

WHICH DIET IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

By Dr. Sheila H. Forman

Whether it's a Monday morning, January 1st or another day you are "feeling fat" — a question that might be at the top of your mind is "which diet is right for me?" As a clinical psychologist specializing in helping people lose weight, I am often asked that question and the answer is not as simple as you might like. Choosing the right diet is like choosing a spouse; it is something you're going to want to live with for the rest of your life. A diet which tells you to eliminate entire categories of food or eat pre-packaged meals is unlikely to satisfy you for the long haul. A food plan which is flexible and meets your nutritional needs is likely your best option.

But, you know you don't need a psychologist to tell you that you have to eat less to reach the weight that is right for your body. What you may not know is that it takes more than just eating less to achieve your weight loss goals. What it takes is a willingness and ability to stick to whatever plan or program you have chosen. To do that you need to have your mind and your emotions on the same page. Too many best laid diet plans have been derailed because of out-of-control feelings and emotional pain. Learning to manage your weight is as much about learning to manage your emotions as it is learning to manage your food intake. The truth is any reasonable diet can work if you also address your emotions. In my work, I have identified the eight emotions that I see my patients eat



in response to most often. They are anger, boredom, deprivation, fear, hopelessness, sadness and stress. If you eat in response to your emotions the best diet you can go on is what starts with your mind. Learning to identify emotional triggers for your overeating and constructive ways to address them is more effective in the long run than any food plan you come across.

EIGHT EMOTIONS PEOPLE EAT IN RESPONSE TO MOST OFTEN: ANGER • BOREDOM • FEAR DEPRIVATION • HOPELESSNESS, SADNESS • STRESS

Use weekends to get healthy — avoid staying in bed and thinking about all that is not working. Get out in the world and see what is happening. Hoping that "slugging" it out in bed all weekend will help your cause to destress — it won't. In fact, it will make you feel even worse. A recent Harvard study showed that when we snooze extra hours here and there to compensate for sleep deprivation, our ability to focus is worse than if we stayed up all night.

It is 100% for certain that regular exercise can help you sleep better. Also, the more you exercise outside the house the better. Certainly, gyms have their place in the get-in-shape vibe, but when you are battling stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia nothing beats the outdoors to get you feeling like part of the human race again. Studies prove that exposure to late afternoon sun helps regulate your circadian rhythms or internal clock. Translation: Don't go hogwild with exercise in the evening or close to bed time. Evening exercise is meant to get you ready to sleep. Light yoga, calming stretches or a slow walk outdoors in the evening is perfect

HUGE is not slurping snacks/junk food in the evening hours and especially not before sleep time. Generally, junk food is filled with sugar and will wind you up — not down. If you do need a nibble go for something that contains complex carbs that increase levels of sleep-inducing amino acid tryptophan. Sleep-boosting choices: piece of whole grain toast or a small bowl of cereal. No soft drinks.

For example, let's say you notice that you eat every time your boss gives you a hard time. Why? Are you feeling angry with your boss for the way she is treating you, but feel as if you can't say anything in response because "she's the boss?" If so, what you may be doing is "eating your anger." The solution? Find healthier ways to express your anger. If you can't say anything to your boss, tell a friend or therapist. Go for a good run and pound the pavement. Write your feelings in a journal. Learnings to express your anger instead of eating over it will allow you to stay on your diet and lose your weight for good.

The next time you are "feeling fat" and are thinking about which diet to try, ask yourself what do you really need? The answer may be a hug rather than food.

Dr. Sheila H. Forman is the author of *The Best Diet Begins in Your Mind - Eliminate the Eight Emotional Obstacles to Permanent Weight Loss* a crash course in overcoming emotional overeating. It offers a straightforward approach to getting on the road to permanent weight loss. Relying on the idea there are two kinds of hunger — physical and emotional, it teaches how to identify the emotional reasons why you eat and gives you tools for addressing each of them. ■

Learn more about Dr. Sheila Forman
www.PsychotherapyForWeightLoss.com



Reduce Stress and Sleep Better

Sleep problems are generally caused by stress. Get a handle on what is stressing you out, and you will sleep like a rock!

Take a look at your health, amount of exercise you get and "type" of food you eat. Are you on overload at work? Too much "kids" responsibility? Write down your thoughts and share them with someone. Support is critical and lets you know you are not alone. Making time to be with family and friends is a tremendous buffer against stress and gives you a break from thinking and worrying. Thought management is important. The negative tapes we play over and over in our minds keep us in a state of confusion, pain and stress. Change thought patterns by counteracting them. The minute a negative thought pops in your head — brush it away with a positive affirmation. Stay away from junk food — it feeds body and mind breakdown. Exercise no matter what. Climb stairs. Walk the dog. Get off the couch. Pump fresh air into your lungs with a good walk and feel reborn.

Meditation is an amazing tool to balance your entire body, mind and soul. It gives you the time and space to change thought patterns and think outside of your regular blah blah mantra. Meditation comes in many forms, and it's not necessary for you to sit on a rubber mat in a yoga class to get the full range of benefits that meditation offers.

It's a proven fact that meditation has helped people destress their lives, calm their bodies and heal themselves of chronic pain and illness, erase anxiety, and improve their moods and regain their zest for life. Meditation can and does make you feel younger, stronger and more in charge of your body, mind and life. Many times when we think "weak" we feel "weak" and the message to our minds and bodies is clear: Something is wrong and we are not in charge. This is especially true where stress, depression, fear and anxiety are concerned — all make a good night's sleep impossible. There is no strength nor peace of mind when our bodies feel weak and ill. Meditation makes your mind strong, and with a strong mind in charge your body will follow.

Meditation is not hard to learn. Simple, positive, reinforcing quotes from books, poems, prayers, thoughts of courage — positive food for your mind and soul are what makes a good meditation routine. A study in the *American Journal of Hypertension* reported people who meditated for 15 minutes twice a day for four months lowered their blood pressure. Lower blood pressure = less anxiety = more time for SLEEP. ■