



5 REASONS  
WHY DIETS  
DON'T  
WORK...

... AND WHAT YOU  
CAN DO ABOUT IT.

BY DR. RHONA EPSTEIN

Note: This is an excerpt from *Food Triggers: End Your Cravings, Eat Well, and Live Better*. The book is written for those suffering from food abuse and addiction, and this article applies to those individuals as well. For any questions or concerns, please contact [dr rhona@gmail.com](mailto:dr rhona@gmail.com).

A close-up photograph of several fresh raspberries. Some are scattered on a light-colored surface, while others are piled on a light-colored wooden spoon. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

# IT'S SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A DIET

It's true most everyone, at some point in life, looks for ways to solve a weight problem. So most people can try the latest diet on the market and find some success with temporary weight loss. They may start out deciding to live completely without carbohydrates or fat. Then, because that's hard, they stray a bit. They take back a little bit of bread, maybe add some butter to the vegetables, a drop of cream to the coffee. That's all it takes to be off to the races again, running with whatever tastes good.

Without ever intending to gain back the weight, that's exactly what they do. But, no problem for those other folks - they can just go back on the diet. They can drop pounds and clothes sizes for a wedding or the summer just because they choose to do so. They can manage to keep off the weight, or, if they do gain it back, start dieting again and get results. There are plenty of people on the earth like this, and they have the capacity to pull in the reins on whatever they eat, and cut back whenever they choose.

But when you're hardwired to be triggered by certain foods, the diet process isn't going to work for you - you can't just lose weight, gain it back, go back on a diet, and expect to have a good hold on the reins of what's been a runaway pattern of eating all your life. In fact, you can't rely on a diet at all.

## WHY DIETS DON'T WORK FOR A FOOD ADDICT:

1. Foods Still Trigger
2. Flexible Exchanges Can Lead to Trouble
3. Deprivation Can Undo You
4. Quick Loss Leads to a Fast Fail
5. Counting Calories Becomes Obsession

**"When you're prone to addictive eating, you're never going to feel satisfied."**

Let's talk about Karen, a former client of mine. Before Karen came to me, she began one of the best diets around, WeightWatchers, a program with a healthy and balanced food plan that's completely livable. People on WeightWatchers take off weight all the time in a balanced and healthy manner... unless, that is, they are people hardwired with a food trigger.

A close-up photograph of several fresh raspberries. Some are scattered on a dark surface, while others are piled on a light-colored wooden spoon. The background is softly blurred, showing more raspberries and a wooden surface.

# ONE SPOONFUL JUST ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN

## **Foods Still Trigger**

The problem of diets for the overeater is there are things like exchanges, and desserts with sugar and white flour. People not hardwired to overeat will be happy for a nice, measured dessert. Telling someone like Karen she can have one WeightWatchers dessert is like putting a bowl of ice cream in front of a child and saying, "All right, you can have one spoonful for the day and that's it."

One spoonful just isn't going to happen. Neither is just one very lovely, measured dessert. When you're prone to addictive eating, you'll never feel satisfied. One taste of what triggers your craving will start the cycle of overeating all over again. So, even when you intend to follow the plan, it's likely the whole box of WeightWatchers desserts will be gone before day's end.

## **Flexible Exchanges Can Lead to Trouble**

The exchanges in diet plans represent a similar problem. The idea behind exchanges is to give you some slack, a margin for those occasions when you can't weigh and measure, or know exactly what you're going to eat. So the food plan allows you so much carbohydrate and fat foods per day, and if you eat them at lunch, then you can just exchange what's on the plan for dinner and omit the things eaten already.

Sound reasonable?

Not for someone like Karen or me or you. That margin is disastrous, a margin for error, in fact. Exchanges give too much flexibility for people like us with a track record of not thinking well on our feet about food choices. We can go out to a business lunch at a restaurant and decide, since we're going to enjoy the good food prepared for us, we'll exchange the carbohydrates and fats we'd normally have for dinner for what we'll enjoy right here, right now, and skip them at dinner.

A close-up photograph of several fresh raspberries on a light-colored wooden spoon. The raspberries are vibrant pink with some green leaves still attached. The background is a soft-focus wooden surface.

# WE MAY AS WELL GO AHEAD AND MESS UP A LOT

By dinnertime, though, we still want our carbs and fats. So we go ahead and eat them and feel guilty for breaking with the food plan, the one where we've been learning to weigh and measure, but have not yet grasped the measurement of a little and a lot. We think because we've messed up a little, we may as well go ahead and mess up a lot. So we have the carb and fat for dinner, in addition to what we ate at lunch. We also decide since we'll start over tomorrow, we may as well really blow it out tonight.

**"We've been learning to weigh and measure, but have not yet grasped the measurement of a little and a lot."**

See how it works?

*Tomorrow is a big deal. Tonight and right now are what we're used to dealing with, and that leads to another of the root reasons diets don't work for us.*

### **Deprivation Can Undo You**

Dieting often leaves people feeling hungry and deprived. Either there isn't enough satisfying food or there are missing, needed food groups, and the restrictions become too difficult to stick with long term. (To be clear, cutting out sugar and refined carbohydrates because they trigger you to overeat isn't dieting any more than it is to abstain from eating

strawberries because you're deathly allergic to them. When we're talking about dieting here, we're talking about the whole psychology to restrain yourself from foods to lose weight, not abstain to stay well).

As Karen learned, trying a diet alone, she often felt deprived by consuming the exchanges at one meal and not being allowed to have them at the next. The deprivation felt more like punishment to her, and she already felt punished in other areas, which was what drove her to binge and overeat (and why the food plan alone is never the way to freedom). So she wasn't going to let dinner beat her down too.

A close-up photograph of fresh raspberries. Some are scattered on a light-colored surface, while others are piled on a light-colored wooden spoon. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue-grey color.

# SHE TRIED DEPRIVING HERSELF AGAIN. AND AGAIN. AND AGAIN.

She began to compensate the only way she knew how. She fed her food cravings again and overate. Then she tried depriving herself again. And again. And again. And the cycle continued.

## **Quick Loss Leads to a Fast Fail**

The same thing happens with quick weight loss plans, which often eliminate major food groups for a period of time. We buy into them because we've been so ashamed of our eating issues and weight, we're desperate to see change. Too many of us think: *I just need a jump start. I'll take off some weight for the wedding, then I'll switch to a less-restrictive diet. I can't stand living fat another day, so I'm going to just fast to feel better now.*

But we can't keep to such restrictions. We break from them. The cycle of sneaking and hiding no-no foods, of starving and bingeing, then slipping into the pattern of overeating, continues. This creates even more shame, the sense of even greater failure and defeat. The sad, damaging, and paradoxical thing is that in the end often more weight is gained back than was lost, and now the body has gotten out of whack. Recovery can become even more difficult.

## **Counting Calories Becomes Obsession**

Dieters learn to count their fats and carbohydrates, calories and grams, and they're okay. But too often overeaters get lost in this. If we've read a lot of diet books, we're already completely confused about food. What one book says is healthful, another calls bad. We don't know what to believe anymore, so we start out trying to manage the numbers and choices. We worry about too much of this or too much of that. Every gram becomes a gigantic issue we try to justify. Calorie counting becomes one more obsession. Management turns to manipulation.

The truth is it's not the calories or fats in our moderate meals that cause the problem with our weight. It's the bingeing and sneaking between planned meals. We get caught up in worrying about eating the high-fat salad dressing at lunch, then two hours later down a dozen doughnuts and a bag of Doritos.

# THE YEARS OF DIETING EXPERIENCE WILL BE USEFUL

If this is where you've found yourself trapped, don't despair. The years of dieting experience will be useful when you're ready to beat triggers and conquer overeating and food addiction. By dieting, you've learned a bit about portions and nutritional facts. That's good. Now consider when we go ahead and eat the salad dressing and the rest of the healthy foods we need, our bodies process the food better and we feel fuller. We're less likely to binge. It works out. So we need to give up the diet mentality and stop obsessing about the details of every morsel of healthy food we eat. In fact, changing your thinking is going to be as important as a food plan.

**"It's not the calories or fats in our moderate meals that cause the problem with our weight."**

## What Next?

If you're ready to make a change, there IS hope.

Visit [drrhona.com](http://drrhona.com) for mind, body, and spirit solutions to food addiction.

