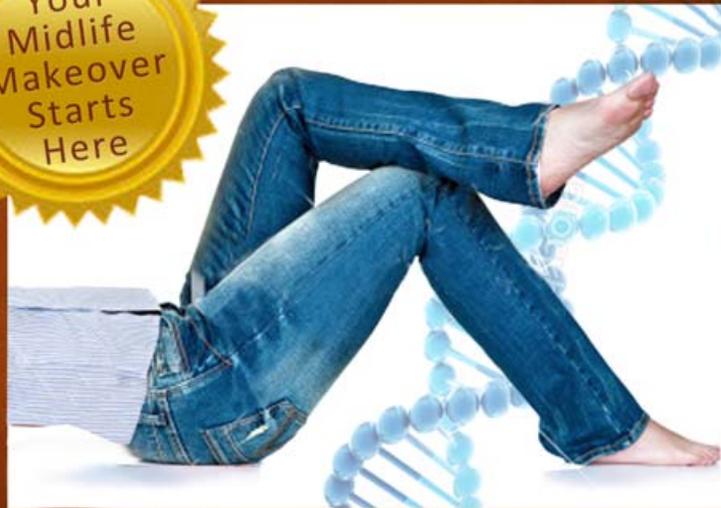


# YOUR Genes *Do Not* Determine the Size <sup>OF</sup> YOUR Jeans

The myths, half-truths, and  
misconceptions that are making  
you fat, frustrated and fatigued

Your  
Midlife  
Makeover  
Starts  
Here



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## **Chapter 7**

### **The Myth: Your Lack of Willpower is Making You Fat**

The world is awash in excess weight. Obesity and overweight cross all cultural, economic, and racial boundaries. In the melting pot that is America, not a single nationality has escaped the bad news. One third of all Americans—which includes all of our cultural imports—are obese, and two-thirds are overweight. Even our companion animals are overweight.

We see obesity at every age, including babies under the age of one. How do we explain the obese baby? Does she choose crib potato over racing around the house, or stuff herself with cookies when the bearer of the bottle isn't looking?

What's just as puzzling is why now? Convenience foods came on the market after World War II, some fifty plus years ago. Television has been entertaining us and making us lazy since the 1940s. The epidemic of undernourished and overfed citizens appears to be about thirty years old. A mystery, since with all those parties and disco dancing in the eighties, who had time to eat?

Who do we blame, food manufacturers? Do we take on the advertising companies who target all of us, but especially young children?

Someone said that if the growing rates of obesity were tuberculosis, the government would have to step in and do battle with the food companies that are engineering foods proven to be addictive, as well as the savvy marketers who use every trick in the book of human psychology to sell their products.

There are books galore that blame sugar and a very popular one that fingers wheat. Avoiding fat has been the subject of hundreds of diet books, and we are all familiar with the South Beach and Atkins programs, which point the finger at carbs. None of these things is without guilt, but to blame one over the others as to why we are where we find ourselves is oversimplifying. The sugar argument is the most plausible, but not the only guilty party.

Scientists and reporters have said “we don’t need no education.” Their belief is that Americans have heard the message of smaller portions and fresh food over fast food but they, we, the Americans, favor convenience, big flavors, and small prices. But I don’t agree entirely.

When the body of organizations charged with keeping us healthy understood the dangers of tobacco, they used non-stop, multi-media education to get the public on board. We’ve only begun to recognize the many factors that conspire to influence our genes, our hormones, and the way we think about food. Now is not the time to stop educating, but to do more of it and do it in ways that all age groups and cultures can get on board.

Regardless of what food plan you choose—carnivore, omnivore, vegetarian, macrobiotic, raw, or any combination of your design, most groups can agree on a few things. If we could adopt them as a nation, health would be the rule and millions of pounds would be shed. These are: drink plenty of water, eat your fill of non-starchy vegetables, use processed foods sparingly. If you choose animal protein, buy it free of hormones and antibiotics, skip sugary drinks and their diet brethren altogether, and limit your intake of all other sources of added sugar.

But a new food plan alone is not going to resolve the problem of overweight. And here's why.

What follows is what I have gathered after years of studying this subject and living in a body prone to want to make every meal the biggest meal of the day, not just lunch. Why we are fat, and unless the trend reverses soon, getting fatter, is complicated and personal. Body types, blood types, hormone health, mindset, where one lives, who they spend time with, economic status, level of educational, medications, environmental toxins, age, how much we move, how much or how little we sleep, and having a big enough “why” to want to stay alive and healthy are all of the things I believe conspire to either decrease or increase that number on the scale.

Although this chapter's myth is about a lack of willpower, I am not letting us off the hook. Willpower alone, though, will not get us through to the other side of any big change, and the authors of *Change Anything: The New Science of Personal Success* have proven it. It's a great book I highly recommend.

Here's a secret about willpower that I learned from Dr. Daniel Amen: willpower can be found in greater abundance in those who get enough sleep and balance their blood sugar. I'm just sayin'.

Still, once you have the knowledge found in books like this one or the others you'll find in the resource section, it is up to you to use it. Some of you will find it more difficult to make the necessary changes to bring their metabolisms back to health. Some of you will need the support of a medical team. But wherever you are on your road to a healthy weight or wanting to ward off weight creep as you age, there is something here to set you on your way.

### **First, the Obvious Culprits**

An inestimable number of tempting foods set us up for disaster every waking moment, and here's why. Our brains evolved when food was harder to come by. Foods with fat were desirable because fat equals energy, energy equals survival. Meats were leaner than today, and taking down a woolly mammoth was not an everyday occurrence. The hunter-gatherer tribes of a million or so years ago did not have side-by-side stainless refrigerators to store excess fat, so we evolved to store fat on our bodies. Smart, huh?

Sugar told the brain that important nutrients not found in meat or other plants were on their way. We developed a love of the sweet stuff with the first sip of breast milk and later in the occasional berry or hive with honey. Craving these foods meant good health, survival, and new generations. According to Deirdre Barrett in the book *Waistland, The (R) Evolutionary Science behind Our Weight and Fitness Crisis*, “Readily available foods such as leafy vegetables were eaten but inspired no strong cravings.”

Cravings for green leafy vegetables? Now that would be revolutionary.

### **The Unholy Trinity: Fat, Sugar, and Salt**

It began in the earliest days of our existence, and it is with these three ingredients that the food industries today create cravings for foods our hunter-gatherer ancestors would have run from. I've read countless books discussing the power of manipulating these three ingredients for super-sized success for the wallets, if not the waistlines, of the company shareholders.

From what I can tell, we are no match for food scientists with their limitless budgets to continually raise the bar on what combinations of foods hook us best.

One of these books, *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*, by Dr. David Kessler, former head of the FDA, weaves a crime-novel type story of anonymous sources, secret ingredients, and science experiments where we are the guinea pigs. In this book he pulls back the curtain on why we find convenience foods so irresistible.

“When it comes to stimulating our brains,” Dr. Kessler noted, individual ingredients aren’t particularly potent. But by combining fats, sugar, and salt in innumerable ways, food makers have essentially tapped into the brain’s reward system, creating a feedback loop that stimulates our desire to eat and leaves us wanting more and more even when we’re full.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Kessler may have been uniquely qualified to suspect and then investigate the addictive characteristics of foods, having been best known during his time at the FDA for taking on the tobacco industry. He believed that they manipulated the ingredient nicotine to make cigarettes ever more addictive. His instinct that the food companies might be up to a similar trick was on track.

No one should blame the food industry, fast food chains, or any other industry for creating products the public will buy. Repeat customers are the lifeblood of business. And last time I was at the supermarket, they were not giving away jumbo large bags of Doritos with extra cheese or sixty-four-ounce bottles of soda. Yet somehow these things

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/23/health/23well.html> Tara Pope June 22, 2009

do end up in someone's home, usually next to them on the couch, along with the clicker and their partners in crime, friends, or a significant other hoping for a piece of the action.

My issue lies with the manipulation of ingredients to make them harder to resist and harder to stop eating, portions sizes that defy reason, and marketing on steroids with no thought to the effect on the consumer. Sadly, the companies that do all of this are not unaware of the problem.

According to *New York Times* reporter Michael Moss, in his book *Salt, Sugar and Fats: How The Food Giants Hooked Us*, they've been having conversations about this, which he can prove, since 1999. What has changed? Foods have gotten sweeter, pack in more (bad) fats, and contain more salt; portions are bigger; and the experts say they're more crave worthy.

Middle of the night trips to the fridge, compulsive eating binges, or the inability to stop eating once the bag of chips is open are all prompted by our environment. Do you think that Grok the caveman or Grockette his woman were up at all hours scavenging around their campfires for another portion of mastodon? When food is expensive and limited, who goes on a binge? And if the bag were not in the house, well . . .who's to blame? This is where we must admit *we* are the culprits, not the victims. We choose what comes into the house and, no matter where we happen to be having our meal, what we find at the end of our fork.

What happens when we don't know what's in the food we choose or what else might be at work behind the scenes? Despite our best intentions we can still get fat.

## **The Hidden Culprits**

It's obvious that snacking on chips, breakfasting on tire-sized bagels, and slurping down bowls of pasta the size of your head are not going to give you that svelte body you're dreaming of.

These are choices we make that we know will contribute to muffin tops and jelly bellies, just as smokers now know without a doubt that choosing a cigarette damages their health. In addition to those listed above, add too much sugar and starch, and too few minutes of the day spent moving, and it's a perfect recipe for adding a few pounds every year.

There are also some hidden factors you need to be aware of. Not only will these little-known devils make fat storage a cinch, they can also make you sick over time.

They're known as *obesgens* (oh-B-so-genz), aka Endocrine Disrupting Partners. These are dietary, pharmaceutical, and industrial compounds that mimic natural hormones in the body and block hormone sites so the real hormones can't do their work.

Remember that hormones are responsible for how we feel and look, whether our digestion is working properly, how well we sleep, and pretty much all of what makes us feel life is worth living. If they can't do their job, we feel less good and things begin to go wrong. These foreign hormone imitators scramble messages and gum up the works of how we process and store fat, among other things. You may have noticed that the word "obese" is the root of this word we're discussing.

They also contribute to certain diseases, infertility, miscarriage, cardiovascular disease, early puberty, cancers, and other health challenges.

They imitate our hormones, but can't be recognized by the receptors, and so they change the nature of what would ordinarily happen.

I'll let Dr. Oz tell you how these foreign invaders prompt fat storage:

- Encourage the body to store fat and re-program cells to become fat cells.
- Prompt the liver to become insulin resistant, which makes the pancreas pump out more insulin, which turns energy into fat all over the body.
- Prevent leptin (a hormone that reduces appetite) from being released from your fat cells to tell your body you're full.<sup>2</sup>

Estrogen-like chemicals found in toxins are referred to as *xenoestrogens*. When our natural estrogen combines with these foreign estrogens, we end up with estrogen dominance. This condition is associated with many female maladies found in greater numbers today than thirty years ago. PMS, PCOS, uterine fibroids, infertility, and breast cancer are among them.

Men, as well as some species of animals, are victims of these hormone disrupters too. Higher levels of estrogen can result in an increased risk of cancers of the reproductive organs, infertility, low libido, and enlarged prostate.

Sadly, our children are being affected also, and it's evident everywhere. Look around and you'll notice how much earlier girls mature and how heavy many of them are. Even active kids may be carrying extra weight, and the government is waking up to this. In 2011 the NIH launched a three-year effort to fund research exploring the role of environmental chemical exposures in obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome.

They are aware of it and are working towards a plan to help reverse the trend of childhood obesity—but we know how slowly the wheels of government turn. So spread

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.doctoroz.com/videos/understanding-obesogens>

the word on what you learn here; we don't have to wait for them to publish their report to make a difference.

### **Hiding in Plain Sight**

We are encouraged to drink more water, and bottled water makes it convenient and easy to track the amount. But—sorry to be a downer—if you drink water from disposable water bottles or sports bottles, it's a good bet you're drinking in BPA with your water.

This much you probably know, as store shelves fill with more and more BPA-free bottles and containers. But you may not know where else you'll find it.

BPA, or *bisphenol*, is also found in the lining of canned foods, juice containers, plastic food storage containers, plastic utensils, polycarbonate baby bottles, sippy cups, and cash register receipts. According to University of Missouri biology professor Frederick vom Saal, who has studied BPA for the past fifteen years, “BPA reduces the number of fat cells, but programs them to incorporate more fat, so there are fewer but very large fat cells.”

We can't assume that just because a plastic something is BPA free that it does not contain an ingredient with estrogenic activity. Estrogenic activity, or EA, is the term scientists who study this stuff call anything that mimics the hormone estrogen in the body. Digging around on this subject, I found an interesting paper written by four scientists who set out to determine if BPA-free plastics were free of EA, as would be the hope.

The study was published online in July of 2011 on the PMA, U.S. National Library of Medicine, the National Institutes of Health publication.<sup>3</sup> They found: “Almost all commercially available plastic products we sampled—independent of the type of resin, product, or retail source—leached chemicals having reliably detectable EA, including those advertised as BPA free. In some cases, BPA-free products released chemicals having more EA than did BPA-containing products.” Got glass?

If you spray your lawn with pesticides, you’ve been obesogened. PVC pipes in your plumbing? You’ll find it there. Microwaved your meal in a plastic container lately? BPA-d, baby. Eating meats raised by a factory farm? Those animals are fed estrogenic hormones and often sprayed with EA chemicals to keep the bug population at a minimum.

Your hot shower beating against the plastic shower curtain is causing toxins to be released. But wait—there’s more. Air fresheners, microwave popcorn, the plastic they wrap meat in at the grocery store, and non-stick pans (unless specifically labeled “green” or “enviro-friendly”). Should I go on?

The last product I want to introduce may surprise you. It’s found in almost all shelf-stable food products and sweetened beverages. You may have seen a commercial on the “truth” about this much maligned sweetener or been to the website [www.SweetSurprise.com](http://www.SweetSurprise.com). The ingredient is high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS), and that website is paid for by the Corn Refiners Association.

Think they have a vested interest in what America thinks about their product? Their website was created as part of a marketing campaign to combat the news reports that call HFCS a poison and proven obesogen. On their site they do a myth vs. reality bit.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222987/>

One of their myths versus their reality is: Myth: High-fructose corn syrup is to blame for obesity and diabetes. Reality: “Nope. There is no scientific evidence that high-fructose corn syrup is to blame for obesity and diabetes.”

Compare their reality to the results of a study out of Princeton University, where a team worked to determine if all sweeteners are the same when it comes to weight gain. Rats with access to high-fructose corn syrup gained significantly more weight than those with access to table sugar, even when their overall caloric intake was the same.

Professor Bart Hoebel, who specializes in the neuroscience of appetite, weight, and sugar addiction and who headed the research, had this to say: “When rats are drinking high-fructose corn syrup at levels well below those in soda pop, they're becoming obese—every single one, across the board. Even when rats are fed a high-fat diet, you don't see this; they don't all gain extra weight.”

Whom should we believe? I have a hard time siding with an industry association that represents their own best interests over a group of scientists performing double-blind control studies hoping to find one piece of the obesity puzzle. Many more studies arrive at similar findings.

### **How to Avoid These Stealth Health Disruptors?**

We can't all go off to live in protective bubbles, and it's likely that at some point we'll want something wrapped or packaged in plastic. Pesticides will be sprayed and the tax man will require us to keep receipts printed with BPA. The thought of all there is to think about, do differently, and refrain from doing is enough to drive a grown woman to

drink. Yes, your beer can is lined with it, not so with wine or hard liquor bottles, so have a Cosmo on me.

The good news is it's easier than ever to buy foods, containers, cleaning products and even personal care products that are free of BPA and harmful chemicals, or at least pack a limited load. Yes, some will cost you more to buy, but what's more expensive, chemical-free living or chemically-induced illness?

Small changes are the easiest to incorporate, so start where you can. Next time you need canned black beans, find them in a can not lined with BPA. Are berries on your list? Berries are some of the most heavily sprayed fruits, so switch to organic.

Want to know what others are? Download the Clean 15 list from the Environmental Working Groups Pesticide list. It's free at their website, [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org). This group is one everyone should be familiar with. They publish helpful, clean-living guides on many everyday products, like sunscreens, cosmetics, and consumer goods.

When possible, buy your fish wild and your meats drug and hormone free. Buy lean cuts of meat. Toxins and chemicals are stored in fat.

When I developed a heart-healthy restaurant San Diego years ago, we had a saying, "buy the best and use less." When we buy high-quality foods, they often taste richer, so we need less to get the delicious effect. These high-quality, high-taste foods also cost more. But I'd rather have a smaller portion of wild salmon knowing it wasn't fed corn, wheat, or food coloring than have a hunk of farm raised. If you have never tasted a free-range, hormone-free chicken, you're in for a treat. The texture is different and it tastes more flavorful.

Do not microwave anything in plastic! Heat causes leaching, and those EA chemicals go right into you via your food. The same study I talked about above, where the scientists found that even non-BPA plastics leached EA chemicals, said that heat and sunlight can further aggravate the leaching process.

Buy non-stick pans that say they are safe, and always use a safe, non-stick spatula, not metal, in the pan. Metal will scratch the surface of the chemical bond and allow it to be released into the food.

Use stainless or glass for your daily water consumption. If you do buy things in plastic—and we all have to at some point—avoid those with the numbers 3 and 7 on the bottom.

Protecting your health, or improving it, can be a challenge in this chemical dependent world, wouldn't you agree? But change is happening at a grass-roots level to clean things up. Perhaps the most important way it will happen is when and where we shop. Food manufacturers will respond to market demands, whether it's organic berries or Ho Hos we're demanding. Buy more glass containers and manufacturers see a trend. Prices eventually come down as products become more common.

Fighting the battle of the bulge with all the weapons available makes more sense than sticking to old outdated science, doesn't it? It might be almost impossible to grasp that something like mosquito repellent can contribute to your spare tire, but if enough honest scientists are telling me it's so, I'm going to err on the side of caution. Knowing foods are manipulated to make them more addictive, plus contain chemicals that can disrupt a healthy metabolism, should make you think twice before adding them to your grocery bag.

Understanding why we gain weight is a complex puzzle with many pieces. The only person who can put the pieces together in a way that creates our health is each of us. The next chapter will help you put the pieces together.