

## are you like maria

*Basically, I was disabled when it came to dieting. I'm about to confess the ways I would lose my self-control.*

*I'd start out weighing every bit of my food, but ended up guessing.*

*I went off my diet every time I'd go out to dinner.*

*I nibbled here, there and everywhere while I was cooking dinner, and then I'd eat dinner too.*

*If there was something good and sweet in the house, I'd have to have it.*

*If I was on low carb, I'd say I don't see how two pieces of whole grain toast with jam could hurt.*

*If I was counting calories, I'd manage to overlook counting certain items.*

*If I was sick, I couldn't stay on my diet.*

*If I had a weekend filled with social things, I couldn't stay on my diet.*

*If I got on the scale and it hadn't moved, or it only moved one quarter pound or so, I couldn't stay on my diet.*

*Whenever I was stressed out, I'd eat any junk food that was around.*

*It didn't matter which diet I'd go on, I just couldn't control my eating. I'd always find a way around it. I'd tell myself I don't have to be perfect. I'd tell myself it's not a good diet anyway. Then I'd tell myself what a failure I was.*

All of us like to function smoothly. We know things and we do things without having to stop and think about why and how we do them. It just feels to us like we are being ourselves, everything is in order, nothing is amiss. We move and think and react countless times each day with the confidence that comes from knowing our world, without having to constantly assess who we are in the world.

Each of us is like a practiced musician who plays the notes of an arpeggio without even thinking of how to play every note. The notes have been so well practiced that at some point they begin to run themselves. The notes become a unit and are no longer individual notes, each one under careful control. You run that way too, just like a well-practiced arpeggio. You react as a whole self, naturally, without laboring over every thought, feeling, or action. Your thoughts and the way you act work as a unit, in patterns that are characteristic of you. This is what you count on.

If you have a problem with dieting, functioning so smoothly, so automatically without conscious control could be at the heart of the matter. As a dieter, though, you have to change your very self. You have to somehow find it in you to stop running yourself like an arpeggio. You have to be willing to give up counting on yourself, counting on your smoothly functioning, comfortable, familiar ways.

Quite an undertaking, wouldn't you say? There it is, the dieter's dilemma. You want to lose weight, but to do so you must be willing to make a big change in the rules by which you've been running yourself. This means that you can't just adopt a food plan like you thought. It's not that simple.

Permanent weight loss requires permanent personal change. That is the challenge you face as a dieter. It is why you may find yourself up against obstacles that are so difficult, even impossible to overcome. You are used to counting on what we all count on to get through our days. You count on your routines, your characteristic ways, your well-worn habits, your quick perceptions and judgments, all of which are based on a self-confident sense of yourself. When you begin to make significant changes, you are rocking the boat, and you won't feel so steady.

What you are asking of yourself when you go on a diet is to change the rules by which you operate. For instance, if extra food has been a comfort for you, then you have to give up this comfort and learn a new way to comfort yourself. You have to stop a process that has been quick and automatic and satisfying and has let you go on being yourself, undisturbed, unchallenged. To slow down your reactions so that change can enter the picture, means that you must interrupt the flow. You must break the rules that you've been living by. You must stop yourself from being yourself. This is not an easy task for anybody. So, if you've tried and failed, it's understandable—it's only human nature.

How can you change what you do that is second nature to you? How can you be other than what you have come to rely on as you? How can you let go of your everyday habits and rules, and adopt new, unfamiliar ways?

Maria is seeking to triumph over the one problem she never could solve: how to break the rules of her life that were working perfectly to keep her fat.

You surely live by some of these same staying-fat rules. What follows is your own personal guide to breaking one of them.

## diETING IS HARD

Research on dieting and weight loss shows that people find it hard to stick to diets. Yet, it is sticking to it that is the primary predictor of weight loss.

Most people who diet, fail. The failure rate is around eighty percent. This is not a very encouraging statistic. Even when people are able to stay on a diet and lose weight, most of the time they will end up gaining it back. If dieting doesn't work so well, where can you turn if you really have a desire to lose weight?

Women especially are concerned with weight control. Cultural demands leave very few women untouched, with so many feeling the pressure to be thin. At the same time, women are expected to be out in the world, to pursue careers, to provide family income, to care for children, to keep family life running well, to be the primary nurturers. No wonder women are always searching for the perfect, easiest, most effective diet, the one that will cause the weight to just fall off. Of course, this never happens.

We asked women who struggle with their weight to tell us what they need in order to be successful at dieting. A collective chorus rose up and said, "I need help with all the things that stop me from sticking to it—I need help to get through the rough spots." The

most interesting thing is that although women have somewhat different ideas about why they can't diet successfully, there are some shared themes that keep coming up like, "I'm too busy", "I have to take care of everyone else", "I don't have any willpower", "I get cravings..."

Are you on a diet? Are you about to go on a diet? How will you stick to it?

You probably need some extra help to stay on a diet. You know this if you've been on a diet before. There are so many pitfalls, so many things that seem to conspire against you. There is always that party or that wedding or that long, lonely night when you feel your willpower leaving you. There is that time when you are in the middle of a life crisis, when you just go right to food to get you through. Then you start to doubt yourself, and then you feel yourself failing, just as you have failed before.

When you diet, obstacles inevitably present themselves, throw themselves across your path, seriously get in your way. Sometimes they are big things, but sometimes they are just little things. In certain situations you can climb over them or find a way around them. Sometimes you can work through them or push them aside. Other times you can't, and you just plunge right into food.

Typically, obstacles are obstacles because you cannot find a way through them or around them. By their very nature, they test you. They test your ingenuity, your persistence, your dedication, your power to deal with them effectively. They test you in lots of ways. If they require a long, hard effort from you in which there is little or no

progress, they can affect the way you think of yourself. Am I capable? Am I intelligent enough? I must be pretty impatient if I can't stick to something, especially when I've said to myself how much I want to do this. Obstacles that seem insurmountable to you can make you terribly frustrated so that you become even less able to deal with them. Obstacles that resist your best efforts over a long period of time or that don't yield to your best efforts even in the short run can render you hopeless, and you give up trying.

There are probably obstacles in your life that are certainly insurmountable for you that do not bother you. They don't frustrate you or call into question your powers. You don't lose hope in yourself over them. You don't experience any of these unpleasant things because you have no intention of seriously trying to master these obstacles. If you do not want to be an artist, for example, you don't concern yourself with the toils of an artist. You don't struggle to master oils, to master oils on different surfaces, to set your work in the context of art history, to incorporate what you've learned in color theory, or go through years of study and practice, and most likely years of not earning your living through your art.

The obstacles that bother you have to do with what you want for yourself. For these obstacles, you want to find solutions.

So you find yourself facing a situation or an event or even a thought or feeling that threatens to totally interfere with what you are trying so hard to do. Even if you are highly motivated, even if you have the best intentions, even if you want to lose the weight more than anything, you can be caught off guard by such things.

Maybe you experience hunger that you just can't deny. Maybe you get discouraged. Maybe you start to feel helpless or hopeless. Maybe your life gets too complicated and you can't find the extra energy or focus you need to sustain your diet. You may begin to tell yourself that losing weight is too great a task for you, given the multitasking you do in your life. These are pivotal moments, moments that you are so used to handling by eating; it just comes so naturally.

Coming up against any one of these personal obstacles puts you in a crucial moment, the kind of moment when you are most inclined to be stopped, to feel at a loss, to be completely turned around. You may be unequipped to deal with such a rough spot. You may feel yourself losing control, not knowing exactly why.

This is a huge challenge for you as a woman who really wants to lose the weight. There are two sides of you pulling in exact opposite directions. You long to stay on your diet; you've promised yourself this time you would. Then you are faced with a difficult moment and suddenly you feel all your power to do so simply leave you, along with the power to think. Now what?