



Daily Dose

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Imagine yourself up on a balance beam.

You tip this way too far; you make an adjustment. You tip that way too far; you adjust again.

You fall off, get a little hurt, you climb back up on the beam.

You hold your arms out, and you begin to sense which movements keep you steady, which movements throw you off kilter.

The difference between movements that send you tipping and movements that keep you right up where you're supposed to be are very subtle, very small. Sometimes, they're just barely noticeable.

As you practice, you learn to tune in fully to the things that affect your ability to keep steady.

You still fall at times, but getting back up becomes easier and easier. Each time you get up again, you do better.

You begin to learn how to dismount on purpose, nail your landing, knowing you'll get back up when you're ready.

Maintaining your weight is a balancing act, a beautiful thing to behold.

You have been moving along the continuum of weight loss, and here you are. You've lost the weight you set out to lose. But the continuum doesn't end abruptly here. It goes on, and for good reason.

Being finished with actively losing weight, finished with a diet per se, may give you the feeling of being a bit lost, with a sense that you have entered unfamiliar territory.

You may not have a lot of experience being in this position. You have lost the weight, you are where you want to be—so what now? A maintenance food plan can be a good aid when it comes to what to eat. But how do you maintain your “good” behavior?

Your job right now is to learn. The rest of the way is a totally different journey. It is the journey that takes you from being a person with a food/weight problem, to being a person without this problem. The food is the least of it. Everything else about you is most of it.

Life is staring you in the face. You need to cope with this and that, little things, big things, easy things, and hard things. What you still need to perfect is how to cope without the thing that probably used to be your fallback position: overeating.

You have been curtailing your tendency to eat your way out of difficult situations, out of difficult feelings. You had to do this, otherwise you wouldn't have been able to lose weight.

In a way, the challenge of losing weight is much smaller than the challenge of making and sustaining a permanent change in the way you live. A diet is a diet, it's time limited, you go on it, and then it's over. But your new thinner self wants to go on and on, and that is by far the most challenging thing.

This is not to say that losing the weight isn't a great big accomplishment—it is, of course.

But it's not the end of the line. It's the beginning of something brand new.

The pit of my stomach tells me much more about my feelings than it does about hunger for food. I am finding this as I concentrate on keeping off those 36 pounds.

In the past, I interpreted those weird stirrings deep down as a constant need for food, but I know now that can't always be right. No one is hungry twenty-four hours a day.

I want to get into the dieters hall of fame. That is where women go who lose weight for good. To become a member of such an exclusive club, I now ask myself many times a day:

Who's talking, the pit of my stomach—or the pit of my heart?

What a loaded question. But it is the question now. It is no longer a matter of following a diet word for word, ounce for ounce, calorie for calorie, because the extra weight is gone. I don't need to diet any more.

I've got my before and after photos, and there's a spectacular change; anyone can see it. But it's only the outside part of the story, not what counts at this point, which is the "pit", the deepest part.

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Being able to maintain a weight loss is the most important thing. What good is the greatest diet if you ultimately end up back where you started?

Here's the critical question: When you lost weight in the past, did you treat that newfound weight loss as a guest in your life—or did you treat it as a permanent resident?

When you have a guest in your house, you use all kinds of special touches. You put out fresh towels; you set a vase of flowers on the table; you make fancier meals; you plan special activities. You are on your best behavior, making sure this person will be at ease and have a good time. But all of this is temporary, because your guest will be going home. Then the house and your life will both go back to the usual, comfortable, well-worn ways of being you are so familiar with.

BUT—when you decide to live with another person on a permanent basis, all sorts of significant adjustments and compromises are necessary if it is to work out well, and above all, if you want it to last. You need to give and take, make room for the other person's differences, needs, demands, and requirements. Everything is changed, forever. At the same time, life is enhanced in untold ways by having this permanent relationship, so it's worth it.

If you want your weight loss to last, you need to make the same kinds of significant changes—the big ones, the essential ones, the ones that last.

Otherwise, that 20 or 30 or 40-pound weight loss will be simply another guest in your life, nice while it is there, but then will come the inevitable day when it will say goodbye. And that is one big heartbreak.

Weight-loss success brings about some scary events.

Don't be surprised if you reach your goal weight and find yourself beginning to have some old "fattening" thoughts or behaviors. It shocks most people when this happens. They get really worried about their weight loss, that it may not be a sure thing.

There is a similar phenomenon in psychotherapy, when someone is finishing up treatment. She may re-experience symptoms she believed had been successfully laid to rest. She might get frightened, worried, and threatened by self-doubt.

What the return of these old symptoms usually signifies is that something was left undone. People aren't regressing or losing their hard-won stability. In fact, it is exactly because they have established good stability that they are now strong enough to tackle what they couldn't fully resolve before.

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Everything in the world has a tendency to go from being neat and orderly, to being messy and chaotic. It's the way the world works.

You clean the kitchen to its sparkling best, but two hours later someone's made a snack, or poured a drink, or someone cooks something, and then—no more perfect shine. There are drops of juice on the floor, dirty dishes, pots and pans to be scrubbed, counters to be wiped.

Another example: you do a nice remodeling job to your house, you alter the space, you make a family room, say, and it all comes out looking great. It's freshly painted: no nicks or scratches, the floors are pristine. But to keep it that way, you need to fight the messiness that wants to happen over time. You need to have your eye on it pretty consistently, have the right tools at hand to clean and fix and repair whenever it's necessary.

When you reach your goal weight, you have a body at its perfect best, remodeled, looking great. But the tendency is, as with all things, to go back to the state of disordered eating and uncontrolled weight gains that have happened in the past.

Once you have reached your goal, you'll need to understand this tendency for your eating to become disordered again. It requires your attention, and your readiness to use those tools at your disposal to keep the remodeling job intact, looking just the way you want it to look.

The tools? They are: self-reflection, willingness to give the idea of weight maintenance enough time and thought, noticing the danger signals, anticipating those situations where you might easily go back to your old ways, learning to cope with negative emotions without eating your way through them—to name a few.

If you don't do what it takes to keep the weight loss intact, it may cost you a lot. You may have to go back and do it all over again, and who wants that?

Here's a new thought, a twist, a radical change in the keeping-the-weight-off goal. Think about *why* you want to stay at your new, lighter weight. What does it actually mean to you? What are you really after? What's the deeper meaning for you to stay at this weight?

Here's a great example. Julianna lost a lot of weight, with the help of a nutritionist. She was determined to do it, and she did. She then did a lot of soul-searching, and realized that what she really and truly wanted underneath it all was this:

I want to be able to count on myself.

Julianna was just plain sick and tired of not knowing what size she would be come the next season, come the next year. She wanted to be able to count on being the way she wanted to be. She wanted to stop letting herself down. She wanted to stick to her promises to herself.

This was bigger than staying at a particular weight. This was a life-goal that was of great value to her, and would carry over into other areas of her life.

It was setting this goal that changed Julianna's life, and has kept her at her ideal weight for 10 years so far.

One reason many women fall back to their old eating behaviors after they lose weight is simply this: They have a naive belief that all they had to do was change their habits for a certain period of time, and they'd have it made.

Going against these beliefs is research that shows how people need to be actively involved in maintaining any changes they make. True behavioral change is never a brief affair for people. It is not accomplished fast, because human nature doesn't work that way. There are things that need to happen in order for change to really take hold.

Here's one scenario that is all too common. You lose weight, and then a funny thing happens. You start to forget the negative impact on your life due to the weight you were at before. In fact, the farther away you get from all that overeating, the less you remember how you really felt when you were heavier. You even begin to idealize how it was when you could eat anything you wanted to eat. You start missing it more and more.

As you might have guessed, thinking this way can easily reignite your desire to overeat, and send you right back to it. Therefore, one of the things you need to do in order to keep the positive change you've made is to counter this kind of idealized thinking. It's important to acknowledge and remember the negative aspects of eating too much and carrying around extra weight. And you need to do this without resorting to self-criticism about how you were then, because that can also lead you to slip back. Without self-recrimination, you can revisit the problems in your life that were created by your excessive weight. This will help reinforce your change.

Once upon a time a little girl lived in a kingdom of untold riches, her mother being a queen and her father a king. She had all a little princess could ask for: Beautiful dolls with two extra sets of dresses for each, a fairy princess costume that included a jeweled tiara and golden wand, beaded silver ballet slippers, a snow white pony to ride, a miniature hand painted china tea set for twelve, a four poster bed with an ivory French lace canopy, birthday parties celebrated in the grand ballroom with thirty other little girls of royalty. She was not a fearful child, nor was she cautious or timid. On the contrary, she was outspoken and many found her charming and bright beyond her years.

Her daily life consisted of many pleasantries, but her favorite part of the day was every afternoon setting her tea table where she and her handmaiden would sit down to tea and sweet cakes. After this ritual, she would go out to the wishing pool just a few steps inside the palace's garden gate. Each evening as the sun was setting the princess would throw one tiny gold nugget into the pool and ask for the same thing

Please, please make me into the apple of my mother's eye.

The answer would float back up to her from the shimmering water

You can't have everything you ask for, but you will have everything you need.

This answer was always a puzzle to her. She continued to use all her worldly possessions, all her graces, and all her little girl charms to try and win her mother over. She danced on toe for her mother. She dressed up, had her maiden pile that curly hair up on top of her head, and got her portrait painted in vivid color. She learned to ride her pony expertly, putting on many a show of jumps. She played her piano pieces by ear without any mistakes, without even a hesitation. She went to bed right at bedtime with no fussing. She made her mother crafty gifts, artfully tearing pieces of silk cloth and colored ribbon and arranging them into intricate collages, which got framed and presented to the queen.

She sang songs to her mother, love songs, songs of gratitude, songs of praise. The queen would watch and listen to her daughter and then would say, each time, *Thank you my dear. Now I must go.* But each time the thank you was not warm enough, the smile was only a half smile from a distance. And no matter what the little princess tried, no matter what she gave, no matter

what she did, no matter how she wished things to be different, the queen remained unmoved. The little princess grew up without the devotion of her mother.

You know, some hungers can never be satisfied. But you can find a way to move on.

Let's finish the fairy tale the way fairy tales are supposed to end.

And so...the princess grew up into a beautiful young woman. She married a prince who loved her more than anything, and she left her palace of origin to dwell in his kingdom, far away in another land, and lived—you guessed it—happily ever after.

If you buy a great new outfit for a special party, and you put it on and think you suddenly look so good because of the outfit, then when you go back to your usual clothes, you won't feel as though you look so good. But if you buy a great new outfit for a party and put it on and feel: "Wow, I really make this outfit pop", then you can take your "popability" with you to every outfit in your wardrobe. You can take the good-looking you wherever you go, whatever you're wearing.

When you go someplace for a weight-loss program, and you think of the program as doing it *for* you, that effect might begin to wear off after you are no longer attending your meetings. But if you feel the program helped you master the learning needed to keep you in control, this is something that won't wear off. This is something you can take with you wherever you are, because the ability resides in you, not in the weight-loss program.

It's active versus passive. It's owning an accomplishment, rather than seeing it as having been bestowed upon you from someone else. It's learning how to apply basic principles, rather than just following the arbitrary rules of a particular dieting program.

What you can begin to do is step into the weight-loss accomplishment and see it as a central part of you. Once you truly connect with the weight loss, once you acknowledge it and give yourself full credit for being the do-er of this wonderful thing, then you can hold onto it.

What is it about you, yourself, that pulled you through to your goal?

The reason maintaining a weight loss is such a challenge is because it's hard to prepare for everything that may happen. Things always come up that are unexpected. Anything that causes an unusual amount of stress—like an accident, an illness, or the painful breakup of a relationship—can send you back into overeating mode. An important thing to do at a time like this is to recognize it is the situation itself that has put you under great stress.

A slip in a time of extreme stress is not a reflection of your own weakness or inability. When you can see such a slip in this light, it will allow you to slip during the time of particular stress, but then go back to your maintenance strategies with confidence.

So why do so many women eventually gain back the weight they lose?

It has a lot to do with maintaining the status quo.

Think of it this way. Let's say you find a great diet plan and you use all your might to stay on it and reach your weight-loss goal. You feel good, better than you have in a long time. You look good to yourself. You're proud. You've accomplished what you set out to accomplish. Everyone around you compliments you—it's all good.

But then the weight starts to come back. Your eating goes back to days of old, before the diet. As the pounds begin to come back, you're horrified, but you don't know how to stop what's happening to you.

So here's where status quo comes in. If you haven't truly changed your habits, then your whole being will probably naturally gravitate back to those habits. If you haven't discovered the ways overeating and being overweight operate in your life so that you can learn to do without them, then you won't be *able* to do without them. Your mind and your body will be tilted toward getting things back the way they were.

There are ways to avoid gaining the weight back if you see it in this light. You need to do more than just go on a diet. You need to do the underlying work. You need to dismantle the basis for being overweight in the first place.

