

## chapter 1

Here's the dirty little secret the diet industry doesn't want you to know: Losing weight is much easier than you think.

I know, I know: If you've watched the afternoon talk shows or the late-night infomercials, visited a gym, or checked out a weight-loss website, then you've received thousands of messages about how you need to cut out fat, I mean carbs, I mean dairy, I mean gluten; about how you need to work out with Zumba, I mean Crossfit, I mean P90X, I mean Bowflex; about how you need to eat for your blood type, I mean pH level, I mean body composition, I mean astrological sign. Things have gotten so bizarre that there's now a program called the K-E Diet in which you take in all your food through a tube going up your nose.

All of this confusion is not helping.

While exercise is great, in any form, weight loss is primarily a matter of eating food that's good for you—and not too much of it. (And never up your nose.) And theoretically, that ought to be easy: When you cut 3,500 calories (or use them up with exercise) you lose a pound of weight. So, when your body is receiving the proper level of nutrients and the proper number of calories, in most cases your weight drops to its healthy, natural state and stays there. The more fit and active you are, the more calories you can take in and burn off.

So what's with all the craziness? Why are two out of every three Americans overweight or obese? Why does diabetes—once a condition of the wealthy and overfed—now eat up one in every five of our health care dollars? Why are so many of our toddlers ready to topple over?

It's primarily because the food we eat just isn't good for us.

And that's why I believe this book is truly revolutionary.

While calories are a critical part of any nutrition plan, they're not the whole story. You can cut calories all you want and still find yourself eating a diet packed with sugar, salt, fat, and disease-causing additives that can play havoc with your weight and your health.

So when it came time to assess the most popular foods in America, I didn't just look at calorie counts. I took a deeper dive into the ingredients lists, keeping in mind that foods with seemingly believable health claims—even those that are low in calories, sodium, and the like—often hide nutritional subterfuge that undermines all the good a food might advertise on its front label.

Consider all the hype about yogurt. A 2012 study in the *International Journal of Obesity* found that dieters who ate three servings of fat-free yogurt a day lost 22 percent more weight and 61 percent more body fat than those who skipped the yogurt. The source of yogurt's power is its high level of protein and relatively low sugar. At just 100 calories, Siggi's Icelandic Style Skyr Non Fat Vanilla gives you a whopping 14 grams of belly-filling protein and just 9 grams of sugar. But over at Stonyfield Farm Organic, their Vanilla Over Chocolate gives you only half as much

protein and 34 grams of sugar—as much as you’ll find in 6 Chips Ahoy! Chewy cookies. That’s not a food that should appear as a frequent guest on your weight-loss lineup.

Or think about this phrase: “Made with Whole Grain.” A Harvard study found that just two servings of whole grains a day reduced diabetes risk by 21 percent. But a restaurant can say its bread is “made with whole grain” if there’s just a little bit of the stuff sprinkled in there. (That’s what you get from Panera Bread’s Whole Grain Baguette—the first ingredient is enriched white flour. You think you’re making a strike against diabetes, but you’re not!)

What about peanut butter? A study in the British Journal of Nutrition found that eating peanut butter during the day helps control blood sugar. But you’re eating something more than just peanut butter if you’re spooning Jif Natural Peanut Butter Spread onto your toast. The term “spread” indicates it’s only about 90 percent real peanut butter, and the rest of it is sugar, palm oil, and molasses.

If that all sounds a bit complicated . . . well, it is. Which is why I’ve done all the work for you. Instead of just ringing the alarm bells and squawking about troubled foods, I’ve selected thousands of the healthiest foods in the universe—from America’s most popular restaurants, supermarkets, and brands—and broken down just why they’re good for you.

I’m not talking about rice cakes here. I’m going to show you how to eat all your favorite foods—and I mean bread and dairy, burgers and fries, ice cream and cookies—and still cut thousands of calories from your diet, all the while cutting your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, depression, and more.

And it’s going to be much easier than you thought.

## YOUR SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE HEALTHY EATING GUIDE

To help you navigate the nutritional Narnia, I’ve created a series of markers that run throughout *Eat It to Beat It!*, a sort of Guided Trail through the American food forest. Throughout this book, I’ll be explaining how foods you might think of as indulgences—snacking on Ghirardelli chocolate, for example, or ordering a sirloin steak at TGI Friday’s, or adding a little cheese to your Jack in the Box burger—can actually play an important role in bringing you back to your ideal weight and helping you live a better, longer, happier life.

Here are the guideposts to look for:

Lose Weight

Beat Diabetes

Lower Cholesterol

Lower Blood Pressure

Boost Immunity

Improve Mood

In each case, I'll explain the scientific evidence that demonstrates how eating beef, chocolate, pasta, mayo, even ice cream can boost your health in a number of ways—if you make the right choices, select the right brands, and eat them in the right amounts. And I'll show you how to avoid the common mistakes that can undermine your health.

From now on, you're never going to have to puzzle out what to order or what to buy. I've done the research for you, comparing tens of thousands of popular restaurant and grocery items, and checking each category to cut down your exposure to unnecessary sugar and calories, unhealthy fats and salt, bizarre flavorings and petroleum-based additives, and ridiculous health claims that serve only to mislead and confuse us. With this simple guide, you'll learn how to:

Eat It to Beat IT! . . . Belly Fat!

I love pasta, how about you? That's why it's great to know that making a simple swap at Olive Garden can change the way you look and feel. If you usually have 5 Cheese Ziti al Forno, try their Linguini Pomodoro (and ask for the whole wheat pasta option). You'll save 680 calories with this swap alone. If you are a regular, make this switch just twice a week and you could drop 20 pounds this year alone! Or let's say you wanted to swing by Dairy Queen for a sundae after dinner. A Large Caramel Sundae is a real splurge at 610 calories (get the small and cut that number in half). But it's

still a much better choice than their Georgia Mud Fudge Blizzard—a large will cost you 1,490 calories. If you swapped out a big indulgence for a small one like that twice a week, you could cut out more than 100,000 calories in a year, That's more than 25 pounds!"

#### Eat It to Beat IT! . . . High Blood Pressure!

If you've been told to watch your salt intake, then you'd better really come to understand what's in your food. Anyone with a family history of high blood pressure should try to keep their daily sodium intake to no more than 1,500 milligrams a day. Sounds like plenty, right? But if you're a fan of P.F. Chang's, you might be putting yourself in a less than optimal situation: Their Hot & Sour Soup Bowl contains 7,980 milligrams of sodium, or more than five days' worth. Order their Egg Drop Soup and save 7,390 milligrams of sodium—and start cutting your risk!

#### Eat It to Beat IT! . . . Diabetes!

While you're probably aware that sucking on sugar cubes isn't such a great idea, you'd probably be shocked to discover how often you're getting a huge helping of sugar when you're trying to be healthy. For example, let's say you take the kids to Baskin-Robbins, and those shakes sure look good. But you've heard that the American Diabetes Association has linked sugary drinks to increased risk, so instead of indulging in ice cream, you look for something healthy . . . like the Mango Banana Smoothie. Well, just one of these "healthy" smoothies is 48 ½ teaspoons of sugar—about five times what you should be consuming in a single day! Treat yourself instead to a cup of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough: Even the large will save you 162 grams of sugar and 580 calories. That really adds up! Cutting out that many calories twice a week could lead you to drop nearly 16 pounds in a year.

#### Eat It to Beat IT! . . . Colds & Flu!

One recent study found that consuming fish rich in DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid, improves the activity of white blood cells and helps decrease inflammation, giving your immune system a boost. But not all fish are created equal. A piece of broiled Alaskan Chinook salmon will deliver 1,570 milligrams of omega-3s. A tilapia filet, on the other hand, will give you just 156 milligrams, while also delivering a high dose of unhealthy fats like omega-6s and, if it's fried in the wrong kind of oil, trans fats as well.

#### Eat It to Beat IT! . . . Brain Fog!

Which came first: Dumb food, or dumb people? Scientists have recently discovered those with the highest intake of trans fatty acids have lower cognitive ability and

measurably smaller brains than those with the least. Yet a serving of Pop Secret Buttered Popcorn has nearly three days' worth of trans fat alone. (Talk about "mindless eating"!)

You could indulge in Orville Redenbacher's Movie Theater Butter Popcorn and eliminate brain-shrinking trans fats entirely!

Eat It to Beat IT! . . . Cholesterol!

Adding just 5 to 10 grams of fiber a day has been shown to lower your cholesterol levels. Does that mean gnawing on drywall? No, how about eating a cookie? You'll get 8 grams of fiber from just two Kashi Oatmeal Dark Chocolate Soft-Baked Cookies, and it will cost you a modest 260 calories. That's right, you could lower your cholesterol risk—by eating a cookie!

The restaurant menus have been studied, the nutrition labels analyzed, and the latest research checked and collated. On the following pages, you're going to discover the simplest, easiest health-and-weight-loss guide ever created.

I hope you're hungry!

## Chapter 2

I'm tired of food marketers treating our bellies like landfills. From brain-draining fats to belly-busting sugars, here are

the saltiest, saddest, dumbest foods you can eat—and some simple ways to fight back.

### The Most CALORIC Foods

At its most basic, weight gain is about eating more

calories than you burn off. So having some idea of how many calories you're eating is probably the most important bit of health information you can have.

Which is why I was stunned to read this on the Cheesecake Factory web page: "At this time, we do not provide nutritional information for our menu selections on our website. We pride ourselves on using only the freshest and finest ingredients available."

Really? I pride myself on having some vague idea of what I put in my mouth on a daily basis. And when you understand just how loaded with unnecessary calories the entrees at Cheesecake Factory are, you can understand why they're trying to play it close to the vest. Luckily some savvy citizens in Washington State (where nutrition labeling is mandatory) scanned the Cheesecake Factory Nutrition Book and made it available

online so we were able to see the crazy numbers on their menu. Five of the 10 most

caloric foods in America are from one restaurant: Cheesecake Factory.

### The SALTIest Foods

Most of us have heard that it's a good idea to "cut down on sodium," but besides making sure the top to the salt shaker is screwed on properly, what does that mean?

Well, first, realize that salt is an essential mineral that your body can't function without. Adults in general should consume no more than 2,400 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day (1,500 if you have high blood pressure, are African American, or are over age 51).

If 2,400 mg sounds like a lot, it is. There's an estimated 189 mg of sodium in one of those little salt packages you get at McDonald's. So if you downed a dozen of them, you'd still be within your daily sodium intake—assuming you didn't eat anything else all day, which you probably wouldn't, because you'd be too busy trying to drain your swimming pool with a flexi-straw.

But a dozen little sodium packages is nothing when you consider what you're getting from these foods, each of which seem saltier than Sarah Silverman's pillow talk.

### The Most SUGARY Foods

Let's say you're an average American who wants to eat well and live healthfully. And let's say your doctor recommends that to cut your risk of EBS (Enormous Belly Syndrome), you should cut down on added sugar. And The American Heart Association even issued some guidelines:

For women (per day): For men (per day):

No more than 25 grams No more than 38 grams

Which equals: About 6 sugar packets Which equals: About 9 sugar packets

Or: About 100 calories Or: About 150 calories

That ought to be easy, right? How hard is it to limit yourself to 6 sugar packets a day?

In a normal world filled with normal food, cutting down on sugar shouldn't be that hard. But in the American food jungle, where nothing is as it appears, added sugar is everywhere. And it's dressed up in funny disguises, like corn syrup and maltodextrin and sucrose.

So beware: Order up some of these overly sweet deals, and you won't be limiting yourself to 6 sugar packets. You'll be lucky to get away with fewer than

60 sugar packets a day!

### The DUMBest Foods

Several decades ago, scientists discovered that if they injected vegetable oil with hydrogen, it would turn solid—and stay that way, even at room temperature. Eureka! Suddenly cooking oil became much easier for junk food joints to work with. Unfortunately, these new forms of fat—called trans fats—also caused clogging of the arteries, including those in the brain.

In fact, they impede blood flow so significantly that in studies, those with the most trans fats in their blood have significantly worse cognitive performance—and physically smaller brains!—than those with less trans fats. While trans fats do occur in nature, these natural fats are less dangerous than the artificial kind that go by the moniker “partially hydrogenated oils.” In fact, these freaky artificial fats are so bad for you that some municipalities have banned them.