

# EATING LESS

## SAY GOODBYE TO OVEREATING



'A lot of nonsense is spouted on this subject; Gillian Riley is a writer who always makes sense.' *Nigella Lawson*



## GILLIAN RILEY

From the bestselling author of  
*HOW TO STOP SMOKING & STAY STOPPED FOR GOOD*

# EATING LESS

Say goodbye to overeating

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# Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	vii
1. Food Addiction	1
2. Control Your Eating, Not Your Weight	27
3. All that Glitters...	41
4. Motivation that Works	59
5. Set Yourself Free	75
6. What to Do about Wanting More	101
7. What's for Dinner?	131
8. The Trouble with Hunger	157
9. Your Reasons Why	171
10. 'My Body Made Me Do It'	203
11. Addiction and Self-esteem	221
12. Failing with Style	239
Further Help	255
Index	257

# Introduction

When it comes to making changes in your eating - whether you think of it dieting, losing weight or healthy eating - certain approaches are usually suggested. This book will have you question them.

- *MYTH: Wait until you're hungry before you eat.* Using hunger as your guide can be inconvenient, impractical and very difficult to interpret accurately. Much research has shown that hunger is unreliable as a signal to eat.
- *MYTH: Stop eating when you're full.* Most people don't feel the 'fullness' of what they ate until quite a few minutes *after* finishing their meal. If you tend to overeat, this is too late.
- *MYTH: Sugar is addictive, so the only solution is to abstain.* It's a very tall order never to eat sugar again. If your success depends on abstinence it will be fragile, and once broken there's no other strategy to use.
- *MYTH: Stop eating sugar, wheat and/or processed food, and your cravings will disappear.* There are plenty of yo-yo dieters who have kept to healthy regimes for months at a time but returned to overeating because their desire for these foods resurfaced.
- *MYTH: Eat anything you fancy and trust your body to tell you what it needs.* If this worked, there would be none of the many ailments and

diseases associated with poor nutrition. This book shows you how to overcome your attraction to the manufactured 'non-foods' that can make you ill.

- *MYTH: Avoid temptations and keep yourself busy to stop thinking about food.* As you may already know, this strategy will only take you so far. As with any problem in life, evading it doesn't resolve it in the long term.
- *MYTH: Don't eat while watching television.* This advice is to keep your attention on your food, but nobody suggests you shouldn't have a conversation at a meal! You can eat less at meals - and talk, read a newspaper or watch a programme at the same time if that's what you want to do.
- *MYTH: Overeating is the result of unresolved emotional issues.* Yet many people overeat when they're happy and enjoying themselves. It can be liberating to discover a way to overcome overeating without delving into your past.

Welcome to a completely different solution.

## CHAPTER 2

# Control Your Eating, Not Your Weight

**The epidemic of obesity is due to large portions of food eaten by inactive people.**

GEORGE BRAY MD, PROFESSOR OF OBESITY, LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

People *can* change. *Everybody* can. In fact, all of us do change, simply because things happen to us as we go through life that inevitably make an impact and leave us different in some way. The question is not whether we change, but how much we direct change, actively choosing to create the person we really want to be.

There are two crucial things to know about directing this kind of change. It never happens overnight, and it never gets done for you. Change takes time and it takes effort on your part.

However, when it comes to your weight - your body size and shape - it may well be that you've already spent considerable time and effort making changes, but you've found the changes either didn't work or didn't last. This, of course, can leave you doubting your ability to make the changes you want.

If what you tried before was some form of diet, then at least know you're not alone: the vast majority of people who diet regain all the

weight they lose. Maybe that's why you're reading this book. You are looking for something else.

Welcome to a completely different solution. This is not a diet book. This book is about making real, lasting change. The ideas I'll be introducing may not be easy to take on board and use immediately. This doesn't mean they aren't sound or that you are incapable of using them. It just means this will take time.

After all, it took you this long in your life to get to where you are now, so isn't it reasonable to spend some time and effort to make real changes? You may want an easy, instant cure, but is that really possible? What I will show you in these pages is that quick-fix solutions - diets, pills, magic slimming techniques - at best avoid the real problem, and can actually make it worse.

## **Your Problem isn't Weight**

In fact, you may not even be seeing what the real problem is. The chances are you think your problem - what you want to *change* - is your weight. After all, if your body was how you wanted it and stayed that way, would you be reading this book? If you answer 'Of course not!' then here's something for you to consider.

Imagine a smoker who says 'I'm fed up with coughing so much. What can I do to stop my coughing?' Someone points out that it's the smoking that's doing it, but the smoker says 'Yes, I know, but what I really want is some good cough medicine.'

Imagine a problem drinker who says 'My driving is terrible. I keep having accidents. Where can I get some good driving lessons?' Someone suggests it's because he's driving drunk, so he keeps drinking and takes the bus.

Now, you may know that smokers and drinkers go through periods when they do think like this. It's a kind of denial because they are denying what their problem really is. The difference, though, is that when they finally admit they do have a problem, they tend to see it for what it is. Smokers set out to take control of their smoking, not their coughing. And problem drinkers set out to take control of their drinking, not their driving.

When it comes to eating, though, this step is often not taken, or not taken fully. People who have an addiction to food set out to change a *symptom*: their weight. They keep their sights set on the effect, not the cause, which is eating too much.

The typical overeater says 'I'm two stone overweight, none of my clothes fit properly and I hate how I look. How can I lose weight?' So if someone says: 'What you need to do is eat less food' they reply 'I know. I'll join a slimming club.'

*You see, your weight is not your problem. It's one of the effects of your problem. Your problem is you eat more food than your body needs. Not more than somebody else's body needs. More than your body needs. Not more than your body used to need when you were younger or more active. More than your body needs now. Not more than your body would need if you had different genes and metabolism. More than your body needs with the genes and metabolism you have. That's why there's extra weight on it.*

Saying the problem is 'eating' and not 'weight' might sound at first like I'm just playing with words, but let's think about it because it's very important. *The reason it's important is because the more attached you are to losing weight, the more difficult it will be for you to deal with addictive overeating.* (1)

Let's start to look at why.



## **The Problems with Weight Loss as Your Goal**

### ***Yo-yo Dieting***

When weight loss is all you care about, it makes sense to follow a weight-loss diet. But whenever you go on a diet, it's inevitable you'll go off it sooner or later. A diet may help you lose weight, but it's only a temporary solution to a permanent problem: your potential for overeating.

When weight is all you care about, your motivation to eat less disappears along with the weight. When you've lost the weight (or even just some of it) you no longer have any reasons not to overeat. It's only when weight goes back on that you start to think there's a problem. So then you are in that familiar - and unhealthy - cycle of weight loss and gain and loss and gain, known as yo-yo dieting. (2)

### ***Poor Nutrition***

When weight loss is all you care about, it's easier to ignore the nutritional value of the food you eat. You may not be giving your body the nutrition it needs, you may even be eating things which do more harm than good, but when weight loss is your priority that's what influences your decisions. You could end up doing things like passing on the beans and rice at dinner because they're 'fattening' but snacking on biscuits later that evening because you fancy them - and after all, you've been so good all day and you're going to work off the extra calories at the gym tomorrow.

This kind of trade-off is typical of those who think entirely in terms of weight. They count calories and drink diet sodas. But watching your weight isn't necessarily the same as watching your health.

### ***An Unhappy Relationship with Food***

When weight loss is all you care about, you can end up feeling guilty about eating anything because all food contains calories. Especially after years of calorie-counting, your choices about what to eat can become harder to make because any choice feels like a bad one.

### ***An Unhealthy Effect on Your Body***

When weight loss is all you care about, your results can be misleading. Weight loss is all too often *lean tissue* loss, which not only ages you prematurely and damages your health, but also makes it even easier to gain excess fat later. On the other hand, if you eat wisely and do even moderate exercise, the lean mass (mostly muscle) you gain can outweigh much of the fat you've lost. This means your *weight* doesn't change as much as your health and appearance does. (3)

### ***Avoiding the Real Problem***

When weight loss is all you care about, you avoid facing the reality of your addiction to food. After all, you're not addicted to weight: you don't get cravings late at night for 2lb of fat to add to your thighs.

When weight loss is all you care about, it makes sense to avoid your addictive desire to overeat. If you tend to overeat late at night, for example, you keep yourself busy in the evenings and avoid being alone at home. This has to be a temporary measure, and when the food addict in you resurfaces, the weight goes right back on because dealing with your addictive eating was never your goal. Weight loss was.

### ***Poor motivation***

When weight loss is all you care about, it's more difficult to stay motivated. There will always be the days when, for various reasons, you

just feel 'fat' no matter what you've been eating. Whether this is real or imagined, any sense of success can be short-lived.

When weight loss is your goal and you have a great deal of weight to lose it can feel overwhelming. Having lost 2lb can seem pointless when there are 198 more to go.

When weight loss is your goal you never really achieve it, partly because it's never enough (remember the saying, 'you can never be too rich or too thin') and partly because you fear you won't stay that way. It's such a fragile achievement.

Most important of all, weight loss as a goal makes it easy to disregard the damage overeating does to your health, vitality and to your self-esteem - in ways that have little or nothing to do with how you look. We'll look at this in more detail later.

## **Why the Problem Can Be So Hard to See**

Have you heard the story about someone asking a fish what water is like, and the fish answers: 'What's water?' In much the same way, we are swimming around in a culture obsessed with appearances, and it's easy to be so used to it that we simply don't see how much it surrounds us. Just like the fish that takes water for granted, we accept the wrong message - that appearance is all that matters - without question.

This attitude is so common, it's everywhere. When I first started writing this book I would say to friends that I was writing a book about *addictive eating*. Everybody who mentioned it again referred to it as a book about *losing weight*. I even have a friend who calls it 'your fat book'! And yet people would never call my book on stopping smoking a book about improving lung capacity.

Be careful, because this is very tricky. It might seem simple, but

there can be a huge gulf between understanding what I'm saying here and embracing it fully. For example, at this point you might well be thinking that you really do want to deal with your addictive eating. But ask yourself if it's still only a means to one very specific end - to lose weight. Ask yourself how much your priority has to do with your appearance, if you *only* want to control your overeating in order to be a certain size and shape. That's what I'm talking about.

Here's an example. A woman phoned me up last week to inquire about coming to see me for help. Her eating was out of control and she sounded very distressed about her weight. She wasn't sure whether to see me or join a slimming club much nearer to her home. 'I have a friend who has just lost 28lbs with WeightWatchers!' she cried down the phone. 'She's a very old friend!' She was extremely agitated about it and it was obvious that what had upset her so much was her friend's weight loss. You know as well as I do that she would never say, with that same tone of fury in her voice: 'My friend has been eating a lot less food!' And yet this must be what the friend had done. My irate caller, like so many others, is obsessed with the effect instead of the cause.

## **Take Control of Overeating**

Some people do give up their goal of losing weight but they don't replace it with any other goals with regard to healthy eating. They just give up doing anything about any of it! You may identify with this, or it may be you fear this is what will happen if you let go of your attachment to weight loss as your goal.

The solution is to understand - *and keep in mind* - how else you will benefit from taking control of overeating. One benefit will be weight loss, and, provided you are in fact overweight, that is an excellent result.

However, in order to do this, you need to make your body size less important to you and make dealing with your addictive eating your main goal. This requires a change in your thinking, a shifting of priorities.

As we will see later on, many different things act together to create an addictive relationship with food. *One of the most significant is making your appearance more important to you than your health.* (4)

Our culture promotes the idea of looking good at all costs. What matters is having the 'perfect' figure. What matters less - if at all! - is becoming malnourished through our efforts to achieve it. Anorexia and bulimia are extreme results of this, but it's relevant to all of us to varying degrees. Extra weight is judged, scorned and ridiculed almost everywhere, and encourages us to attach ourselves so strongly and exclusively to the goal of weight loss.

Losing weight is a good consequence of eating less. But when we are preoccupied with our appearance, which is a material concern, we pay less attention to the effects of addictive eating, and what it costs us emotionally and spiritually to be out of control in such a significant area of our lives. And in many insidious ways we take less notice of the cost to our physical health as well.

The point is that while you are overeating, you are holding yourself back from becoming all you could be - in ways that have nothing to do with the size and shape of your body.

If you are like most addicts, you reason that when you have sorted yourself out and become all you can be (whatever that means to you) then you will be able to control your addictive eating. This is putting the cart before the horse. The process of dealing with addictive eating is the path - quite possibly the only path - towards a more confident, peaceful, happier and more fulfilled you. Making positive eating choices for the right reasons can lead you directly towards becoming the person you want to be and living your life the way you

really want to live it.

*I'm suggesting you pursue a new goal: taking control of your addictive eating because that's your main source of physical and psychological wellbeing.* Then losing weight becomes a bonus. It's a very good bonus - assuming you were overweight to begin with - but it's not the focus of everything.

## **Why it's Vital to Change Priorities**

Perhaps by now you are beginning to think: 'Yes, but what does it mean to be in control of my eating and how do I do it?' Great! This is a good question to be asking, and you are in the right place to get the answers. Just understand that this is a very different question from: 'How do I lose weight?' *The first step in learning to control your addictive eating is to stop asking how you lose weight.*

This might look like too big a change for you to make. If you are completely preoccupied with wanting to change the shape and size of your body, it may seem impossible to start to care more about your eating. But look at it this way: if you are going on a hundred mile journey due south, and you turn a fraction to the left and take your journey slightly south-east, after a hundred miles you will end up in a very different place. Begin this hundred mile journey by acknowledging that your best goal is to be in control of your overeating. It's actually a journey that will take you the rest of your life, as you are going to be eating - and living in a body of some size and shape - for the rest of your life.

Weight loss as a principal goal is fundamentally flawed. It addresses the effect, not the cause, of your problem, and only one effect at that. It's the one we can all see, but I want to suggest to you it's not

even the most important one.

Being in control of your eating has far more significant implications. And wanting to lose weight could be the one thing that keeps you from appreciating what these implications are, because when weight loss is all you care about, you invalidate these other, truly life-enhancing rewards. This is what we will look at further in our next two chapters.

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### **.IN OTHER WORDS: TULLIA**

*I started to have eating problems roughly 15 years ago. I sought help, but because I was not overweight, anorexic or bulimic, nobody would give me help.*

*I kept on eating junk food even though I had signs of poor health: unpleasant mood swings, PMS, fluid retention, fatigue, frequent nausea and abdominal bloating. I wanted to change but I thought there was no way out. Besides, most of the time I was denying the problem to myself, very much helped by the fact that it was never a weight problem, so I could conceal it.*

*Once I came to terms with the reality that I was addicted to food, a whole process of change began. I became engaged in a process of self-discovery that has gone far beyond the tangible consequences of overeating.*

*At first I had a huge resistance to change, yet the more I practise, the more I feel at ease with it and as a consequence with myself.*

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## **Taking Control**

- Make a list of things you want to change in terms of what and how much you eat. Here are a few examples I've heard from clients: to eat smaller meals; not to snack between meals in the afternoons; not to eat anything

after 8pm; to snack on fruit instead of chocolate. Aim to be as specific as possible, so that instead of writing down "to eat less" you identify what you intend to eat less of and at what time of day or in what circumstances you'll be. You might get some ideas from the list at the beginning of Chapter 1 and from Chapter 7.

- It takes deliberate effort to change your goal from wanting to lose weight to wanting to control your addictive eating, so whenever you think about your weight, think: 'Weight is not my problem. Eating is'. This is true whether you are underweight, overweight - or even if you are the weight you want to be.

If you tend to be very concerned about your weight, it may not at first seem true to think of your problem as 'eating'. This requires a significant change in your thinking. Stay with this, though, because you will find a breakthrough for yourself. Whenever you get caught up in how you look and what you weigh, just remind yourself of any other downside to addictive eating that you regularly experience. Keep reviewing this book and take note of the ways in which changing this emphasis benefits you. There's more about this in the next two chapters.

- If you normally weigh yourself, consider putting your bathroom scales away. I wish you knew how many times I've heard clients say, "I was doing fine until I got on the scales!!" Unless you have a particular reason for knowing your weight, such as filling in an insurance form or for medical reasons, there's no need to weigh yourself more than once or twice a year, if that.

When you weigh yourself over and over again you are using your weight to see whether you are succeeding or failing. In this book I will show you how to create a different way to gauge success, one which relates to how much you are in control of your eating. In order to take on this new standard, you will need to let go of your old standard.



- You may react to some things in later chapters by thinking: 'But how will that help me to lose weight?' Change your question to: 'How will that help me to take control of my overeating?' and you will see the answer.
- Take special care if you tend to talk a lot with friends or family about weight and dieting. If you regularly discuss these issues, this may be another aspect to your problem because it keeps you focused on the shape and size of your body. Start to think of ways to remove yourself from these conversations. Or, deliberately change the conversation to one about health and nutrition.

## NOTES

1. To mention just a couple of studies on this, research conducted at Stanford University School of Medicine (September 1998) found that those women who were the most dissatisfied with their appearance - *whether or not they were overweight* - were the most likely to drop out of diet programmes. And a study at the University of British Columbia (October 2004) showed a strong link between a greater degree of 'body image dissatisfaction' and chronic (yo-yo) dieting.
2. A number of studies have linked yo-yo dieting - where 10 or more pounds are lost three or more times - to poor immune system (University of Washington Medical Center, 2004), lower levels of good, HDL cholesterol (Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, 2001), reduced blood flow to the heart after menopause (University of Michigan, 2003) and increased body weight later in life (University of California at Berkeley, 2004).
3. "Your problem is not excess *weight* so much as it is excess *body fat* coupled with too little muscle... it's imperative that you look beyond the simplistic notion of losing weight and concentrate on building muscle at the expense of fat." From "Biomarkers: The 10 Keys to Prolonging Vitality" by Drs William Evans and Irwin Rosenberg of Tufts University Department of Nutrition and Medicine, USA (Simon & Schuster). Also see Chapter 7.
4. Eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and 'binge eating disorder' are strongly associated with an 'overconcern with appearance'; it's even considered by many to be part of the definition of an eating disorder. It might be useful to look at all difficulties with eating as a matter of degree, and that this could have some relevance to you even though you don't have an 'eating disorder' as such.