

RUN TO THE FINISH

COMPLETE GUIDE

TO

RUNNING *for* WEIGHT LOSS



amanda
BROOKS



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COMPLETE GUIDE TO RUNNING *for* WEIGHT LOSS

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ABOUT

Amanda Brooks

Amanda, an eight-time marathoner and running coach, is the author of RunToTheFinish, a destination for in depth running articles, tips and community derived from her 16 years of running and passion for sharing the sport.

She's a digital consultant, writer, speaker and social media fiend with 18 years of experience providing strategic online solutions for Fortune 500 companies nationwide and almost 12 years blogging.

Amanda combined her love of writing, strategy and running to develop a site that is recognized as a top running blog. It's a destination for tips, motivation and tools for getting the most out of the runner lifestyle, while having a blast.



INTRODUCTION



For years I held off on putting this book together, despite the requests. I simply didn't want people to feel like weight loss was the only reason to run...

And yet, let's be honest, it was one of the things that initially drew me in! It would be a lie to say otherwise! Which is absolutely fine because whatever brings you to the sport gives you a chance to fall in love and for all the other reasons that I continue running: pride, energy, stress relief, friendship, health.

Additionally, if it weren't for running, I'm positive it would have taken me longer to change my eating habits and lose the weight.

Within this book, I'll share with you the tips that allowed me to **lose 35lbs and keep it off without any angst for over a decade!** It's not an overnight weight loss program, it's not a strict diet, and it's not a magic potion.

It's small changes you can make within your life for lasting change.

One of the crazy things you're going to quickly realize here is that running alone isn't the whole story.

Instead, we're starting by taking advantage of how running makes you feel as a launch pad to making some changes in our thinking and our food choices. Which leads to running better, which means running more, which means less days off for injuries, which means sustained weight loss!

CHAPTER 1: MINDSET AND HABIT CREATION

STEP 1 CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

Do you find yourself saying “*I can’t eat xyz*” or “*I shouldn’t have this*”?

You’re essentially telling your brain that it’s being punished and this only works for a short period of time. Which is what makes running + food changes so powerful!!

Instead of focusing on not eating the entire bag of salty kettle cooked chips, you start thinking about what foods you want to CHOOSE to feel better on your next run. Foods that are going to help you recover faster. Foods that are going to allow you to run farther. Foods that are going to help you lose the weight easily.

Remember to start using your words:

I choose to eat healthy foods.

I don’t eat xyz because it makes me feel bad.

I don’t know about you, but that little shift made my brain feel so much better!

In fact, that same positive mindset is why instead of following a diet, I set a goal for myself to eat the gold standard of fruits and vegetables (affectionately called freggies), which is 7-9 servings per day.



CREATING A
POSITIVE MINDSET
around
food

Eliminating Negative Self Talk

One of the quickest ways to derail your efforts is to listen to negative mental chatter. I doubt any of your friends are berating you for enjoying that slice of pizza, but you might still be, which is far more damaging because you tend to believe yourself!

I'm sure most of you are past the "*oh I had one cookie, so screw eating clean the rest of the day*".

But maybe you're still replaying last weekend or thinking about the fact that you had a cookie the last four days, even though you swore not to, and maybe you just don't have the willpower required to lose weight.

What about all the other meals you ate that weren't cookies? {insert your food of choice for cookie, I tend to go for sugar!} Don't you deserve some credit for those choices?

Why does our self-talk matter so much?

1. **Makes changing harder!**

If you're repeatedly telling yourself something that goes against the change that you're trying to make your brain is going to be confused about what you want. "*I always fail at diets.*" "*I want to eat better.*" -- Well which is it?! Stick to what you want your brain to know.

2. **Stress!**

High cortisol encourages more fat storage and we know it turns on our emotional triggers, which leads us right back to the kitchen. More on how to manage cortisol coming soon!

3. **You'll believe it.**

What you tell yourself repeatedly becomes a belief "something you perceive to be true whether it is or not". Other people impact our self-image all the time, but the only one that stays with you day and night is you. You can decide what's true.

Remember that even one change means you're moving in the right direction.

Build on that change, focus on that change, celebrate that change and slowly your brain will get on board.

The focus becomes "*Hey, I passed on the cookie yesterday, maybe I am a healthy eater. Yeah I had a salad for lunch too and it was really good. I really am enjoying whole foods.*"

Here are a few things you can try when the chatter starts:

- Am I benefiting from focusing on this?
- List 5-10 good qualities about yourself
- Start thinking about an activity you enjoy and plan to go do it
- Remember you deserve the same grace you'd give to others

Avoid Either or Syndrome

Either you're on track with your diet or you're not. Does this sound familiar? I'm so happy to tell you that this mindset will totally fall by the wayside as you keep putting in to play all of the tips shared within this ebook.

You'll find yourself gradually craving meals filled with more vegetables and not feeling any guilt on a night where you choose to ENJOY every bite of a slice of pizza. You will know that it was delicious and it was just one night, not a way of living.

▮ "Becoming healthy is a journey, not a destination." **Frank Ferendo**

This is more than a quick 30-day weight loss challenge;

It's about enjoying the entire process of creating the healthiest happiest version of you. Finding the foods that work for you, taste good to you and make you feel good. Finding the workouts that get you excited and seeing progress not just on the scale, but in all areas of your life.

Remember most of us aren't here because of **one poor food choice...we're here because of repeat offenders**. So when you find yourself saying "oh just one isn't a big deal", remember that's true if you stick to just one."

STEP 2: STOP RELYING ON WILLPOWER

One of the weirdest things about weight loss is that we try to do it by willpower. If a smoker decides to quit, they don't keep a pack "just in case" or run across them sitting on a co-workers desk and have to grit their teeth to walk by.

For a while, do yourself a favor and get rid of the foods you're choosing not to eat. Remembering that you aren't removing them for the rest of your life, just for awhile to let your taste buds reset and break habits. I mean I eat pizza every Friday night because it makes me deliriously happy to enjoy that smell, texture and time with my husband , so this isn't about deprivation.

Now, let's move on to creating habits.

Habit Change

We've all been there... a really solid string of days where we've been working out and enjoying bountiful meals of whole foods, shunning sugar and basically feeling a little smug because we're so awesome.

Then someone has a birthday or a happy hour or a wedding or a...well you get the picture.

We over indulge one night. We skip just one workout.

And then it's months later and we're starting our goal all over again.

While I can't relate to skipping workouts {cause I'm a nut}, I certainly know the siren song of sugar and watch my dear, handsome husband fall in and out of love with fitness every few months.

How do habits help?

Habits are an automatic reaction to a cue, signaling the mind to undertake a learned routine.

Tapping in to this automatic signaling allows you to change the way you eat or commit to exercise with ease, rather than fighting the process. It allows for maintaining those changes long after friends have fallen off the wagon.

Why I prefer mini habits:

I love this statement by Stephen Guise:

The reason people fail to change their lives, and fail to instill new habits, is because they try to do too much at once. In simplest terms, if your new habit requires more willpower than you can muster, you will fail. If your new habit requires less willpower than you can muster, you will succeed.

The benefit of the mini habit is this:

- Provides quick wins, which creates motivation to see more progress
- Easy enough that you won't talk yourself out of it
- Allows you to accomplish something that feels productive
- Develops a base on which you can build other habits

“The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts, usually in either of two very different ways. One shortcut is to become reckless: to act impulsively instead of expending the energy to first think through the consequences. (Sure, tweet that photo! What could go wrong?) The other shortcut is the ultimate energy saver: do nothing. Instead of agonizing over decisions, avoid any choice.” – From NY Times

THE SECRETS TO CHANGING EATING HABITS



Create your healthy habit

The statement it takes 21 days to form a habit is a bit misleading. We're looking to create a lifestyle, so stop looking for a finish line and this all gets easier.

Over time, you'll naturally cross that line from remembering to do something to **NEEDING** to do it because it's part of your routine.

COMPONENTS OF A HABIT:

CUE – A signal to prompt another event.

I start to feel sleepy.

ROUTINE – A standard procedure used regularly.

I brush my teeth and wash my face.

REWARD – Something received as a result of an action.

I feel like I've cleared away the day to go to be fresh.

CRAVING – An intense desire for something.

The minty fresh feeling in my mouth to replace dinner.

BELIEF – Mental conviction that something is true.

I'm someone who always brushes my teeth before bed.

Managing Hunger

One of the most curious things to happen to many runners they increase mileage, burning more calories than ever, they start to gain weight!

This usually happens for two reasons:

1. **Justification**

We feel justified in eating more because we just ran so much! And usually we aren't eating more veggies, we're having that 3rd slice of pizza, thank you very much.

A good trick is to remind yourself that the day after your long run is a rest day. Instead of feeling that you need to cut your intake on that day, if you keep it reasonable on a long run day you'll be able to enjoy enough food to feel full the following day, which is when hunger truly hits for many runners.

2. **Overestimating the Burn**

Because we tend to be focused on calories, we plug our run in to a calculator and tada look at the thousands of extra calories coming our way. Unfortunately, those calculators aren't entirely right.

While you might burn 10 calories per minute, you'd also be burning at least 3 calories by being alive...hmm so that brings your extra down to 7.

Did you take in any fuel during that long run? Also bringing down your extra calories.

Did you eat more on any other day this week than you burned? The long run might be overcoming that surplus.

Look for a **total weekly deficit** rather than giving yourself a big green light around long runs and you'll often find yourself leaning towards healthier choices.

Which leads to the bigger concept of managing your hunger (running induced hunger).

- Refuel after workouts with high nutrient meals
- Focus on veggies at every meal (volume without the calories helps you feel satisfied!)
- Eat more protein to help with recovery and satiety
- Don't avoid whole food sources of carbohydrates, they're necessary for recovery and variety of nutrients
- Maintain a good electrolyte balance

We'll talk more about a lot of this in the sections that follow!



CHAPTER 2: SWEATING FOR WEIGHT LOSS

Wait, isn't this book about running? Why isn't this chapter just running for weight loss?

Well because most of us who have been around the game for a while can tell you, it takes more than just running to create the body that you want. It's often very easy for runners to become skinny fat or *gassssp* they gain weight while continuing to increase their mileage!!

Are you confused about what actually works for fat loss? Some people say slow and long, some say high intensity and some say screw cardio do weights.

The truth is they all work.

Just like all those different diets work for different people, but there three basic workout types that need to be part of your overall running program if fat loss is the primary goal:

- **Build muscle:** Strength training often goes by the wayside for those chasing a calorie burn, but the afterburn of weights can be far superior. In addition to creating a physique that's more likely what you're after and allowing you to run faster or farther.
- **Insert Intensity:** Interval training is a great way to increase your fitness and create a high calorie burn especially on days where you are short on time. This could mean doing repeats on a track, tempo runs or just playing with fartleks (short pick ups during a run). But limit the high intensity to a few days a week, so your cortisol doesn't go sky high.
- **Go Long:** At least once a week go for a longer duration with less intensity. Once you're going for over an hour, you start teaching your body to tap in to fat stores for fuel instead of just using the glycogen in your muscles. Long is relative to your current training and your goals. Starting out work up to 60-90 minutes for your long run.

Let's talk calorie burn because that's where I hear people get confused. High intensity exercise does indeed burn more fat, but let's look at the numbers to understand what this means

Low-intensity training burns about 50% fat for energy while high-intensity training burns about 40% fat for energy.

Easy math example:

Walking for 20 minutes burns 100 calories = 50 fat calories burned.

10 minutes of interval training at a high intensity burns 160 calories = 64 fat calories burned.

Exciting news to see you can burn more fat in less time, BUT the major caveat is that you cannot sustain high intensity exercise beyond 10-20 minutes and thus your likely overall total calorie burn will be less.

The best workout plans include a mixture of both high and low intensity to ensure long term success, which makes a training plan that includes easy runs, speed work and long runs a great variety.

If you're running to lose weight, but you hate every minute of it, you will likely stop running at some point. Instead find what you enjoy and go after it! Zumba, yoga, Pilates, they all produce great bodies for anyone who is **CONSISTENT**.

BODY FAT VS WEIGHT LOSS

Since I keep saying workouts to lose body fat, let's talk about why!!!

You can lose weight, which could be water or muscle, but neither is likely going to get you the actual body shape you desire. And we realize that damn scale is a liar, we're making all kinds of progress, even when it doesn't show it.

BUT we still want some way to measure it and prove to ourselves our body is changing.

In my case, looking at body fat helped me to see that while I had dropped pounds, I was also losing some muscle and becoming what we used to dub “skinny fat”. Meaning I looked lean, but my body fat said I needed to make some changes both for my health and to truly be the runner I wanted.

Most standard charts categorize body fat percentage this way:

DESCRIPTION	WOMEN
Essential Fat	10-13%
Athletes	14-20%
Fitness	21-24%
Average	25-31%
Obese	32%+

In general, I'd say don't get too caught up in these numbers either. They're simply another way to measure whether the changes you're making are working and to ensure that you're not losing muscle mass while training.

If you are under fueling while marathon training, the body is going to begin using your muscle for fuel. It's going to make you weaker and likely long term derail your weight loss efforts too.

Instead, we want to do a few key things:

1. Build muscle with strength training before beginning a heavy period of run training
2. Maintain some strength training throughout build up to a race
3. Eat enough to maintain most of the muscle you created and fire up the metabolism

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO MEASURE SUCCESS

I believe it's critical to find something to measure, as it gives you a focus to stay on track. The statement what we measure we manage is true!

Other things to measure:

- How many veggies are you eating daily?
- Measure your waist or hips consistently to see changes (this helped me identify foods that made me bloat!)
- How is your energy during workouts?
- Are you finding that you can breathe easier or run farther?
- How many meals are you eating at home vs eating out?

Pick a specific area and measure it.

HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR WORKOUTS?

I've preached it. You've read it. We now all understand that strength training needs to be part of our running routine.

Yet, we still let it slide because, well time, life, priorities and we just don't particularly love the gym. It's why we run!

I've found three things really help us stick with a runner strength training plan:

- Knowing exactly how it's going to make us a better runner.
- Remembering it's going to enhance your weight loss goals.
- It needs to be quick, so we can keep getting in our miles.

I'm the first to admit that if a workout leaves me so sore that I can't get in my miles, I'm unlikely to want to do it again. Running is my primary goal, my strength training needs to enhance the speed, distance or feel of those runs!

Here's a sample schedule for your off-season or during base building:



A Week of Running + Strength

MONDAY: Heavy, lower body workout

TUESDAY: Short run with mobility

WEDNESDAY: Full-body HIIT workout

THURSDAY: Interval run with mobility

FRIDAY: Off

SATURDAY: Off or yoga

SUNDAY: Long Run

As your mileage or intensity increases, it's not always as easy to fit in a lower body only workout. Or perhaps like me, you just don't particularly love that workout so you'll skip it every time!

Instead, implement a practice of consistent body weight strength. While you still need weights, this is a fantastic way to start making it habit.

PRE-RUN: Before every run start stretching your warm-up a bit to include lunges, squats, planks, push-ups hip bridges. All of these both fire up your muscles and are great for strength.

MONDAY: rest

TUESDAY: Full body strength + short easy run

WEDNESDAY: Speed workout or tempo run

THURSDAY: easy run or rest

FRIDAY: Full body strength

SATURDAY: short easy run (or a couple fast miles)

SUNDAY: Long Run

EXAMPLE FULL BODY WORKOUT

There are a variety of workout programs on the market, so I won't try to replicate their great information here. Instead, I'm giving you the top 10 body weight exercises for runners because I feel like we're more likely to implement to those initially!

Once you get in the routine, look at Beachbody programs or get a great running strength coach to implement some different workouts and incorporate weights.

Single Leg Squats – If you're anything like me, I don't have the range of motion for a pistol squat. So we work on that by sitting back on to a bench with one leg extended. Initially start by placing the extended leg on the floor for support.

Side Plank Twist – Legs extended with both feet on the floor and forearm perpendicular to the body on the floor, place top hand behind head and then twist elbow to the ground while thinking about pulling your hips up.

Push Up and Back – Complete a push up and then from the top of the push up, bend knees and push your body back like you're going in to downward dog but with bent legs.

Single Leg Deadlift – This balance move is fantastic for runner's knee! Standing on your left leg, slowly bend at the waist, raising your right behind you and reaching hands to your shins. Do not try to touch the floor, only go to your range, then return to standing without placing down your right foot.

Sumo Squat – Did you know the lack of working your inner thighs could be part of why you get injured? With toes pointed out and legs wider than hip distance, squat down and rise up. For a bonus, squat down and then raise on to your toes to push up.

Tricep Dips – In a reverse table top position, hands on the floor with fingers pointing towards your feet, slowly lower down by bending and keeping elbows close to the body.

Superman – Laying on your stomach, contract the core and raise both arms and legs off the floor, hold for 2 and return.

Full Plank – No more holding planks for 2 minutes, it's not working! Instead you need to implement the focused plank. You should be squeezing every single muscle in your arm, core, glutes and legs to hold this plank. If you aren't shaking by 15 seconds, you're not squeezing hard enough.

Hip Bridge – Lying on your back, engage the core to raise your hips and once steady begin lifting 1 leg at a time for a march. If your hips are swaying as you march, then just hold the bridge until you're stronger.

HOW MUCH TO WORKOUT TO LOSE WEIGHT?

There is no pat answer to this, but you can absolutely workout too much and halt your weight loss.

Ensure that your workouts include the variety mentioned above, plenty of recovery and are in line with the total stress you have from work, family and life to really make them work for you.

Endurance athletes tend to have a higher threshold for pain (and stress) which leads us to believe that we are “handling it all just fine”. In reality our bodies are physiologically unable to respond to a consistently high level of cortisol.

Chronically high levels of cortisol lead to weight gain despite all your efforts! Let's dig in so you can understand this tricky little hormone and what to do about it to get back on track, optimize your recovery and continue enjoying those runs.

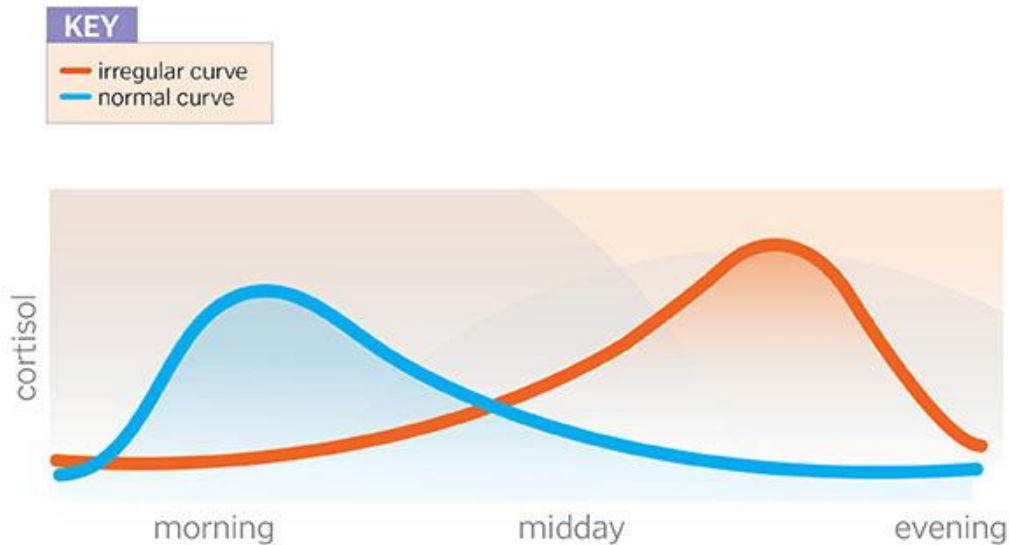
Morning

Cortisol levels should be elevated to increase alertness. If you struggle to wake up in the morning, hit the snooze button multiple times, or need several cups of coffee to get yourself moving then chances are your morning cortisol levels are abnormally low.

Evening

Cortisol levels should naturally decline to help us prepare for sleep. Excessive cortisol from stimulants, stress, “busyness” prohibit melatonin production making it hard to fall asleep or get in to a deep sleep.

Here's a visual of how cortisol should flow and when it's out of whack.



Following are the impacts of allowing our stress {life and training} to go unchecked:

- Prevents short term memory from transferring to long term
- “tired but wired” feeling
- Decreased metabolism {gaining abdominal fat}
- Increased bone loss
- Inhibits pituitary function
- Higher inflammation
- Lowered immune system {frequently sick}
- Mood swings, anxiety, depression

So yes, this is where I tell you the things you've often heard, but might ignore. It's important for your weight loss to:

- Get plenty of sleep
- Find ways to reduce lifestyle stress
- Eat to reduce bodily stress
- Reduce the amount of stimulants, like coffee, you use
- Eat enough foods to not make your body think it's in starvation mode
- Eat the right types of whole foods, as discussed below

Public Library of Science: Medicine reported that people who consistently slept less than five hours a night had significant differences in the hormones leptin and ghrelin as compared with people who slept an average of eight hours a night.

Low levels of leptin are a signal of starvation and a need for a bigger appetite, while ghrelin is an appetite stimulant. << Looks like a recipe for disaster, especially when combined with our Western culture of early morning carbs which increase insulin and thus our all day sugar cravings.

All of this is a reminder that you can't simply run more to get results. If you're overstressed, you'll set yourself back. Pick a schedule that you can manage without feeling overwhelmed and then look at how you can dial down the stress in other areas of life

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING THE GUT BRAIN CONNECTION

Not a diet in sight around here! Instead some of the tricks, which I found so valuable, in both losing the weight and then keeping it off with ease for over a decade.

“Call a truce; stop the food fight! Give yourself unconditional permission to eat. If you tell yourself that you can’t or shouldn’t have a particular food, it can lead to intense feelings of deprivation that build into uncontrollable cravings and, often, binging. When you finally “give in” to your forbidden foods, eating will be experienced with such intensity, it usually results in Last Supper overeating and overwhelming guilt.” From Intuitive Eating

The entire concept of eating intuitively was terrifying to me after so many years of calorie counting, so don’t feel alone if you’re ready to run screaming from the room.

Bear with me.

LEARNING TO HONOR HUNGER

Eat when you’re hungry; stop when you’re satisfied.

It’s just this simple...or more correctly, it should be this simple.

Many of us have gotten away from listening to our hunger cues, so it may take some time to re-learn what real hunger feels like. What caused our disconnect?

1. **We eat because we "should" be hungry.**

It’s 3PM you haven’t had lunch, you don’t feel hungry, but you should, right?! So you eat anyways. Maybe you weren’t hungry because you had a high protein breakfast at 10AM and haven’t worked out...your body didn’t need food yet.

2. **We don't realize we're emotional eaters.**

We eat because we're tired, stressed, we earned it with a long run, lots of unconscious reasons cause us to grab the chocolate, but it's not hunger.

3. **We eat because others are eating.**

When you read it like that it sounds silly, why would I eat simply because others are eating?! Yet how many times have you gone to a happy hour or a party not at all interested in food and found yourself with hands in the chips and dip?

4. **We're afraid of food.**

Have you ever had that day where you're starving, but it's not time for dinner so you just have a "snack" instead...the snack turns in to a protein bar, some chips, some fruit and on it goes, because you were actually ready for a meal, but didn't think it was time to eat. OR you've followed the 5 small meals rule {plus a bunch of munching} so a big meal actually seems scary because it *seems* like more calories.

5. **We aren't eating real food.**

A lack of nutrients will cause your body to continue sending out hunger signals regardless of the calories you've taken in, which is why we are focused on returning to foods in their natural state.

Food is everywhere and triggers inviting us to eat are everywhere. The good news is once you start tuning in to your own internal signals the rest of it becomes white noise.

HOW TO RE-CONNECT

Think of your body as having its very own built in GPS that will guide you to the right food in the right amount when you listen.

Don't be afraid to sit down to a large plate of food, volume becomes important with whole foods as they are often lower in calories. Know that some days you will be hungrier than others and it's natural for your overall food intake to ebb and flow based on the other activities in your day.

1. True hunger comes on gradually; emotional hunger is usually sudden.

2. True hunger makes an apple or steak sound appealing; emotional hunger makes a cookie sound good.
3. Slow down, check in with yourself during the meal to see if the food even still tastes good.
4. Start with a smaller portion, knowing you can go back if after eating slowly you still feel hungry.

I really want to leave you with a thought from the book [Intuitive Eating](#):

"Keep your body fed biologically with adequate energy and carbohydrates. Otherwise, you can trigger a primal drive to overeat. Once you reach the moment of excessive hunger, all intentions of moderate, conscious eating are fleeting and irrelevant. Learning to honor this first biological signal sets the stage for rebuilding trust with yourself and food".

2 CAVEATS TO YOUR EATING

I want to make 2 small caveats to the honoring hunger statement for those who are focused on weight loss and/or workout recovery.

1. **Eat within 30 minutes of waking** and eat protein {not carbs}.
The not eating breakfast strategy to save or bank calories will backfire when you find yourself with low energy and cravings later in the day due to hormonal swings.

If you aren't hungry when first waking, try stopping your food intake earlier in the evening to give your body more time to digest. You can also drink a protein shake!

America has the system backwards. We start our morning with bowls of cereal, juice, toast with jam and all of this floods our body with insulin *{if you think about it don't those sound like a bunch of snacks rather than a meal??}*. Insulin can be used by the body to either feed our muscles or feed our fat.

In the morning your body is well rested and your muscles are fully stocked with glycogen from the meals you had yesterday. Thus, all those carbohydrates release insulin that cannot be taken up by the muscles. The result is an increase your hunger hormone (Grhelin) and a block of the full hormone (Leptin). Making matters worse, since the body has all this insulin floating around it will NOT burn fat for fuel.

For the next week try to make these tweaks to your morning:

- Eat within 30 minutes of waking
- Eat a meal high in protein/fat, low in carbs
- Eat your carbs within 1 hour after working out

Dr. Marc Bubbs supports the above plan based on his work with athletes and weight loss clients in Canada over the last 10 years. It seems to lessen cravings throughout the day and provides the optimal kick start to fat burning for the day. (I found more research to back it as well).

2. **Post workout you must eat.**

For many a hard workout dampens hunger levels or we mistakenly believe that we can again "bank" calories by not eating.

Within 30 minutes of any workout over 30 minutes, high intensity cardio or strength training session, you must refuel. Aim for a good mixture of carbs and protein, since we now understand that your body will use those carbs in a beneficial way after workouts.

Without providing carbohydrates to refill the glycogen in your muscles {muscle building}, your body will begin to break down muscle to create the energy you need

for the rest of the day. Eiiiiik!! The number on the scale may drop initially, but as you continue to lose muscle it will be harder to perform, have energy and maintain weight loss. {remember the scale is not the only measurement of success!}

Eat poorly = recover poorly

If you don't refuel well, then your body is going to need more recovery between workouts which means again less calories burned, lowering your overall ability to increase performance or weight loss.

If you're a green smoothie drinker this is the PERFECT time to utilize them because your body needs the carbs and can absorb nutrients from a liquid meal much more quickly than solid food. I like this option as opposed to just the protein shake because you're getting added whole food vitamins and minerals.

"After conducting scans on the participants' brains under both circumstances, the team learned that skipping breakfast tends to trigger activity in regions of the brain that prompt cravings for high-calorie junk foods, which typically contain high amounts of processed sugars and unhealthy fats. When participants ate a full breakfast; however, they were much less likely to have such desires, and instead stuck to a fairly regular eating plan." **From Natural News**

[Here are 97 High Protein Breakfast Ideas.](#)

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT FOODS FOR YOU

I think by now most of us intuitively know, or have bought enough books to know that whole foods, lots of veggies and some fruits, are the best possible foods for us. But why are some friends losing weight so quickly by eliminating animal protein and others by amping up their protein?

Biochemical individuality means we're all physiologically different and we all have different needs and requirements from our food. Which is why I want you to **find what works for you rather than following a generic plan.**

Food Sensitivities

If you're eating foods that you have a sensitivity to your body is NOT going to lose weight. Your body is going to focus on healing areas that are affected (damaged and inflamed) by the food you're eating. When you have internal inflammation, you're more likely to be puffy and bloated, not exactly the look we are trying to achieve.

Hopefully, as your meals have begun to shift towards more whole foods you're already starting to notice some changes.

BUT if you aren't or you feel like you're doing everything right and not seeing changes it's time to look at food sensitivities.

The best way to determine if you have a food sensitivity is to completely eliminate the food for a 4-6 weeks, and pay attention to how your body reacts when you have or don't have this food in your daily eating regimen.

The most common food sensitivities:

- Wheat (gluten)
- Dairy
- Soy
- Artificial sugar
- Processed food
- Corn
- Eggs
- Alcohol
- Vitamins

Notice a lot of foods that many diets cut out?? It's part of why they work so well for some people. The good news is you may not have any reaction to these foods at all or maybe just one or two.

The elimination process may feel daunting, but I can vouch for the results being 100% worth the time!

After just a week of removing eggs, though I dearly love them, my energy levels skyrocketed, I could finally eat without stomach pain and all that made running a whole lot better.

Besides all that, eating foods your body dislikes can just downright make you feel fat!! Because we're exposed to these foods repeatedly all day long, it's much harder to pin point and suddenly we begin thinking that being bloated, constipated or having trouble losing the weight is normal.

Traditional Chinese Medicine has long held the belief that your gut is one of the cornerstones to health.

If you've been eating right and exercising, but continue not to feel well it's time to do some digging! Don't accept that feeling tired, sad, achy or anything else are simply how it has to be.

A few definitions for you:

Food Allergy

The body has an immediate adverse reaction to the food which can be as minor as hives to as critical as swelling that closes the airway. We are not talking about this kind of allergy today.

Food Intolerance

The body lacks specific enzymes to digest a particular food. The two most commonly known are gluten and dairy which cause GI distress because the body cannot appropriately process the food, but are not life threatening like an allergy.

Food Sensitivity

Often lumped in with intolerance, a food sensitivity is exactly that...something which your body has an adverse reaction to from 45 minutes to 3 days after eating it. The estimate is that up to 80% of adults have some kind of sensitivity.

Cumulative dose is an important factor for most athletes. While 1 gel with honey may not bother you, that gel combined with 3 hours of body stress from running and a few other ingredients that your stomach doesn't love could be what breaks you in terms of GI issues.

how to improve
digestion



IMPORTANCE OF DIGESTION

Many of you will not have any food sensitivities which is great!! Unfortunately, your digestion may still need a little boost to ensure you're properly breaking down food and absorbing all of the nutrients.

I know talking about digestion isn't the sexy part of healthy eating, but the truth is if you don't pay attention to it then all your hard work could be for nothing!

POOR DIGESTION=POOR NUTRIENT ABSORPTION=ILLNESS

This makes sense when you realize nearly three quarters of your body's immune system dwells in the digestive tract, it has the most profound effect on overall health out of all the internal organs. It also means that digestive issues are going to prevent weight loss!

How Do You Know If Your Digestion Is Working?

You should be going to the bathroom at least once a day, but ideally multiple times (and no I'm not talking about peeing from all the water). If you're having skin problems, consistent fatigue, bloating, gas, repeated illness, straining to use the bathroom, increased food intolerance...then likely something isn't moving the way it should down there!

How We Hinder Digestion

1. Not chewing our food makes it harder for the body to digest and thus you may miss out on nutrients. Also slows down the time it takes to move through your body.
2. Poor quality foods means less available nutrition and less for your system to do as it just passes it through creating a sluggish digestive system.
3. Lots of pain relievers or antacids slow the production of important stomach acid and create strain on the liver.
4. Antibiotics kill off the healthy bacteria in our intestines

Improving Digestion

A few easy changes to help your body more efficiently handle your food and you guessed it, absorbing more nutrients means better running, less hunger and tada weight loss.

Probiotic

Most doctors I have spoken with over the last year recommend a probiotic for athletes because our bodies are taxed beyond the rigors of daily life. The important thing here is to find a high-quality probiotic so that it is bio-available and to always take it with food. Your body will attack the bacteria otherwise and you may not get the benefit {wish someone had told me that originally!}

Chewing

As noted previously, chew your food well to help your digestion. One of my favorite tricks to make this happen is the one bite, one fork trick

Set your fork down after every single bite!

It will slow you down and help your brain recognize it has plenty of time to chew because you aren't in a rush.

Water

Hydration is important to allow that football field length of your intestines to keep moving properly. Bonus points because we all know that being dehydrated can often make us think we're hungry, when really a glass of water will do!

TIP: Don't follow the crazy rule to down a huge glass of water before you eat a meal. That actually hinders digestion! Try that maybe 30 minutes before, but never right before a meal.

Fiber

All those whole foods you've added to your diet should be giving you lots of fiber, but you can also add in some ground flax if you need a little boost. This is going to ensure things keep moving through your system and hopefully help prevent some runner's trots.

ACV

Many people like taking a spoonful of apple cider vinegar before meals as a natural way to help break down food. Ensure you're getting one with the mother - my preference is Braggs.

Healthy Gut Foods

The following foods have been shown to help increase the healthy bacteria in your gut, promoting the breakdown of food and allowing it to pass more quickly through your system.

- Yogurt
- Keifer
- Sauerkraut
- High quality dark chocolate
- Spirulina
- Miso
- Pickles

Additionally, it's great to incorporate prebiotic foods on their own or with probiotic foods to perhaps give the probiotics a boost. You can find prebiotics in foods such as:

- Asparagus
- Jerusalem artichokes
- Bananas
- Oatmeal
- Red wine
- Honey
- Maple syrup
- Legumes

Last, but not least it may be beneficial to take a [digestive enzyme](#) {this one recommended by my doctor}.

Days where my body is taxed from a long run or I'm eating a lot of beans or enjoying an off day with pizza, I always add this after the meal to give my body a little additional assistance in breaking down the food to keep my system happy and healthy.

What Are Probiotic Supplements?

I started using probiotics after cutting dairy from my diet. Interestingly I think I would have felt better long before cutting dairy by adding them in! Why?

- Your gut is made up of 70-80% bacteria...eww, right?
- Probiotics also deliver “good bacteria” to the intestines.
- Probiotic Pearls survive stomach acid which is obviously key for getting any benefit

My preference is to use a pill, something like [this high-quality probiotic](#) because it's easy to take it with me for all of the traveling that I do.

SIDE NOTE: The additional bonus to fixing your gut is it leads to better running! Less runners trots, more energy available for running and quicker recovery as you truly absorb the nutrients you're working so hard to eat!

IS GRAZING OK?

One of the hardest lessons I've had to unlearn is grazing. About 10 years ago a new "diet method" recommended we switch from 3 square meals to 5 smaller meals. In theory this is great, but it's rarely implemented correctly and usually turns in to 5 daily snacks....or let's be honest, all day grazing!

Unfortunately, most snacks do not look the same as a meal. Do you put together a salad for a snack? For those that do, a huge high five, for the rest of the world let's consider why this practice is NOT helping our metabolism as promised.

Here is a normal day for most people who eat 5-6 mini meals:

BREAKFAST: Oatmeal with fruit

SNACK 1: Granola bar

LUNCH: Chicken and steamed broccoli

SNACK 2: Greek yogurt

SNACK 3: String cheese, probably a piece of candy

DINNER: More chicken, brown rice, asparagus

SNACK 3: Small bowl of ice cream

This person stayed under their required calories, but is probably not satisfied and feels hungry due to a lack of nutrients. **YES your body makes you feel hungry when you're missing nutrients.**

Let's look at a 3 meal day for the same calories:

BREAKFAST: Egg omelet (1 egg, 2-3 egg whites) with avocado and veggies + slice of whole grain bread with nut butter (and/or fruit)

LUNCH: HUGE salad with spinach, carrots, broccoli, grilled chicken, EVOO, balsamic vinegar, sunflower seeds, quinoa + an orange

DINNER: Salmon with 1/2 sweet potato, roasted veggies {like asparagus and zucchini}

SNACK: Dark chocolate and hot tea

5 meals a day absolutely works, but only if you eat meals and not snacks. For most people it's too easy to lose track of 5 meals and suddenly little calories are adding up here and there from less healthy sources.

Don't be afraid to sit down to a large plate of food, assuming you have piled it high with whole foods. You might be surprised to find that switching to 3 bigger meals means you don't want to snack throughout the day because the well-balanced fuel has left you satiated.

How to Overcome the Late Night Munchies Syndrome

1. Eat an actual meal for dinner, don't just snack.
2. Drink enough of water.
3. Get engaged in something after dinner that uses your hands - blog, knit, paint your nails.
4. When you feel like you're going to give in to the munchies, call a friend or someone that you have been meaning to talk to.
5. Go for an evening walk. This is one-way people stay healthy, active and young even into their 90's.
6. Reach for raw veggies first.
7. Purge your kitchen of junk food. Only stock healthy items.
8. Stop procrastinating. Do what's on your list of things to do, and if it involves house cleaning, either crank up loud dance music, or if you have little sleeping ones, listen to headphones.
9. Write out a list of reasons why you have the Late Night Munchies Syndrome and start plotting ways to overcome them.
10. Don't starve yourself during the day or skip meals, it backfires at night.
11. Bake something naturally sweetened and share it with others.

CHAPTER 4: CHOOSING FOODS FOR WEIGHT LOSS

I know you were hoping there would be a whole lot more sweating in this book, but no matter how hard I tried I couldn't ever make weight loss work without changing some food habits.

Running affords us the ability to enjoy a few more of our favorite not so perfect health foods, but it's not an all-day buffet green light.

However, I still like to think about food in positive terms which is why we're starting with the gold standard. In fact, you won't find anything here about calories because the default process of cleaning up our food choices takes care of that without the stress!

EAT UP

Get ready to explore your best self, take in the bright colors of the farmers market, scour Pinterest for what appeals to you, travel down aisles of the grocery store you might normally skip...healthy eating is an adventure. Embrace it to enjoy the journey of adding in a lot more veggies.

"Food is an important part of a balanced diet." Fran Lebowitz - I love this quote because it is a reminder that FOOD is not the enemy! It can be fun and enjoyable and easy, once you change your mindset.

GOLD STANDARD

When I first heard the "gold standard" of healthy eating meant eating 9 servings of fruits and vegetables every day, my head nearly exploded.

It sounded like A LOT and to be honest, completely impossible. But changing to this food focus was the key to my lasting weight loss because it flipped the switch from what not to eat to what to eat for my best life.

It's more fun to be focused on what you can do. The challenge of hitting 7 vegetables daily prompted me to think more about my meals in a positive way.

While over time you'll likely find yourself naturally adding more veggies to your meals, here are some of my favorite tips to get started.

- Green smoothies
- Adding shredded carrots to oatmeal
- Adding sliced peppers to scrambled eggs
- Asking for more veggies on any sandwich when eating out
- Spiralize to create some fun zucchini or carrot noodles
- Sweet potatoes are a delicious base for lots of meals
- Soup is easy to add veggies to!
- Start aiming for a daily salad
- Try using dried fruit instead of gels to fuel a run
- Baby carrots to satisfy the need for crunch

Bonus points because all those veggies help you to feel FULL!! I don't know about you, but I hate when I finish a meal and still want more. Adding in veggies, always makes me feel more satisfied.

Overall here are some general ideas to help you see how it easy it is to make it to 7-9.

- 2 cups raw leafy greens (basically go nuts)
- 1 cup cooked leafy greens
- 1 cup raw broccoli, cauliflower
- 1 cup chopped carrots or roughly 12 baby carrots
- 1 small apple
- 1/2 cup chopped fruit, berries, grapes
- 1/2 a potato or sweet potato
- 1/2 a zucchini
- 7 cherry tomatoes or one whole tomato

EAT ENOUGH FAT

Fat doesn't make you fat. Too many calories, particularly SUGAR, make you fat...but let's talk about more exciting things like all the ways that fat is wonderful:

- Makes you feel full
- Reduces sugar cravings
- Lowers blood pressure
- Lowers LDL cholesterol
- Fights inflammation
- Makes your skin supple
- Thicker shiny hair
- Stronger bones

3 Cornell studies have shown that opting for something low-fat can make you eat A LOT more.

Our goal is to avoid processed foods so hopefully you aren't picking up too many packages with low-fat labels! Here are some healthy fats to start incorporating throughout your day:

- Avocados
- Olive oil
- Olives
- Macadamia nuts
- Peanuts, walnuts, almonds
- Sesame oil
- Beef {grass fed only}
- Coconut oil
- Salmon

Along with being good for your heart, monounsaturated fats are also good for maintaining a lean body. Research published in Diabetes Care found that replacing saturated fat with monounsaturated fat led to a redistribution of body fat away from the abdomen. This is amazing considering total calorie intakes remained unchanged.

Let me get this straight...we are going to enjoy food more, feel satisfied, not have cravings and lose abdominal fat? Why wouldn't you give it a try?? Curses to all you marketers who made us believe that fat free foods were so great!

Aim for at least 30% of your calories from healthy fats. Some people will find they do better on more and some a little less, but if you have been eating low fat for a while you should notice a change by getting up to this healthy percentage.



HOW TO CONQUER
SUGAR



CONQUERING SUGAR

Sugar is one of the biggest hurdles people talk about when trying to change their diet, myself included! Repeated studies have shown that processed sugar can be as addictive as drugs like heroin! You aren't crazy or alone in feeling like it's hard to quit.

Today we're going to talk about things you can do beyond adding in healthy fats and adding protein to your morning meal (you're doing those right??).

- 1. Hydrate**
Being dehydrated can cause your body to send out signals that mimic hunger and cause blood sugar to drop. As your blood sugar drops you will naturally reach for sweeter foods.
- 2. Eat more sweet vegetables**
Your body does need carbohydrates, so filling your plate with berries and sweet potatoes can help reduce cravings for other sugars. This is particularly true for athletes who are burning more carbohydrates with exercise.
- 3. Get active**
Again this is going to help balance your blood sugar and give you a mood boost to help your body crave movement over sugar for an increase in dopamine (feel good chemical). It doesn't take much, even 10 minutes has been shown to give you a boost. Try this in the afternoon when you start to feel sluggish.
- 4. Sleep**
There is no getting around this, you **MUST** get enough sleep. I'll hit more on the why's later, but you've heard the tales and it's true your hormones get whacky without enough sleep.
- 5. Bye-bye packaged foods**
Hidden sugars and high sodium throw your body out of balance causing your cravings to continue. Hopefully you're pushing these to the by focusing more on veggies anyways.

6. Get spicy

Did you know cinnamon balances blood sugar? Try adding it to your oatmeal or green smoothies to blunt the insulin spike. Adding other flavors to your clean eats can make them more satisfying as well.

7. Seek out life sweetness

I know it sounds cliché, but it's entirely true. As we saw yesterday our emotional triggers can send us to the candy bowl unconsciously. Get a hug, write a nice email, make a call to a friend...connect in any way you can to find the sweetness in the world around you.

8. Hormones

If your hormones are out of balance your cravings will likely increase. This means balancing insulin, cortisol, estrogen and testosterone (women over 40 may want to check with a doctor to find out their levels). We've touched on some of the ways to do this with food and continuing to eat clean will help!

Special Note: If you have been doing the Paleo diet and find over time you're sluggish or craving more sweets it could be due to the lack of grains. They contain nutrients that are important for hormone balancing. This will not be true for all, so once again this is about testing and seeing what applies to you without being caught up in labels.

Next time a craving hits, try these two tricks:

1. Checkout what you've eaten lately...could you need a meal? Does an apple or piece of fish sound appealing? If not, you probably are having an emotional response.
2. Do the work. That's right take a minute to actually look at the emotion you're having. No it's not fun, yes it takes longer than just reaching for the chocolate.

WHEN CAN YOU INDULGE?

As noted at the beginning, we're not striving for a perfect diet, but for one that allows you to enjoy food in a healthy way. Which leads to the fantastic question "Does this mean I can have {insert food you think is unhealthy}?"

This is where the idea of fringe vs binge comes in to play.

FRINGE: A food you can have occasionally. It might not be the best choice, but enjoying doesn't derail you.

BINGE: A food that tends to set off a chain reaction of poor eating choices {not necessarily an actual binge}.

For example, if I decide to have a bite of David's ice cream in the evening it always leads to me getting my own bowl...that's a binge item, meaning one bite is never going to satisfy me.

Alternatively, one nice sized piece of dark chocolate late in the day can absolutely satisfy my sugar itch without causing me to reach for other sugary treats. In fact, enjoying that single piece will keep me from overeating other things as I try to "avoid a bad food".

"*Betcha can't eat just one*" isn't just a catchy slogan, it's TRUE. Fast foods are loaded with salt, sugar and unhealthy fats that actually trigger responses in your brain to make you crave more.

GIVING UP FAVORITES

In a 2011 study, 82% of adults cited not wanting to give up foods they enjoy as a reason for not changing their eating habits. Clearly this is a HUGE topic for all of us and understandable, which is why we are leaning in to the process and not forcing an overnight change.

If you have something not considered a clean eat don't get upset about it, but do notice how you react. Were you able to enjoy it and then go right back to your healthier habits or did one send you back for seconds...or give you a mental green light to enjoy another off-track food later in the day?

The foods we enjoy will change as we retrain our taste buds and habits. So give it time, find healthy foods that feel decadent and enjoy the heck out of any TREAT you decide to have!

This is a long term lifestyle which involves knowing yourself and your goals.

REFRAMING WEEKENDS

It's usually not intentional that weekends become a time of going "off track", but the trend does seem to be consistent. It's also usually preceded by a number of excuses or fear statements.

How can I eat healthy when we are at the lake?

How can I pass up cake when everyone is having it?

I just want to enjoy myself and not worry about food.

It's too hard to do it when we go out.

If I had been telling myself those things while in college there is no way I would have lost 30 lbs and then continued to lose and maintain for the next 10 years!

Instead, I reminded myself that every time I passed on a cookie it got easier and I anticipated the joy.

If you're focused on giving up things the entire process of making healthy choices becomes a burden and we are here to have some fun in this life! So let's focus on the exciting things that come from following through on clean eating, core work and mindfulness.

PLAN TO SUCCEED!! Take food options with you when you travel, be in charge of selecting restaurants, enjoy people more than food and know that you're just as funny without alcohol.

Don't let perfect be the enemy of good.

Let's practice some reframing:

- How can I possibly do this = How can I most easily do this
- This is going to be so hard = I love a good challenge
- I deserve to eat what I want = I deserve to feel great

You already know where the first thought pattern will take you as you've probably used it many times before. Why not be open to trying a new thought process that might just make hitting your goals easier and more enjoyable.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you haven't started tracking your changes in some way, I encourage you to do so ASAP!

What we measure, we manage.

That statement has had a profound effect on my life and others. It can be as simple as that gold star you get daily on your chart calendar as a kid or logging calories in MyFitnessPal daily to see your food choices.

There's both a mental reward from the tracking and an acknowledgement of your current focus and goals. What's key is not to judge yourself!

“Instead of needing to get A+ in our nutrition compliance, you can still see improvement and get great results at a B+.” - **Dr. Yoni Freedoff**

HOW TO EVALUATE PROGRESS?

1. Take a look at your tracking tool to see if you have more days on track or off and then look for patterns.
2. What excuses are you using to keep you from making the change? That's right, I'm calling your BS because we all know that "*I don't have enough time*" is just a way to skirt around saying I didn't make it a priority.
3. What is the best change you've made?
4. What is one thing you can change for the coming week?

5. Do you need more support? Who can you get in your corner to help make this process easier? Of course you have the rest of us by using [#teamrttf](#) on social media.

The best nutrition plan is one YOU can own, love, live with and stick to.

Who do you need to be in order to have what you want?

You know that feeling when you wake up and simply don't want to go to work, but you do. It's called being a professional and that's what I want you to start thinking about with your food.

Now I hope it isn't nearly so hard as dragging yourself off to a job when you'd rather be playing, but the truth is sometimes we do things that aren't the most exhilarating because they get us what we want.

Doing things only when we want to rarely leads to success and certainly doesn't create good habits, which is what we are doing each day we make new healthy choices.

EMBODY YOUR SUCCESS

Goal setting usually teaches us to pick something tangible like lose twenty pounds and set a deadline. It's measurable and time bound.

Habit researchers will tell you this backfires on two fronts:

- A. When you lose 10lbs instead of celebrating and building on that success you are frustrated by not hitting your goal.
- B. It doesn't focus on the habits and changes required to achieve then maintain the goal.

Today I want you to try something entirely new. **Think about someone who as achieved your goal and what characteristics and habits they must have to do it?**

Let's look at how a professional runner treats their body:

- Finished a long run I need to FUEL my body {not I finished a long run so I deserve a treat}
- Kitchen is stocked with fruits and vegetables to ensure fuel is always available
- Snacks are packed and taken everywhere to stay on track
- Water bottle goes everywhere
- Core focused workouts at least 3 times a week
- Take pride in caring for their bodies
- Surround themselves with others who have similar goals

Start to think about what characteristics you need in order achieve your goal and set about cultivating them daily!

I realize that many of us are not interested in being professional marathon runners, but why not treat yourself like an athlete? You deserve quality food, massages, recovery and focused workouts.

Congratulations, you've learned a ton to change your habits and make lasting changes!! As always you can find me for questions or more ideas at www.runtothefinish.com

BONUS: COST SAVINGS

Since I know that cost often becomes a reason for not making changes, let's just nip that in the bud too.

If you've found your grocery bills creeping up as you transition to healthier eating, here are 7 ways you're spending too much and what to do about it.

1. **Organic overload**

After initially getting sick, I started buying EVERYTHING organic. Reality check, some of it doesn't matter quite so much...bananas, oranges, grapefruit, avocado...anything where the skin is being discarded means you aren't ingesting the chemicals from the outer peel. Now certainly there is still a HUGE case for why we should go organic to change the way things are done, but in terms of cost savings not everything needs to be this way.

2. **Sneaky snacks**

Did I really need that whole food ingredient locally made cookie?! Heck no, but it's so easy to get sucked in at my favorite health food stores. It's also **easy to believe that the food there is magically better for you**. A chip is still a chip and a cookie is still a cookie. The ingredients might be better or allergy friendly, but they aren't whole foods and they definitely cost more.

3. **Portion control**

A bag of almonds is not a 1 day snack 😊 just like we overdo it with chips, it's easy to munch away on healthy snacks too.

- Pre-portion nuts in ziploc bags to go
- Put a measuring cup in cereal
- Weigh meat for a few weeks until you can better eyeball portions

- Stop buying single servings and portion on your own
- Limit choices (we snack less when we have less choices)

4. **Pre-cut, cooked, sliced, diced**

- Cook your beans
- Wash your quinoa
- Chop your veggies,
- Blend your smoothies
- Save boat loads

Admittedly in between travels I opt for convenience over cash because for me it's totally worth it to ensure I am eating good whole foods. However, to keep cost down on a regular basis make friends with the bulk bins and enjoy a little extra kitchen time with a Katy Perry dance party.

5. **Overlooking the seasons**

I love me a daily apple or some blueberries in my oatmeal, but they just aren't in season year-round no matter what the grocery store tells you. Buying berries in bulk during the summer allows me to freeze some for later in the year while getting them at their peak and cheapest price. The same goes for almost any fruit or veggie, shop the sales and switch up your routine by shopping the seasons.

ALL fruits and veggies are good for you, don't get sucked into the hype about which is best. Finally, hit up the farmer's market, their fruit may not look perfect, but it's just as tasty.

6. Buying Clubs

- CSA's are a great option for getting tons of produce at cheaper prices. Local Harvest has a great search to find one near you.
- Did you know there are also buying clubs for all the other healthy ingredients you use? Thrive Market is a big one taking over online right now.
- Costco/Sam's Club – While they don't carry all of the healthy food options that Green Polka Dot does, they do usually have a good assortment of frozen veggies and fresh fruits so you can buy in bulk. {fun fact: wrap celery in tin foil to help it stay fresh for weeks!}

7. Food waste

Cheapskates join me in a wag of the finger at everyone who is wasting food. The statistics are staggering so it's possible that finger should be pointing right back at you. Easy ways to cut down on food waste:

- Toss nearly done veggies in to a smoothie
- Freeze half of any big meal you've cooked
- Use green bags to help extend the life of fruits and veggies {totally works}
- Blend spinach or other greens, freeze in an ice cube tray and toss in smoothies later
- Freeze milk or kefir in ice cube trays if it will expire before used
- Meal plan and stick to your list when shopping
- Enjoy the food you buy – Sounds crazy, but if you're forcing yourself to eat foods you hate then of course you'll end up throwing it away!

8. **Supplement nation**

Greens powders, protein powders, superfoods...now that we understand food is medicine, it's easy to believe we need to enhance it even further.

Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love and use supplements, but they are like the cherry on top of a banana ice cream sundae...it starts with eating whole foods! We don't NEED these items to enjoy a healthy diet and shouldn't feel required to shell out big bucks if we are feeling strong, energized and happy with the rest of our food.

BONUS:

GREEN SMOOTHIE GUIDE



BONUS: GREEN SMOOTHIE GUIDE

The PERFECT way to up your daily fruit and veggie intake! The average person gets only 1-2 servings, this group is ABOVE average and aiming for 7-9.

PROTEIN

Does Every Smoothie Need Protein?

It's ideal to ensure you both feel full for longer and helps to prevent a spike in blood sugar from the fruits and vegetables.

Is Protein Powder My Only Option?

No you could put in pasteurized Egg Whites, Greek Yogurt, silken tofu, chia sees, hemp seeds.

Protein Powder Recommendations?

Vega Sport is my preferred powder for after any workout. This is obviously from the two enormous tubs in my kitchen. But here are a few other tips:

- Buy some small packets to test out different brands and flavors to find what works for you
- Try to avoid overly processed brands filled with chemicals, that defeats the purpose of the smoothie
- Try to avoid huge amounts of sugar, instead use Stevia and fruit as natural sweeteners

LIQUID

Vanilla flavored almond, soy, or coconut milk are a great starting point for most smoothies. I try to use the Unsweetened Vanilla Almond Milk most of the time to keep sugar low, but most soy milk will have more protein so if you aren't adding protein it's worth considering. If regular milk is your thing that's great too, but try adding a little vanilla extract for flavor.

Over time you can reduce your milk alternative amount and increase your water. Initially start with 1 cup milk, 1/2-1cup water...now I tend to use only water and let the fruit provide enough sweetness.

BLENDER

Do you need a great blender?

Not really...but no doubt they are better with one!! The first 3 years that I made green smoothies was in my Magic Bullet. It served me well, but to be honest I have been able to get a lot more nutrition in to my smoothie with the VitaMix.

Blender Tips

If you are using a smaller blender:

- Remove kale and swiss chard leaves from the stalk
- Chop thicker pieces of vegetables or fruit before putting them in the blender

GREENS

Baby spinach is the ideal starter green for most people. It has a more mild flavor and 1-2 cups can easily go unnoticed.

Kale and swiss chard have a more definitive flavor, but again mixed with the right fruit you'll soon be drinking it like nobody's business. For those just starting out use spinach in week one and then try adding a leaf or two of kale the following week...a little more the week after.

The goal is to switch up your greens occasionally to keep getting a variety of nutrients.

OTHER VEGGIES

Carrots: Use shredded in a smaller blender, this sweet veggie will disappear in your smoothie

Cucumber: High water content helps it blend in well

Broccoli: Use small pieces in a small blender, but I swear you'll never know it's there

I've also tossed in the white part of bell peppers for their high nutrition, zucchini, bok choy...almost anything! Just consider if it has a high flavor what you might need to mix with it to ensure you don't feel like you're drinking say pureed bok choy.

FRUIT

Banana: This is the primary fruit recommended for all first-time smoothie makers and one still used by many for years. Its high sugar content helps mask the veggies and it's great for athlete's due to potassium, etc.

Pineapple: A few frozen pineapple chunks will sweeten up any smoothie that may have gone too far to the green side

Oranges: I love an orange creamsicle smoothie, but have found this only to work well in the VitaMix. In my Magic Bullet the white strands hung around making it just awkward to drink.

Almost any fruit will work, it's a little science experiment in your kitchen. Now one of my favorites is a cleanser that includes apple, lemon, protein powder, spinach, ginger and water.

ADD ONS

Maca: Great for athletes to help your adrenals stay well

Ground Flaxseed: High source of Omega 3's and fiber (start small it will thicken up). It's important to use ground and not whole flax seed for your body to absorb the nutrients.

Stevia: A few drops adds a little sweetness if your drink is bitter because you got excited with your veggies

Peanut Butter: I like my peanut butter on the spoon, but many folks swear by adding some to their smoothie. The added fat could help ensure the smoothie keeps you full much longer.

Coconut oil: A great source of good fats that will give you energy and help you burn fat...also some flavor

BONUS: GETTING YOUR FAMILY ONBOARD

When the person you share your home with is not following the same healthy eating journey, it can certainly present issues, but they're not insurmountable and more importantly YOU are a healthy eater, so it doesn't matter what they do.

But of course, it's more fun to have them join us, so here are a few tips to help get others on-board with your new lifestyle.

1. **Think taste, aroma and atmosphere.** I know it's more work than just fixing your meals and going on with life, but it can be so worth it. Sitting down together changes the entire mood of a meal and can help create that feeling of enjoyment.
2. **Get them involved.** This means letting kids pick out a new veggie and it means letting a spouse offer up an idea each week. If they are really craving BBQ and you find a clean way to fix it then you've satisfied them, which will start to help them make the shift.
3. **Show how much you're enjoying your food.** If you're MMM and AHHHing every time you eat well hello who won't want some? But if you're complaining about missing out on food...well do you blame them for being uninterested?
4. **Go slow.** Just as I have mentioned that you should go slow in your own changes, so should you with getting him (them) to change. It can be scary for people who don't know about the process, they assume they will never have a meal they enjoy again!
5. **What's important to him (them)?** Saying fast food is bad for their heart may not have an effect on a 15-year-old boy, but telling him it will clear up acne or make him run faster might be a trigger that gets a different response
6. **Get sneaky.** When all else fails start putting those veggies in places they don't even know it. After they've said the meatloaf (with cauliflower and spinach puree) was some of the best ever let them know. It allows them to get used to the idea that healthy can taste great.

Remember you have this group for support at ANY time that you need it, so even if your family or friends don't come around YOU can stay on track because you're a clean eater.

And don't forget the power of ASKING your family to join you and thanking them each time they do!