

Living the Thin Life

Creative Ways to Maintain Your

Weight for Life

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*For Dad, who always inspired me by his
example and his love of books*

This book is not intended as a substitute for medical advice from physicians. The reader should consult a physician in matters relating to his or her health, including any significant change in dietary practices.

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Introduction

I'm not a doctor or a nutritionist. I don't work for a weight-loss clinic or a fitness company. I'm not trying to sell you anything. I am just an ordinary, middle-aged woman who has managed to lose the weight I needed to lose and then keep it off. I am living the thin life, and it's a great life! I don't feel self-conscious like I used to when I was carrying around those extra pounds. Now I have the confidence to enjoy life as I've always wanted to.

Over the years, I've read just about every diet book and visited every diet website I could find, looking for ways to successfully maintain my ideal weight with a minimum of sacrifice. I've experimented with lots of ideas, and discovered that some but not all of them work for me. I've learned how to adapt all that information and advice to fit my own individual lifestyle and personality. And I think that's the secret - to be willing to try out new recipes, exercises, and motivation strategies. Then I discard the ones that don't work for me and add the ones that do work to my regular routine. Over time, these strategies become habits. I don't feel like I'm on a diet, but rather that I have a lifetime eating plan.

To lose weight, you must take in fewer calories than you expend in energy. To maintain a level weight, the energy input (food) must remain equal to the energy output (exercise). Sounds simple, right? Somehow it becomes complicated when you compare different approaches that contradict each other or that require weighing, measuring, and counting. The trick to making it easy is finding ways of getting the right amount of exercise and eating a healthy diet that will be effective for you. If the techniques you try require too much effort or don't suit your personality and lifestyle, you will lose heart and give up on them.

In this book, I will help you identify your own unique motivators to keep you on track, develop a food plan that fits into your lifestyle, and build an exercise program that you can stick with. You will end up with a personalized system that will allow you to stay at a healthy weight for the rest of your life. I have researched tips from many diet experts and looked at the many rules they

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provide. While I agree that a lot of the tips make sense and will work for most people, I also believe that every person is different and you sometimes need to break the rules and make up your own rules.

My story is not dramatic. As I said, I'm an ordinary American woman, an office worker from the baby boomer generation. For most of my life, I was at a normal weight. When I was in my twenties, my two children were born. I had no trouble staying slim with two very active kids and a full-time job. As the years went by, I found myself picking up one or two extra pounds each year. Although it didn't seem like much, those pounds were adding up. I was cooking family-style meals high in carbohydrates and fat. We ate lots of pasta, casseroles, bread, and desserts.

I guess my metabolism started slowing down as I became more sedentary. After returning from a one-week Caribbean cruise to celebrate my wedding anniversary, I stepped on the scale and realized I was 20 pounds over my ideal weight! That was when I finally decided to take action and make some changes in my life. My clothes were tight and unflattering, my energy level was low, and I just didn't feel good about myself. I set a goal to lose those extra 20 pounds and keep them off forever.

By this time my son and daughter were grown up and independent and my husband was very supportive. I had more free time to focus on myself and come up with a lifelong plan I could stick to. This was my opportunity to take control of my eating and exercise habits.

I started out with a low-carbohydrate diet, which I was able to stick with for eight weeks. After losing about eight pounds, I switched to a low-calorie plan and continued losing, although at a slower pace. I started taking aerobics classes at a local gym, then joined a women-only fitness center that combined strength training with aerobics. I reached my goal weight and loved it! My clothes now looked great on me and I got lots of compliments. I felt energized!

The next challenge was figuring out how to maintain my ideal weight for the rest of my life (*without* feeling like I was always on a diet).

Don't think I'm one of those naturally thin people who can eat whatever they want and never gain an ounce. I have to work at it like everyone else. I have always enjoyed food and love to snack. I had to find ways to satisfy my sweet tooth without putting the pounds back on. I never liked to work out, so I had to find ways to work exercise into my daily routine and keep myself motivated.

Introduction

In this book, I'll share the tips and tricks that have worked for me. I've included stories from friends and family members who succeeded in losing weight and keeping it off. I'll show you how to create your own personal system tailored to your likes and dislikes. I will include some shortcuts that will make sticking to your plan easier. I'll also provide fun quizzes to test your knowledge. In Appendix C, I offer many easy, delicious recipes.

My husband asked me not to use his real name in this book, so I'll just call him "Elvis" (he's the king, or at least he likes to think so). Elvis and I have had many discussions about proper eating and exercise habits. His ideas are usually very different from mine. I'll try to be objective and tell you about his suggestions, too. You be the judge, but keep in mind he is about 30 pounds overweight while I have maintained my ideal weight for over ten years.

For example, Elvis has three cookies for breakfast each morning. He explains, "You're not supposed to take a vitamin on an empty stomach." While it's true you should take vitamins with meals, you don't need 450 extra calories, with the main ingredient being sugar.

Elvis also has the attitude that some diet foods are not "real". Most people know that skim milk is regular cow's milk that has had most of the cream skimmed off. It has the same nutrients as whole milk, but with less fat. Having spent some time on a farm as a child, I've actually seen the skimming process. But Elvis feels that skim milk isn't real. Maybe he thinks there's some kind of dairy animal called a skim.

Throughout the book, I'll also try to provide some examples of what *not* to do. You may see Elvis's name come up in these examples.

I'm now in my fifties and I feel better than I ever have. I have lots of energy plus Elvis tells me I look better now than I did when we got married. So don't be discouraged. It *is* possible to keep the weight off and live the thin life!

Part One

Pep Talk

Chapter 1

Let's Get Motivated

This is my key message - discover what motivates *you* and what works for *you*. We are all unique individuals. We don't look alike or think alike, so why should we expect the same eating or exercise program to work for everyone? In fact, research has shown that women differ from one another more than men do¹. These differences make it important to develop your own system and not expect a "one-size-fits-all" program to work for you. Pick and choose from all the suggestions and advice presented here to come up with your own personalized plan. Improvise by adjusting, combining, or adding suggestions.

Over the years I've realized you can develop a system that suits you through experimentation and learning from your experiences. It's an ongoing process that you will continue to fine-tune over time. There are new products continually being developed - exercise equipment and programs, sugar and fat substitutes, new menu items at restaurants - so you can add variety to your routine and avoid monotony. That keeps it fun!

The first step in developing your custom plan is to discover your own personal motivators. What truly makes you want to do whatever it takes to stay healthy and fit? When you're tempted to overeat or skip a workout, what thoughts will keep you on track by reminding you of why you want to stay in good shape? Here are some possibilities to consider:

A desire to be healthy. This is a great motivator for most people. Maintaining a healthy weight can help reduce your risk of developing certain health conditions such as:

- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease and stroke

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- High blood fats such as cholesterol and triglycerides
- Arthritis
- Cancer
- Gallstones
- Fatty liver disease

Being overweight can also contribute to sleep apnea, which can strain your heart and make you feel fatigued throughout the day. Extra fatty tissue in the throat can cause snoring which may disrupt your sleep.

Overweight people are more affected by air pollution than people of normal weight, according to a 2007 study². Pollution causes temporary drops in lung function that decrease lung efficiency. Normal and underweight people in the study didn't have this reaction.

Being fit is a great feeling. You will wake up each morning looking forward to a new day. While there are health factors we can't control, taking charge of your health is empowering. You will feel confident about yourself, knowing you are taking the best care of your body you can.

If that's not enough to keep you motivated, here are more benefits of being thin and fit that have been demonstrated in various research studies:

- Fit people over age 40 have a 50% lower risk of stroke.³
- Physically active older adults live longer.⁴
- Older adults who maintain their strength have fewer balance problems.⁵

When you're having trouble sticking to your exercise and eating plan, think about all the health benefits of being fit.

Looking good! We all want to look our best. Having a trim and toned body will help to make your clothes look great on you. You'll love to catch sight of your reflection in a mirror or store window. Knowing you are attractive is a great confidence-builder.

If you are overweight, you may feel self-conscious about the impression you make on others. Being at your ideal weight can remove this worry and allow you to be yourself so people can focus on your other qualities. Appearance can be a great motivator.

We all need to be realistic about our body image. You don't have to be a size two or look like an ultra thin model or actress to look good. Understand

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what weight *you* look your best in, taking into consideration your own bone structure, body shape, and genetics. Then you can just relax and accept yourself.

Deferred gratification. Say no now, knowing you can say yes later. This strategy really works for me. If I'm having dinner out or at a friend's house, I can pass on dessert, because I know I have a tasty healthy treat waiting for me at home. When you have to wait for something, getting it is a greater pleasure. Remember the anticipation you felt as a child in the weeks leading up to Christmas or your birthday? If we received presents every day, they would lose their value to us. That same attitude applies to food. Food tastes better when you're hungrier. Let yourself take the time to feel a little hunger, and the eventual reward will be sweeter.

I like to keep great-tasting low-calorie desserts around the house, such as sugar-free, fat-free pudding. With something to look forward to throughout the day, it is easier to turn down other foods. One of my favorite ways to relax in the evening is to work a crossword puzzle or read a book while enjoying a sweet snack. If I have my dessert or treat earlier, I no longer have my special indulgence to look forward to. A treat tastes much better when you have waited for it.

Really deferred gratification. Once a week, Elvis and I go out to dinner. We enjoy relaxing at a nice restaurant on a Friday night after working all week. It's a special treat since we eat at home the other six nights of the week. When we eat out, we order what we like. I may skip the bread, but I don't order "diet" food. When I'm tempted to splurge during the week, I remind myself that I'll be having a nice meal on Friday and I can wait.

Try this technique yourself by planning some future reward you can look forward to. It's much easier to pass up your favorite foods when you know you will get to enjoy them later. Surely you can wait just a few more days! That special meal will taste better, and you will have saved extra calories by waiting.

Getting compliments. I enjoy it when Elvis tells me I'm the prettiest girl at the party or I look better now than I did in my thirties. It's fun to get compliments from friends and family too. You can stay motivated in the face of temptation by remembering that warm feeling of appreciation.

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It's fun for me to be out with my grown daughter and be mistaken for sisters. Many people I meet don't believe I have children in their late twenties. I've been accused of being a "child bride"!

"A recent large study at the University of Maryland has shown that thin women have fewer hot flashes than heavy women."⁶

Feeling in control. Maintaining your desired weight gives you a great feeling of control. You are making the choices that determine how you look and feel. You understand your individual likes and dislikes and work them into your overall plan. You're not at the mercy of hunger pangs because you have figured out how to eat sensibly. You don't dread a workout because you have decided to make regular exercise a part of your life.

Not getting out of breath. One of the great things about being in good physical condition is your increase in endurance. Over time, you will strengthen not only your muscles, but your lungs as well. You'll be able to walk or climb stairs more easily. When you're tempted to skip a workout, remind yourself how much you appreciate being able to do more without getting winded or fatigued. It will all be worth it.

Shopping for new clothes. When you're slim, you can wear clothes in styles that you choose, not what happens to fit from a limited selection. You can wear clothes in all your favorite colors instead of sticking with dark solid colors. You can wear belts to show off your waistline. Clothes look best on people with trim, toned bodies. Fashionable clothing is designed to fit and flatter slim people.

Looking forward to holidays and special occasions. Some people are motivated by a special occasion for which they want to look their best. For example, if you have a high school reunion coming up in six months, you can use the desire to impress your old friends as a motivator to keep you on your eating and exercise plan for the next six months. After you have enjoyed your special event, pick the next one coming up on the horizon, such as the Christmas

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holidays or a summer vacation. Motivating yourself in six-month increments can be very effective and can help build lifetime habits.

Knowing you're in good shape will help you look forward to special occasions rather than dreading them. Also keep in mind that at special events (especially weddings and holidays) people usually take lots of pictures and save those pictures for life, so that's extra incentive to look good in them.

Being there for your family. Dennis C., a relative of mine, maintains his motivation by thinking about all the future years he wants to enjoy with his children and someday (hopefully) grandchildren. He knows that being heavy can shorten your lifespan and reduce the quality of life in the years you do have. He wants to be an active, important part of the lives of the people he cares about for as long as possible.

Your family and friends can be a strong motivating factor for you. Besides looking to the future, you will get more enjoyment out of the time you spend with them today when you are strong and healthy. It's a wonderful feeling to make them proud of you. When I told my son I was planning to write this book, he said, "Be sure to put lots of pictures of yourself in it." That comment sure gave *me* motivation!

Having strength for everyday tasks. Simple tasks like carrying bags of groceries or doing laundry are much easier when you're in good physical condition. It's great to be able to handle going up stairs without dreading it as an ordeal to get through. If you're out of shape, simple things like opening a heavy door at a department store, taking out the trash, or even pushing a grocery cart can become challenging.

On the other hand, being in good shape improves your endurance, so you are able to go on walking tours on a vacation or even hiking in national parks. You don't want to be one of those people who straggles behind and slows everyone else down, do you? Think of all the things you do that are easy when you're physically fit, but difficult when you're not - such as hoisting your carry-on bag into the overhead compartment on an airplane, bending over to pick up something you've dropped, or getting something off a high shelf. Life is just easier all around when you're physically fit.

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Boosting your energy level. When you're healthy and fit, you'll naturally feel more energetic vs. feeling sluggish. And who wants to feel like a slug? That doesn't sound very appealing to me.

Have you ever been stuck behind one of those slow-moving people you just can't get around at the shopping mall or grocery store? It can be frustrating when you want to move quickly. Which of these people do you want to be: the slow-moving obstacle or the determined, quick-moving go-getter?

I've talked with women who started exercising after years of inactivity. One friend told me that before she started working out regularly, she would dread forgetting something and then having to walk extra steps to go back and get it. She didn't realize how little energy she had until she lost weight and gained strength. Now it's no problem for her to take extra steps, and in fact she will sometimes intentionally go out of her way to get more steps in.

Having a never-ending wardrobe. You can save money on clothes because you'll only need one size. When your weight fluctuates a lot from going on and off diets, you may accumulate lots of clothes in different sizes. Or if you have been steadily gaining weight over the years, you may have been gradually buying larger sizes and now find yourself with a closet full of clothes that don't fit. When you are able to maintain the same size, every item in your closet is wearable. You'll never have to throw anything out.

I've been at a stable weight for many years and it's almost embarrassing how old some of my favorite clothes are. As long as they fit well, why not go ahead and keep wearing them? I still get compliments on outfits that are more than 20 years old! It's helpful to buy good quality, classic-styled clothing, knowing it will last the years. Of course, some of the clothes that still fit me I wouldn't be caught dead in! I just hang on to them hoping that they'll be back in style someday.

Improved self-esteem. If you are in good shape, you can avoid feelings of embarrassment. On the other hand, when you know you're not at your best you may not look forward to meeting new people because you're worried about the impression you may be making. Instead of being open to new situations and opportunities, you may be too focused on your self-perceived flaws to appreciate other people and experiences.

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Feeling good about yourself will give you the self-confidence and freedom to enjoy what life has to offer. The energy you might have spent worrying about your appearance can now be used for more productive purposes.

Competition - being a winner. This suggestion might not work for everyone, but there are some people who thrive on competition. A certain relative of mine motivates himself to lose weight by making a bet with someone, usually his brother. He puts up a significant amount of money and then either sets a deadline for when he needs to lose a certain amount of weight, or just races the other person to see who can lose a certain amount first. He is so competitive that he usually loses weight out of sheer determination to win the bet.

You may want to try this motivator with a reward other than cash. How about competing with a friend to see who can complete more workouts in a certain period of time, and then treating the winner to a day at the spa? How about creating a trophy to award to the friend who loses the most weight? Or maybe just the satisfaction of winning is enough for you.

Flexibility and youthfulness. The most important factor in projecting a youthful appearance is having flexibility in your movements. Many older people move very slowly and stiffly. Of course, we all will age eventually and if you have stiffness due to injuries or arthritis there may not be much you can do. However, for most of us, stiffness can be delayed by participating in some sort of regular exercise. A person who walks briskly and moves easily will appear much more youthful.

Investing in yourself. Maybe you're the type of person who hates to waste money. Try signing up for a weight loss class, exercise program, or dance lessons. Once you've committed your cash, you'll be motivated to stick with it, if only to feel like you're getting your money's worth.

Enjoying more space. One of the great things about being thin is simply not taking up so much physical space. With a smaller body, you have more room to breathe. When you're flying in coach class on an airplane or taking a subway, you can easily fit into your seat. I always feel sorry for the heavy-set people I see trying to squeeze into those tiny spaces. You also have more room in movie theaters, dressing rooms, and even bathroom stalls. Keep reminding yourself

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how comfortable it is to have your personal space and you'll be sure to maintain your motivation.

Taking up more space can also have some unexpected negative consequences. Two heavy relatives of mine were actually kicked off an amusement park ride once because they were too large. It was extremely embarrassing to them. You can decide to never let this happen to you. When you're tempted to eat unwisely or skip a workout, remind yourself of this.

"Fat may damage brain cells - a French study of 2,000 middle-aged people found that the higher the Body Mass Index, the lower the memory test scores."⁷

Emulating someone. Maybe I'm a little shallow, but having a role model to emulate is motivating for me. I may pass someone on the street or see an actress in a movie who looks great, and I think to myself, "That's what I want to look like!"

An alternative is to use yourself as your role model. Keep a picture of yourself when you were in peak shape, and use it to remind yourself of how good you can be. This picture lets you become your own role model and creates motivation and enthusiasm for maintaining your weight.

Not emulating someone. For some people, having a negative role model is motivating. Remind yourself of what you *don't* want to look like. With the growing number of overweight and obese Americans, you can easily find someone who is not at her optimum weight and physical condition. You can stay motivated in order to avoid becoming that person. Some people will even display pictures of obese people on their refrigerators to motivate themselves to forgo an impulsive snack.

Maintaining self-discipline or willpower. This is the absolute last item on my list, because it's the one that rarely works, at least not for the long-term. I'll include it anyway because it's possible it will work for you. If you can make a commitment to exercise and to eat healthy because you know it's a good

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decision and the right thing to do for yourself, that commitment may give you the strength to stick to it.

Your homework assignment

You are about to create the first part of your personal plan for life. Use the personal plan worksheet in Appendix A, or download an online version from my website, www.livingthethinlife.com.

1. Select at least three ideas from the list above which apply to you. Really think about what's important to you personally that makes you want to be slim and trim. Write these items down in Section 1 of your plan. You'll need this motivation list later when you're fighting temptation to remind yourself why you want to stick to your plan.
2. Add your own ideas by thinking about times when you were successful in sticking to a diet or exercise routine. Don't worry about your ideas appearing to be silly to someone else. Remember, this is *your* list of what motivates you.

Appendix D

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