abusive. Rather, the process is about knowing what your true beautiful shape is and embracing this with gratitude.

## WHY "DIETS" FAIL

By now, you would have heard that the number-one rule/tip/mantra/bumper sticker (or even tattoo, if you're so inclined) for losing weight is, "Diets don't work!" In fact, the most effective, scientifically proven, absolutely 100 per cent guaranteed method for you to fail at any weight-re-establishing pursuit and *gain* weight is to diet — and there are two clear reasons why:

**1.** Dieting sets up a psychological state of deprivation and control, and both of these states create biochemical stress in the body and distress in the mind. When you are dieting, you are focusing on what you can't have and this leads to restrictive and obsessional thinking, which is actually very toxic for your mind, nervous system and happiness. Dieting sets you up for a war inside yourself and often leaves you hungry and in a battle with your body. This is not peace and this is definitely not health.

**2.** Diets lead to bingeing and blow-outs, which make you *gain* weight. (Please note: even those suffering with bulimia nervosa who binge then purge will still ultimately gain weight so, along with the physical damage created, this is in no way an effective method of weight management.) As mentioned, when you diet or restrict, you become fixated on what you can't have. This deprivation leads quickly to a low mood and agitation and, when you inevitably "fail" by breaking the diet, you then turn against yourself, getting caught up in anger and frustration, which often cycle into further dieting/restricting, failing,

further self-attack. All this is very painful and energy depleting, leading to symptoms of anxiety, depression, low self-worth and fatigue.

## HOW TO LOVE — NOT PUNISH — YOUR BODY INTO SHAPE

So, if your future self is a healthy expression of your shape, and that involves weight loss, how do you make it happen? You can work towards a healthy weight using the following psychological tips.

### AVOID FOOD LABELLING

One interesting and destructive psychological pattern that usually occurs when we diet is we begin to label food as "good" and "bad". This is dangerous because, when we eat food we have identified as good or bad, our minds then internalise this behaviour and we become good or bad, which again is a very toxic way to relate to ourselves. Remember, food does not have a personality! Lettuce is not good — it's just lettuce. Similarly, a Mars bar is not bad. Yet we often give away our power to food in this way, which means we then lose our centredness and the food starts to control us.

The best way to avoid this pattern is to simply stop banning any foods (Mars bars included) and stop labelling foods as "good" or "bad". Instead, it's more helpful to identify foods as "every day" and "sometimes" foods. Notice how these words are much less emotive and more neutral, and don't lead to self-attacking inclinations.

Photography Getty Images



Struggle with breakfast?  
To awaken your appetite, try  
to fit in that morning walk or  
yoga before brekkie.

## 2 REDUCE THE SEDUCTIVENESS

When you stop banning certain foods, you allow the mind to start reducing the seductiveness of the foods you have fixated on. For example, if you are craving a Tim Tam, it's much more effective to say to yourself, "OK, yes you can have a Tim Tam. But do you really need it, want it, feel like it *right now*?" This method is very clever as it puts *you* back in control rather than the Tim Tam. It also disarms any inner warfare by giving total permission to the individual while increasing your inner conscious awareness around the behaviour, breaking the habit of unconscious, emotional, non-hungry or mindless eating.

If the Tim Tam is still lingering in your mind, then access your wisdom: "Is this really what I need right now? Or is there something else going on with me that I am ignoring by focusing on a Tim Tam, such as boredom, loneliness, frustration or merely old habits?" Ask

yourself whether you really want to keep giving your vital energy and power away like this, or whether it's time for you to be *amazing* to yourself and connect with what it is you really need.

If you *are* feeling emotional, can you embrace and acknowledge that rather than push it away? Simply stop, get still, then take a few deep breaths into your belly, have a big sigh and connect with your body — your true hunger and your wisdom. You can then make a choice: "Instead of reacting emotionally as I have always done, how can I truly attend to these feelings and thoughts with greater care and compassion?" Perhaps you could go for a short walk outside and connect with nature, call a friend, clean or take a shower, or even sit quietly and actually feel what it is you are feeling.

Whatever you do to interrupt and break the reactive cycle of emotional or non-hungry eating will effectively weaken the cycle, creating

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new pathways of neural networks — an ability of the brain known as neuroplasticity — and boost your self-empowerment. This will enable you to successfully retrain your mind and body to simply start to eat only when you are hungry, not bored or emotional, and to finish eating when you are comfortably nourished, not uncomfortably overflowing. This is gorgeously empowering!

## 3 NEVER SKIP BREAKFAST — OR LUNCH

It's paramount to not skip either breakfast or lunch — and that doesn't mean just grabbing a muffin. Make your food choices smart and nutritious; this is a form of self-awareness and self-love. If you are not hungry in the morning, consider the lateness and quantity you ate the night before. For many people who struggle with breakfast, their morning appetite only arises after exercise, so fit in that morning walk or yoga before brekkie if at all possible. Similarly, if lunch is a struggle, consider whether you're over-snacking between meals out of habit.

Skipping either of these meals doesn't only affect your metabolism — it can also affect your mood, lead to low energy as well as poor concentration and decision making, and set up unhealthy patterns whereby you overcompensate later in the day or out of convenience choose foods that are not as optimal or nourishing.

## 4 PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR MOOD

Most of us don't realise how significantly food affects mood; however, if you look at a bunch of five-year-olds at a party, it all becomes pretty clear! To avoid dramatic peaks and troughs,



Complex carbs create the building blocks to serotonin, the neurotransmitter in the brain that helps us be positive and happy.



it's important to add protein to each meal and increase foods that are low in sugar or additives. Protein helps to stabilise your blood sugar levels so you feel calmer and more satisfied (remember, there are many vegetarian forms of protein available). In contrast, eating a lot of sugar, fruit juice and even too much fruit will all aggravate any underlying anxiety by destabilising your blood sugar, and also not fill you up.

### 5 DON'T BAN CARBS

Carbohydrates are not evil. In fact, complex carbs (those found in fibre-rich foods such as unrefined grains, wholemeal breads, vegetables and fruits) are what create the building blocks to serotonin, the neurotransmitter in the brain that helps us be positive and happy. This is why if you've ever been on a low-carb diet you start to notice that you feel pretty cranky and down fairly quickly. Additionally, having healthy levels of serotonin in the brain not only reduces anxiety and low mood but also can curb cravings and regulate appetite. You just have to focus on smart complex carb choices. So do your research and get sorted!

### 6 BE AWARE OF LIQUID FOODS

We often take in many calories from coffee (especially lattes and cappuccinos), fruit juices, soft drinks and alcohol that we don't psychologically register as food. While counting calories is unnecessary and

creates obsession, you do need to be aware that all these liquids will increase your overall energy intake for the day and will need to be "burnt off" if you wish to stabilise your weight or trim your waistline. Be aware, too, that coffee will elevate your adrenalin, which is contraindicated for anyone struggling with stress, anxiety or insomnia. In addition, recent research has found that even "diet" soft drinks actually make people gain weight.

So, when choosing your beverages, go for natural sparkling mineral waters with a dash of lemon, or herbal teas. And, instead of fruit juice, grab a whole piece of fruit. That way, you gain the benefit of all the fibre.

### 7 RECONNECT WITH YOUR BODY

Many of us have forgotten how to connect with our bodies and our true hunger. In my sessions with clients I encourage them to slow down, tune in and reconnect with their hunger and fullness signs within the body. The sensation of hunger is a great sign that your body's metabolism is working well. However, it's usually best to not get too hungry by skipping regular meals or healthy snacks, as this can simply lead to overeating in a chaotic manner, undermining your commitment to your wellbeing. Instead, what you want to do is relearn the sacred art of allowing your body to lead your daily eating, not your mind and emotions.

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### 8 LEARN MINDFUL EATING

Mindful eating is a simple yet revolutionary practice that stems from the Buddhist tradition. It involves sitting quietly in a calm environment at mealtimes without distractions of TV, smartphones or tablets (challenging — but worthwhile!).

First, look at the food that is prepared for your body, then stop and take three joyous breaths, thanking the food and those who prepared/cultivated it. Doing this links your meals to increased gratitude, an attitude that's been shown to create inner happiness. Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh suggests you sit somewhere quiet and peaceful, look at the colour of the food, enjoy the smell of the meal, then slowly and calmly eat it. Through this process, you're attempting to stay connected to the food and to focus only on placing the food into your mouth — not your plans, your worries or your projects. While this may sound very easy, it's a skill requiring much concentration. Trust yourself, though, to develop this beautiful positive habit so it endures even when you are eating with others.

Eating in mindfulness makes eating a practice of daily meditation, which calms the body and mind and allows you to increase your capacity to eat consciously and intuitively, which ultimately assists with returning your body to its healthy weight and creating a more vibrant life. 🌱

■ *If you are struggling with weight, body issues or an eating disorder, you are not alone and it's important to know that you do not need to suffer through this in silence. Please seek professional help via your GP and gain a referral to an experienced psychologist.*

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