



*Worcestershire Weight
Management Clinic*

Journey to a New You

Guide to Sustainable Lifestyle Choices

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April 2022

Introduction

When I first started my hypnotherapy practice in 2010, the majority of my clients wanted help to lose weight or normalise their eating. One thing that became very clear was that it isn't **just** about what you eat, there is always something else going on. Most people know how to eat healthily, but for whatever reason, they struggle to do this consistently. Whilst some clients thought that hypnosis was the 'magic wand' and didn't actually want to deal with underlying issues, others acknowledged that they had to make wider lifestyle changes and were willing to do this.

As I am now changing the way I work with clients across all issues, it feels the right time to summarise some of what I know about healthy eating, into a free Guide. This may be enough for some people to make the changes they want to, others will learn a bit more about what is going on for them and will then need my support to help them work through those issues in order to make their positive changes.

You probably know hundreds of different diets and weight loss programmes, and more than likely have tried many of them, without sustained success. However, the foundation of every weight loss programme still remains a healthy eating plan, combined with movement/exercise **PLUS** sustainable lifestyle changes.

When Michael Winner was asked to write a book about how to lose weight, he almost refused as his advice was '**EAT LESS**'..... Very true, but that's not the full story as we all know. I would say my number 1 piece of advice is to **PLAN, PLAN** and **PLAN** again, very quickly followed by **DITCH THE DIETS**. My approach is to think long term and to make **SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE CHOICES**, so that you start to build a healthy relationship with food.

What is a healthy relationship with food? Quite simply, it's using food for energy, nourishment and health, and not for comfort, to fill a gap or to repress negative emotions. Let's be honest, most people see food as something other than energy, nourishment and health, and eat far too much. It's easy to see how this happens – we weren't born like this; as babies we naturally regulated when and how much we ate. When we felt body hunger, we cried and in most cases we were fed. When we'd had enough, we pursed our lips and turned our heads away from the spoon or bottle, we stopped eating and went back to sleep. Food was purely for energy, nourishment and health.

As we got older, food took on new meanings and became many things; reward for good behaviour, treats from parents/grandparents, comfort when we fell over or got upset about something, celebrations – food like cake, jelly and ice cream. We also had other people as role models around food and followed what they did. Coupled with that, food (in particular sugar and processed foods) has become much more readily available and affordable, so we

eat more because it's there. Is it any wonder that our relationship with food became unhealthy and the nation's waist bands increased in size?

BUT something else is going on – the way we see ourselves. There is a lot of media pressure to be like the celebrities we see on television, social media and in magazines, and people try to live up to them. We have become a world where we are always comparing ourselves to someone else or trying to live up to what we think is the society 'norm'. In fact society values have become very toxic, this is not a healthy way to live emotionally and may lead to low self-esteem, low self-worth, and in extreme cases to eating disorders, as we try to compete. Some of these feelings can also stem from childhood experiences and the negative messages we have taken on board.

In addition, if your life isn't fulfilled, your stomach can never supply what's missing – often a spiritual reason. What aren't you getting from life, environment or relationships? Stop focusing on food/diet/calories and focus on missed fulfilment.

When you start looking at what is going on for you, you begin to live your life by your own values and live by **your** truth, not society's or anyone else's. All these issues can be overcome to bring you into a state of positive well-being. It is very liberating to not feel the need to follow the crowd, or worry what others think. As Richard Harvey said – *“You must be brave if you want to be free, because it takes great courage to be free, liberated and not require anyone's approval”*.

For a number of years now, I have been looking into the links between spirituality and well-being. For me, it is nothing to do with formal religion, more a way of being, a way of life; however, each person will follow their own path. As a Reiki Master, I have worked on what **MY** way of being is and what works for me, to ensure my ongoing well-being. You are much more likely to have a healthy relationship with food when you have positive well-being. However, it can be a bit of a chicken and egg situation as we often say to ourselves, I need to be at my ideal weight before I can feel positive about my well-being, but by making sustainable lifestyle choices that increase well-being, the more likely you are to build a healthy relationship with food. You can learn to accept yourself as you are, without comparing yourself with others and it is from this place of understanding and well-being that a healthy relationship with food can develop. Louise Hay, William Bloom, Eckhart Tolle and Wayne Dyer are four of my favourite spiritual authors and any one of them would be a great start into exploring Modern Spirituality. The physical and mental health benefits should not be underestimated as you move towards a New You.

So the idea of this book is to cover the basics of healthy eating; it also touches on aspects of spirituality and sustainable lifestyle choices, leading to a more healthy relationship with food. By setting your intention to adopt healthy eating habits, you can begin to see where the true issues lie, by exploring your thoughts and feelings, when you have a wobble or two. There may be aspects of your self-discovery that you are unable to resolve on your own and

that is where I or any other professional therapist can provide support. As a Spiritual Mentor, I can guide you through self-discovery or if that is not your 'thing', I can just support you with the practical issues.

Think of it as **YOUR JOURNEY**, not a destination, have fun on your journey, meet new people, do new things – this is now your **NEW BEGINNING!** All those things you say you will do when you lose weight, start doing them now and **NO EXCUSES!**

A beautiful journal and pen are handy accompaniments on this journey, so you can write down your progress, thoughts, ideas or nuggets of self-discovery.

As always, I am here for as much or as little of the journey as you wish, the choice is yours. My contact details are on my website www.positivechangeswithin.co.uk. Do please get in touch if I can support you in any way.

Chapter 1 – Why Diets Don't Work

So, let's start by addressing the 'elephant in the room'...

Dieting is a huge multi-million pound industry, with many different types of 'fad' diets, 'diet' products, books, with groups meeting weekly around the world for a weigh-in. Most organisations rely on the majority of people not maintaining any weight they have lost, reverting back to old behaviour patterns, and then going back on a diet again. It's a big money making business.

When someone mentions the word 'diet', what are the first things that come to mind? For me 'diet' means deprivation and short term change in eating habits, inferring I can go back to my old ways of eating, once I reach my target weight. The focus is on food and target weight, rather than thinking about longer term, permanent behaviour, lifestyle changes or why?.

Psychologically, when you say 'no' to something you want, you want it even more and food becomes an obsession, taking up your thoughts and depleting willpower. It's no wonder you can only sustain it for a short time and then revert back to the old ways as soon as you've reached your goal, if you even get that far.

Diets very rarely look at the underlying relationship with food and why you eat the way you do. Nor do they consider whether your lifestyle encourages you to eat unhealthily. You know how to eat healthily, but you sabotage yourself and often don't know why. There is usually something more going on at an unconscious level, often linking back to childhood and food is used to suppress emotions. It can also be used to suppress emotions in the present day or used as a substitute for something that is missing from your life.

Understanding is key to making wider lifestyle changes and acquiring new healthy habits for good.

Diets can be complicated, counting calories, weighing food, points, different colour days, sins and the list goes on. Keeping it simple can make a huge difference to how successful you are in making permanent change. Even 'diet' foods aren't all they are made out to be; checking labels to see how much sugar is in these products compared to non-diet products can be quite alarming. It seems the focus is all on weight rather than eating for health and understanding what sugar is doing to you.

So you can see, for various reasons, that diets don't work long term, for most people and the sooner you break free from the diet mentality, the sooner you can start to build something much more sustainable. If you do what you have always done with dieting, you will get the same results...

Chapter 2 – Plan, Plan and Plan Again

You now know why diets don't work, so what's the alternative?

Maybe you have heard the saying 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail', that's it in a nutshell and I can't emphasise that enough. It's no secret that most people have very busy lifestyles and at the end of a busy day when it comes to deciding what to eat, what are you going to pick when you are really hungry – a healthy balanced meal which will take 30 minutes or more to cook or something quick, easy and unhealthy, such as tea and biscuits, toast, crisps cake etc.? I know which I would choose...

There is strong evidence to back this up, from an experiment carried out with a group of people, who were invited to an 'all you can eat' buffet breakfast. After they had eaten, they were told not to eat for 24 hours and to come back the next morning for another breakfast. When the results were compared for what people ate on the first day to the second day, it was found that people ate much healthier on the first day and ate less. On the second day, they ate a lot more and also made unhealthy choices. In this example there are two factors at play; firstly, hunger and second willpower. When these two are in charge and there is no planning, guess what? Eyes down and get stuck into the trough!

So what's going on? Let's talk about willpower - not very effective as a tool of control over your eating. You have a finite amount of willpower each day and it's a bit like your bank account, the more you draw out, the less you have left to spend. Your willpower is replenished each night as you sleep, after each meal or after some down time. It is depleted with every decision you make, every stressful situation, feeling hungry or where your energy levels drop. This explains why you feel more in control of your eating when you wake up and by the evening, well anything can happen. It also explains why you make unhealthy choices when you are tired or hungry.

Unfortunately, willpower seems to be the main tool that is relied on when making choices around food. How often have you said 'I've got no willpower, I can't help myself'? As in the experiment above, when you are hungry, you are much more likely to make poor food choices. Planning takes out the element of choice, so move away from relying on willpower and move towards listening to your own body and **PLAN, PLAN, PLAN.**

How you plan is entirely up to you, as long as it works for you. My preference is weekly planning as I only need to do it once. You have several choices, you can make one weekly meal plan and stick to the same meals each week, you can do two or three weeks' worth of meal plans and rotate them, or just make a list of all the meals you like under the breakfast, lunch and dinner categories. Each week you can then choose which meals you will have that week. Once you have these in place, it is a quick plan before doing your shopping list. It is also advisable to plan drinks, and healthy snacks if you feel you need them.

Once the plan is made, shopping becomes much easier. You make your list based on your meal plans and you stick to it, whether that's a weekly shop or every few days. If it's not in the cupboard, you can't eat it.

Consider this...

- To increase your fat, you ate unhealthily.
- To have eaten unhealthily, you had unhealthy foods near your hand.
- To have unhealthy foods near your hand, you had them stored in the fridge, in a cupboard, on the worktop etc.
- To have unhealthy foods stored there, you **put** unhealthy foods there.
- To put unhealthy foods there, you needed somewhere to put those unhealthy foods.
- To need somewhere to put unhealthy foods, you had those unhealthy foods out.
- To have unhealthy foods out, you brought unhealthy foods into the house.
- To bring unhealthy foods into the house, you **bought** unhealthy foods.
- Your decision to increase your fat is therefore, because you **buy** unhealthy foods.

Perhaps you have concentrated on the **fat** for too long, which is way removed from the problem. Weighing yourself measures fat, but fat comes from eating food and food comes **only** from food-related behaviour, so what you need to focus on is **BUYING HEALTHY FOODS** at the shop. With planning, this is a behavioural decision that has **already been committed to** and only needs to be made once.

The next step is preparation, so that if you are rushed in a morning, you know what you are having for breakfast and lunch, and if it needs any preparation the night before you can do it. If you are taking lunch to work, it is all there ready for when you want to eat, no difficult decisions to make or feelings of guilt when you go for the unhealthy option. Similarly, plan your evening meal to be quick and easy when you get home. This can be achieved with batch cooking and freezing (remember to get it out in the morning), or using a slow cooker with everything in for a quick, warming meal. In the warmer weather, salads are quick and easy and with a little imagination, lots of variety. Just keep it simple, take out the element of choice and there is no need to rely on willpower.

As an added extra, you may feel that to make a statement about your intentions to eat healthily, you go through your fridge/freezer and cupboards and throw out anything that is not included in your meal plans, both food and drink. You start with a clean slate and show your commitment to making positive changes.

'But what about my family?' I hear you say. Yes, it can be more of a challenge when you have children and a partner, who may eat less healthy foods than you want to. You have a couple of choices, you can all move towards healthy eating or you can allow them some 'treats', which you keep separately away from where you regularly go. But let's remember

that you are doing this for good health and so it can be an opportunity for all the family to move to healthy eating together.

Planning can also be used if you know you are eating out. Most places these days have a website, along with their menu, so check out what's on it beforehand and decide what you will have, rather than leaving it until you are there and have to make a choice when you are hungry.

To summarise then, make your meal plans, clear your cupboards/fridge/freezer, make your shopping list based on your meal plans and nothing else, then go shopping and only buy what is on your list. This is a behavioural change and needs no further thought.

Chapter 3 – The What, When, Where and How of Eating

The 'What'...

If you are serious about being healthy, feeling more energetic, no more bloating, then you will be looking at eating natural foods that haven't been 'messed' with. This is a favourite term of mine, if it's been 'messed' with in any way, it's best to avoid it. This goes with my keep it simple theme and includes bread and pasta, mainly because of their wheat content, which leads to bloating in a lot of people. If you do choose to eat bread and pasta, always go for the whole grain option over white, this also applies with rice, eat brown over white.

Another trap is thinking that low-fat or 'diet' labelled foods are good for you. As already mentioned they can often contain more sugar, or in the case of zero-sugar products, they contain something even worse – artificial sweeteners. Did you know that artificial sweeteners are given to pigs in order to make them eat more and fatten them up ready for slaughter? It has exactly the same effect on humans...

Eating protein with each meal helps to balance blood sugar levels. More on balanced blood sugar later, a key part of whether what we eat turns to fat or is used in a healthy way.

Avoiding wheat, sugar and unhealthy fats, will help the body to get used to enjoying the taste of natural foods. Choose the healthy foods that you know you will enjoy and if you eat enough with the main meals, pudding is something you won't need. If you do, you can have a piece of fruit or natural yoghurt with some fresh fruit mixed with it. Making a fruit salad which will last for a couple days is a great way to satisfy the desire for pudding.

Where you want a meal such as chilli, casserole, curry, make sure the sauces are made from scratch and not out of a jar, which is full of sugar. Always check your labels if it's not in its natural form e.g. yoghurt.

Once you start to eat more vegetables/salad/fruit, what I call 'eating the rainbow' and cutting out sugar, after only a few days you will notice how much 'lighter' you feel, less bloated. More importantly, you will have more energy and I want you to really notice that feeling and get used to how good it feels. If you are not getting that, then it is likely you are eating more than your body needs, which leads me nicely on to portion control.

The hungrier we are the more food we **think** we need; we don't need it, our brains have become conditioned to want to eat more than we will ever need. Remember our stomach size before we stretched it with all that overeating? It is only the size of your clenched fist, but is stretchy, so keep that in mind when you put your food on your plate. Half the plate should be vegetables or salad, quarter protein and quarter carbs, if you choose to eat them. There are carbs in vegetables, so it's ok not to eat carbs with every meal, but the option is there for the meals like chilli, curry, small jacket potatoes or a roast. Who doesn't like a

roast potato or two? Whenever you do have carbs, eat less than you would normally do; they should fit comfortably into the palm of your hand.

It can help to cut back slowly, to trick the mind and begin to do more of the things you enjoy that are not related to food. It is all about creating new neural pathways – more about that later.

Drink – drink your 2 litres of water each day, it helps to burn fat and drink before a meal to help prevent overeating. Dehydration can also lead to false hunger and have you reaching for food unnecessarily. Avoid fizzy and sugary drinks and, limit your caffeine and alcohol intake.

The 'When'...

I am sure most of you have heard the saying 'breakfast like a King... dinner like a pauper etc.'. Well it's pretty good advice actually. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day and if you get it right, it will set you up for the rest of the day. It grounds you so you can deal with challenges in a healthier way, rather than reaching for food. I know a lot of people say they don't feel like eating breakfast when they wake up or they don't have time. Sometimes this is just habit, sometimes it's because too much food has been eaten too late the night before. When your body has been without food for 12-14 hours, it should be ready for nourishment and blood sugar levels brought back to where they should be.

Ideally three meals a day works for most people; a good breakfast and lunch, with a light evening meal (not eaten too late – ideally by 6pm). This will ensure you are not going to bed on a full stomach and as a result it will help you to get a better night's sleep, which is important if you are to continue to make healthy choices. Never make food choices when you are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT)**, that's why I strongly advocate **PLANNING, PLANNING AND MORE PLANNING!**

But... eating habits are an individual thing and there are people who never want to eat full meals, preferring to 'graze'. Grazing can be dangerous unless you are doing it in a planned, healthy way, so you may choose five 'snack' type meals or three full meals, whatever works for you. My preference is eating 3 meals a day, I only have to think about food three times a day then, and it keeps it simple. Experiment and find out what works best for you.

Whatever way works best for you, do ensure that meals aren't missed. Maintaining balanced blood sugar levels helps your self-control, so eating meals regularly ensures you maintain balanced sugar levels. Earlier I mentioned an experiment about the two breakfasts, where due to low blood sugar levels and being hungry, participants made poor choices. An excellent reason not to miss meals, thinking (incorrectly) that it will help you lose weight!

Another thing to consider around the 'when', is timing. Paul McKenna has produced a Hunger Scale; at the extremes you are so hungry you are feeling physically faint or you are so full you are feeling nauseous. There are varying degrees of hunger in between these extremes and he advocates eating when you are slightly to fairly hungry. This hunger should be felt in your stomach and not in your head, when it's in your head, we call it 'fool's hunger', so get in touch with feeling real hunger. Many people spend most of their life not feeling hunger in their stomach, because they don't stop eating and to them this is normal. If this is you, allow yourself to feel real hunger, get used to the idea and see how it feels to try a 'new normal'. When it comes to stopping eating, the feeling in your stomach should be between pleasantly satisfied and full (see the 'How' for more information on this). So when it comes to planning when to eat, again experiment to see how hungry you are when your planned meal time comes round and adjust accordingly either the time you eat or the amount you eat at the meal before. Really tune in to your body to get this sense of where you are on the hunger scale before eating.

Finally, under 'when', consider when are your danger times for 'wobbles' and an urge to eat less healthy food. Sometimes it is the mid afternoon 'slump' as a result of a sugary or processed lunch. Opt for slow release protein with fresh foods instead. A healthy mid-afternoon snack of fruit/protein will help to avoid a fridge raid when you walk in the door after work or a day out. If you are an evening 'picker', find a means of distraction or start going to bed earlier and get a really good night's sleep; this will help you make healthier choices the next day too.

The 'Where'...

Make meal times special even if you are eating alone. Family meals sat around the table chatting or a candle lit dinner for one or two. Use lovely china and glassware, so you feel special and want to take your time eating your meal. Avoid distractions like eating in front of the TV or at your desk at work, whilst still working, or worse still 'on the run' whilst driving or walking around. You are more likely to overeat or eat too quickly and your body doesn't recognise that you have eaten. Studies show how we can forget how much we have eaten and are happy to eat more later, regardless of whether we are hungry or not.

Also linked to the 'where' are the habits we form around food and drink, sometimes referred to as the environmental habits. As an example, we may associate sitting in a favourite place with a cup of tea and we always have a biscuit or a piece of cake. Changing that location can help to break the habit. This can also apply to a cafe or restaurant, or certain people we meet up with, the habit is there and linked to food, so be mindful and think about how the habit may be changed to something healthier. Remember, you are not your habits; they are just bits of learned behaviour that can be unlearned and replaced by healthier behavioural habits.

The 'How'...

This links back to getting in touch with your physical hunger, only this time you are focusing on getting in touch with no longer feeling hungry. When you eat quickly or in a distracted way, your brain doesn't have time to catch up and tell you, you have had enough, so you keep eating until you have overeaten. It is helpful to be mindful of your breathing when you are eating. Breathing slowly from the abdomen calms the body, so your fight or flight response is not active. This allows your digestive system to work effectively.

By eating much slower, taking small mouthfuls and chewing food well (which also helps with digestion), you are able to listen to what your stomach and brain are telling you. You can pay full attention to the eating experience and what is happening inside your body and also to the food you are eating. Notice the colours, smell, taste and texture; it can become a whole sensory experience. As you start to feel the fullness – **STOP!** Even if your plate isn't empty, get into the habit of stopping, give it half an hour and if you feel physical hunger, you can eat a bit more. By doing this, you will soon learn what is the right portion size for you and will automatically put that amount on your plate. You may even consider moving to a smaller plate.

Never be afraid to leave food; I know no one likes waste, but if you eat it, it will end up as 'waste' anyway and on your waist! After a while you will know your ideal portion size and there will be no more waste.

All the above could be described as 'Awareness' eating – no longer the mindlessness of just shoving food into your mouth to satisfy whatever need it is that you are trying to satisfy. By re-programming your mind, you can eat from a place of intention and not in reaction to something else. It's also about not beating yourself up. You will notice I used the word 'avoid' quite a lot in the 'what' and that's because nothing is really off limits. I always work on the 80:20 principle; if you eat healthily 80% of the time, then 20% allows you to have a little indulgence on certain occasions, as long as you are doing it in an 'awareness' way. This stops that 'deprived' feeling you get when someone says you can't. In time, you will find the indulgences become less. I find the 80:20 principle works really well for me, I don't feel deprived and most of the time I am not craving unhealthy foods.

If you do have a 'wobble', there is no need to beat yourself up, adjust the next food intake (damage limitation), to compensate. More importantly, learn from it; what was going on for you that resulted in you eating something you didn't need; what need were you trying to satisfy? The more times you stop and reflect on what is going on, the less likely you are to give in to it and eat. Think how you can avoid it next time, this is where your journal comes in handy to make notes, reflect on what was going on, your thoughts and notice the emotion driving you or the pattern you are running.

My food diary is also helpful for keeping track of what you eat and drink, as well as having space to write your thoughts down when wobbles occur.

Unless you are making changes with someone else, it's a good idea to have a positive support network, someone who is in your corner and who will help you rather than undermine or sabotage what you are doing. Be aware of those people who always suggest another bottle of wine, a high calorie pud, or won't take no for an answer when you decline their offer of cake or biscuits; you have a choice to get them on board or drop them if they don't want to know, or take a step back from them. Your support could be a family member, friend, work colleague, anyone that you can contact when you need to. Have a safety plan for if you have a 'wobble' in the early days, until your new habits become firmly embedded. List five actions (write them down) you could take; e.g. contact someone from your support network; deep breathing and a quick meditation, so you move away from the temptation; distraction activity – have a bath, go for a walk, read etc.; write a quick gratitude list – five things you are grateful for.

It used to be said that it took 21 days for a new habit to take effect. Further research now indicates that it is in fact 66 days. This actually makes more sense, as all habits are only neural pathways in the brain, so as you start to think and behave differently, moving away from the diet mentality, you are laying down new neural pathways (habits). The more you use the new neural pathways, the stronger they become and the old neural pathways become weaker as you use them less. They are not gone completely in the early days and there is potential for a 'wobble' until they lose their power over you, hence the use of a good support network. So, rather than responding habitually to unhealthy foods and immediate 'reward', stop and become aware of the long term impact of eating it. Thinking about the outcome changes how you feel about eating unhealthy food.

Chapter 4 – Making Sustainable Lifestyle Choices

We have covered the basics of food in the previous chapters; however, they alone are not enough. If you want to make major life changes, you need a motivating reason/s to make it happen and achieve results. You also need to believe in yourself and your overriding thought in your mind is 'I can do anything'. The more you say it out loud, the stronger the belief will become. I will cover thoughts in the next chapter.

So what is motivating you? If you are thinking 'I need to lose a couple of stone for a wedding or holiday', that is all it will be, short term weight loss and no real change in behaviour. If you are thinking this is for life, a healthier future, there will be behaviour changes and sustainable weight loss. If your focus is **just** on weight and eating, with no other lifestyle changes, it becomes a battle and it is less likely to lead to a successful long term outcome.

Ask yourself:

- Am I worth making some changes in my priorities?
- Am I worth the effort to learn some new ways of selecting foods?
- Am I worth taking time to move about more?
- Am I worth giving up limiting beliefs, bad habits and excuses?
- Am I worth learning how to love and take care of myself?

If you answer 'yes' to just one of these, you are on your way....

By taking a whole life approach, you will become aware of what lifestyle behaviours contribute to your unhealthy eating and you can also deal with any underlying issues, such as why don't I think I am worth it. Often stress makes everything seem more difficult and out of control, which is when we resort to unhealthy eating. There is an analogy of stress being like a laundry basket, where we keep putting washing in and if we don't get to sort it and do some washing, the pile gets higher and overflows; we lose control. Our bodies have a natural way of sorting the day's 'laundry' and that is sleep. When we are asleep, our REM sleep or dream sleep sorts through the day's events and makes sense of them. If we do not get enough sleep, this processing does not get completed and we wake up with a half sorted laundry basket. If this continues, we begin to lose our sense of control. Periods of relaxation (just resting, meditation, down time), can help this process and we begin to get back on top of life again.

When you feel in control, you feel able to sort out the three main areas of life that can affect your ability to make changes; job/career/roles, relationships and the way you feel about yourself. Being able to take control over these three areas enables you to continue and take control over your eating habits. As you become happier in yourself and understand what may have been driving your unhealthy eating habits, you make sustainable lifestyle changes to support a healthy life. This enables you to stop obsessing about the weight loss, and it takes care of itself.

So how do you do this? It is a good idea to ask yourself this question – ‘if I already had a healthy relationship with food and was at the weight I wanted to be, would I be living the life I want and would I be happy? How does that differ from the life I live now and what is missing?’ This is an important exercise and one to be totally honest with yourself. I am often told ‘when I reach my ideal weight, I will do x, y or z’. I always ask why wait, why aren’t you doing it now? For example, ‘I will wait until I am slimmer then I will wear different, more colourful clothes or get a new trendy hairstyle’. Ditch the black, baggy clothes; wear brighter colours and get that new hairdo now, for a brighter future! Let go of the fear of being fat, be happy as you are and **start** being and doing what you want **NOW**, it will make you feel better about you and when you feel good about you, everything seems much easier.

A lot of people also tell me - ‘I just want to be me, not what others expect me to be’. They say that being fat and happy is often just an act, so be the you that you want to be now, don’t worry about what others think and don’t wait. It can sometimes take a while to work out what you want and make changes, which is why you need a clear vision for the future, and set some goals to help you get there. You are on a journey, so you need to know your destination address; this is not about reaching a certain weight. Think more along the lines of feeling comfortable in your body, stable weight, healthy relationship with food, energetic etc.

Let’s not forget the role of exercise or just being more active as part of the goal setting. Walking each day for 30 minutes will give you health benefits on a physical and emotional level. Using stairs, lifestyle activities like gardening, housework, dancing, cycling are all ways of being more active, if formal exercise is not your thing.

This is where a good friend, member of the family or life coach can help, by brainstorming the options, reviewing them and setting a clear vision, for what **YOU** want. Once you have that, you can work on what steps are needed to get there; the vision may seem too big to achieve, but breaking it down makes it more achievable. You have probably heard the saying ‘How do you eat an elephant?’ The answer – in bite sized chunks.... and these bite sized chunks are your process goals, the changes you make to your habits, behaviours and lifestyle. Measure your success in habit and behaviour changes, feeling in control and more positive, not just weight loss.

For success, it is essential that you have an attitude that says ‘I am 100% committed and motivated, to control my weight by making healthy, sustainable lifestyle choices’. Your behaviour has to change to ensure you begin to develop the natural habits of an individual who has a lifestyle that is aligned to eating healthily. Make sure you are ready to make permanent changes and that you do so for the right reasons. No one else can make you lose weight and pressure from those around you may make matters worse. You must undertake lifestyle changes to please yourself. If you are distracted by any other major life issues, work through those first, if you need to. Be sure you are ready to take on new challenges.

So, make a commitment to yourself, a lifelong commitment to work on the issues in your life, change your lifestyle, deal with your current habits and behaviours, and plan to succeed. Take responsibility and even if you have an occasional 'wobble', it's not the end of the world. Stick to your healthy lifestyle, just start again the next day and the results will be worth it.

Chapter 5 – Thoughts

Without feeling excited about your journey, it will be a difficult road to travel. So what you think and say to yourself is crucial, think of it as a journey of discovery and what you are actually gaining from making changes, rather than on what you **think** you will be losing. Your 'self-talk' is around 'I can do this', 'this is exciting and easy', allow yourself to feel empowered. Anyone who tries to tell you it will be hard, just acknowledge their point of view and tell them you are focusing on the positive aspects.

Recognise emotional triggers for eating; acknowledge and feel the feelings, let them be, don't push them down with food, they won't go away. Instead choose healthier soothing activities to give you a genuine 'feel good' feeling or take positive steps to start to understand/resolve whatever emotion is triggering you. How do you view your life, what else needs to change – job, relationship, family, friends, leisure, health etc.?

The quality of your life is very much determined by the quality of your thoughts, so become aware of your thoughts around food, what messages are you constantly giving yourself? A naturally slim person will think about food as 'just something you eat when you feel hungry', they may indulge in some unhealthy foods, but **know** they can stop after a couple of mouthfuls.

You are what you think, but you are not your thoughts and feelings though. Believe you can change and you will. When you spend so much time worrying about your weight, going over the same thoughts, why not say positive affirmations instead – 'I approve of myself' and begin to believe that anything is possible. Really open up to the thought that anything is possible, really feel it in your solar plexus (between navel and bottom of rib cage)

Louise Hay sees excessive appetite as running from your feelings, insecurity, self-rejection, fear, needing protection, judging your emotions. Using affirmations around feeling safe to feel; feelings are normal and acceptable, will help you to begin to accept yourself as you are. Fear is also a cover for hidden anger/resistance to forgive.

On the spiritual side, I have a deep trust in the 'Universe' and that everything is happening exactly as it is meant to be. I also trust that the 'Universe' will provide, if I let go of trying to control everything. I have many examples to support this trust and this in turn leads to acceptance of situations, even if I don't like them, they are meant to be and usually there is something to learn from them. So begin to develop this trust in the 'Universe' for yourself, to 'go with the flow', flow with the rhythms of life. This will help to release patterns of fear, create a new cycle of positive experiences and create inner peace. You are using your mind and thoughts in a different, more positive way.

Also think about the words you use (they are just expressions of thoughts). How often do you use extremes? As an example, you get home from work and moan about the fact you have had an horrendous day. You feel negative and energy levels are low. Think about a

reframe... 'Wow that was a busy/challenging day, but I got through it – go me!' How would you feel then, pleased with yourself, more positive/confident? So watch your thoughts and think about reframing your negative thoughts to something more helpful. There are always challenges in life, it's the way you deal with them that makes the difference.

A good start to clarity of thinking is to de-clutter your physical environment; cupboards, wardrobes etc. (remember the kitchen cupboards and fridge/freezer mentioned earlier in the Planning chapter?). Get rid of anything you no longer need or want and as you do it, say 'I am releasing the old and making room for the new'. Finally – what's cluttering your mind? Write it down, what's in your control – deal with it; out of your control – let it go. Think about a process of - acknowledge, accept, forgive and let go. When you begin to live your life in this way, you begin to see food in a different, healthier way too. Life's challenges become more manageable.

Finally, learn self-approval and to love yourself, by living from your heart centre. Think of something/someone you really love, feel it in your heart centre, maybe you also get a little flutter in your tummy and a smile on your face. Create this feeling regularly and life will flow with greater harmony, health and joy. When you can live from a place of love rather than fear, it dissolves anger, resentment and fear. When you judge someone or something, look from a position of love, they are the same as you, just on a different life path; no need for fear of them being different.

The Astrological Affirmation for 2022 sums this up perfectly and encourages us to be true to ourselves and embrace our uniqueness...

May we remain true to ourselves, our friends and the uniqueness of our individual journeys through life.

May we walk a path of love, integrity and light, truth, individuality and strength.

Chapter 6 - Science

Keeping a healthy, balanced blood sugar level is important for our weight, when the level is too high or too low, this is when the body stores fat. We need sugar for energy and the food we eat converts to glucose, to provide this energy. We don't therefore, need added sugar which just raises our blood sugar levels, which in turn increases the insulin levels in the blood, as it tries to bring the levels back to normal. It is this process that turns the glucose to fat and it gets stored in our body, rather than being used for energy. Similarly, we don't want to be eating big meals as this has the same effect.

When insulin levels are high, it makes you feel lethargic and blocks your brain from 'seeing' the hormone leptin. Leptin says 'not hungry, ok to get active' and can be blocked by high insulin levels in the blood. Insulin levels as already mentioned, are raised by sugar, flour and refined/processed foods. If you can't 'see' the leptin hormone levels in the blood stream, your brain thinks you're starving and forces you to eat more and conserve your energy. This will impact on how active you feel and as activity or exercise can be a great mood lifter, it will work against what you are trying to achieve. By keeping insulin at the right level, your brain can 'see' the leptin and normal service resumes, to support your lifestyle changes.

When the brain thinks you are hungry, as a result of increased insulin, it produces the hormone Grehlin to encourage you to eat more and conserve your energy. When you actually understand this relationship, between Grehlin, Leptin and insulin, it is easier to understand the importance of eating healthy foods in the right portion size, and balancing the levels of sugar in your blood.

There are several books on the market about glucose and one just released in 2022 is *Glucose Revolution* by Jessie Inchauspe. It goes right into the science in a fully accessible way and shows how eating foods in the right order can make a huge difference. Well worth a read to help you to start making sustainable changes to the way you see food and eat it.

The role of sleep is also essential in balancing Grehlin and Leptin. Never underestimate the power of sleep in maintaining a healthy weight. Lack of sleep disrupts hormone balance and as I mentioned earlier, it affects decision making and processing daily stresses.

Finally, let's look at cravings; they come from addictive pathways in the brain. Processed/refined foods release dopamine into the addictive sensors in the brain. It acts like heroine (refined from the poppy) and cocaine (refined from the cocoa leaf). The refining process turns wholesome natural substances into white powder drugs, which can become addictive. Sugar is only a refined white powder product... It does affect everyone differently, it all depends on susceptibility. For further information about what your cravings are telling you, have a look at *Constant Cravings* by Doreen Virtue.

In Summary...

I hope that this Guide has given you some useful reminders of things you already know and maybe some new information which will help you to start living the life you want, **AND** move you towards a way of eating for your ideal healthy weight, which is sustainable.

It really is a whole life review and one of the most important areas to consider is the quality of your thoughts. The books mentioned below by Louise Hay, William Bloom, Eckhart Tolle and Wayne Dyer are great first steps into exploring Modern Spirituality and changing your thoughts about yourself. I will also be adding more resources to my website www.positivechangeswithin.co.uk over the coming months.

So having read through this Guide once (I assume you have as you managed to get this far...), go back and re-read it, this time making notes in your lovely new journal. What changes can you make immediately, what else do you need to put in place, are you interested in further reading? Then by experimenting with new behaviours around food, begin to find out what is really going on for you; echoing Deepak Chopra, what are you **really** hungry for?

Remember, you are not alone on this journey, so make sure you have a great support network around you and seek the help that you need, if you need it.

Further Reading

Glucose Revolution – Jessie Inchauspe

What Are You Hungry For? – Deepak Chopra

You Can Heal Your Life – Louise Hay

Constant Cravings – Doreen Virtue

The Power of Modern Spirituality – William Bloom

The Power of Now – Eckhart Tolle

Any books by Wayne Dyer – see what resonates with you.