

# HEALTHY AS F\*CK

The Habits You Need to Get Lean, Stay  
Healthy, and Generally *Kick Ass at Life*

OONAGH DUNCAN



# CONTENTS

---

PREFACE	IX
<b>PART 1: GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF YOUR ASS</b>	<b>1</b>
INTRODUCTION: So, You Want To Lose Weight...	3
CHAPTER 1: Drop the Guilt and Get Your Hot Abs— Even If You Have a Women’s Studies Degree	13
CHAPTER 2: Find the Fucks	22
CHAPTER 3: Woo-Woo Alert: It’s Actually All About Happiness	38
<b>PART 2: JUST TELL ME WHAT THE FUCK TO DO TO GET SKINNY ALREADY</b>	<b>57</b>
INTRODUCTION: Why Discipline, Motivation, and Willpower Are Bullshit	59

CHAPTER 4: The Scoop on the Habit Loop	67
CHAPTER 5: The 7 Habits of Highly Healthy Motherfuckers	78
PART 3: HOW NOT TO BE A BIG, FAT QUITTY MCQUITTERFACE	149
INTRODUCTION: Do. Or Do Not. There Is No Try.	151
CHAPTER 6: The Life-Changing, Magical Art of Getting Your Shit Together	155
CHAPTER 7: The Power of Your Peeps	176
CHAPTER 8: Break Up with Your Bullshit	190
CHAPTER 9: If You Can't Do Something Right, Do It Totally Half-Ass	210
CHAPTER 10: How to Fight the Fuckits	225
CONCLUSION	248
NOTES	251
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	252
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	257

A decorative background consisting of numerous light gray rays radiating from the bottom center towards the top corners of the page.

# PREFACE

---

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF GLUTEN? IT'S THIS PROTEIN THAT'S found in wheat that...just kidding! It's the 2020s, and even your weird survivalist uncle is gluten free.

I bet you can name three people off the top of your head who would rather eat nuclear waste than gluten. That's why there are bestselling authors who could substitute the wheat flour in their baking with gold dust because they've made a fortune selling gluten-free cookbooks. Which is all kind of weird if you think about it...considering that celiac disease really only affects 1 percent of the population.

You know what else affects 1 percent of the population? Von Willebrand disease. It's this blood clotting disorder that probably none of your friends talk about at cocktail parties. Why? Von Willebrand disease isn't a covert way of pretending you aren't on a diet. Because

chances are you are on a diet right now. Except you don't call it a diet. You call it a wheat allergy or eating clean or ketosis or paleo or plants or maybe you are just trying to avoid sugar.

Now don't get mad. I know that accusing you of being on a diet is like accusing you of being some vapid cheerleader who didn't get the fucking fax in 1987 that diets don't work and you are supposed to love yourself the way you are. You probably hate the word *diet* because it reminds you of your mom counting her Weight Watchers points or cooking nothing but cabbage soup for a week. Well, I'm afraid your keto lifestyle might seem just as ridiculous to the next generation. And, dude, I'm not judging you for getting super into the latest healthy-food/weight-loss trend. We all follow trends. (Anyone else feather their bangs in the '80s? Whoopsie daisy.) But let's face it—most people don't really care if it's about sugar, wheat, free-range protein, or cleanse kits with chlorophyll slime as long as there is a reason to hope it will help trigger fat loss.

The point is, the language has changed, but as I type this, seventy-five million Americans are *actively* trying to lose weight. Which is no surprise. We are now at a point where *most* of us are overweight, and more than 30 percent of North Americans are clinically obese. I'm not talking about a little muffin top over your skinny jeans (although god knows we are certainly made to feel like shit if this is the case). We are at the point where we have to start thinking about type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression, cancer, and fertility problems.

So, the average American is freaking out and spending an average

of \$800 a year trying to fix the problem—buying juice cleanses, meal plans, workout programs, and weird-ass herbal supplements. And then everyone feels like shit about themselves. Why? Because none of it works.

I mean—obvi, right? The whole world is getting fatter. And the statistics of weight-loss success with any of these diets is dismal. And I mean *any of* them. Even that sugar-free thing you're doing right now. From Atkins to the Zone with a lot of keto and GF in between—there is no peer-reviewed scientific data that confirms that one diet (or—excuse me—“lifestyle”) is better than any other for long term weight loss. There is very little chance—across the board—of keeping the weight off for over a year.

Here's why: it's not about your wheat intake, your ketones, or your net carbs—*it's about your habits*. The National Weight Control Registry at Brown University studies those rare unicorns who have lost significant weight and kept it off. They achieved it through all sorts of different diet/lifestyle approaches. The research shows that the *one* commonality in those subjects was making small changes to their everyday behaviors.

Small changes to everyday behaviors?! How fucking *boring* is that? Where is the “revolutionary new formula”? The “one secret that doctors don't want you to know”? Or the “diet that celebrities swear by”?

That is all Satan's bullshit.

Let me tell you, if you like sensationalist clickbait headlines, this book is going to disappoint. On the other hand, if you like having an

effortlessly healthy (smoking hot) body and a calm mind, welcome to your new life.

I call those “everyday behaviors” your habits. Everything comes down to habits. All the rest of it—everything from the glycemic index to complex intermittent fasting protocols—all of that is just noise and fad diets disguised as a virtuous lifestyle.

Now before you hit send on that angry email where you tell me that getting rid of gluten has changed your life and how dare I call it a diet: I’m happy for you. If you’ve found something that works for you, then you can shut this book. You don’t need my advice because you’ve already got this shit nailed—and that is awesome. Celebratory rice cakes all around!

But.

If that gluten-free “lifestyle” tends to fall off when you are stressed or when there’s something particularly delicious in front of you or when you are on vacation...that is a diet.

Consider this: When is the last time you heard a vegan say that things were so crazy at work that she was gonna give herself a break and eat meat until life calms down? Or hearing someone say that they were going to pause their tooth-brushing habit while they were on vacation because, you know, you only live once! Ridiculous, right? Because veganism and tooth-brushing are deeply ingrained habits. They are part of your identity. They require no perceived extra effort because they are rooted in a deep sense of the kind of person you are. (“I just don’t eat meat. Period.” Or “I am someone who does not have

nasty-ass teeth and fart breath no matter how relaxed and on vacation I am.”) So, unless your sugar-free/gluten-free/paleo/keto efforts are completely effortless and it never occurs to you to pause them on vacation, you are on a diet.

And so what if you are? There’s nothing wrong or shallow or unenlightened about wanting to lose weight (more about that in chapter 1), so props to you for trying stuff out. The only reason I’m taking a big second-day-of-the-Master-Cleanse dump all over your “lifestyle” choice is because it’s not going to be sustainable and it’s going to end up making you feel like shit when it doesn’t work out. Again.

And I say fuck that. I never want you to have that yucky, “I totally fell off the wagon, I suck” feeling again. That’s why I wrote this book. That cycle of getting your hopes up with a new weight-loss program and then feeling like a loser when it fails? That shit is over, my friend.

I’m talking about that weight-loss roller coaster. You know, where you try this new thing (coconut oil all over everything! net carbs be damned!) that has a bunch of pseudoscience to back it up and omigod it totally works and you announce to everyone that this is IT, you are totally doing this now, and it’s not a diet it’s a lifestyle, but then one weekend you just don’t fucking feel like doing that lifestyle but whatever, you’ll pick it up on Monday and then Monday rolls around and you pick it up but it’s kind of lost its joy but you dutifully do it because this is totally your thing now but then Wednesday is your friend’s birthday and a girl’s gotta celebrate good times come on, so then Thursday doesn’t count because you are hungover and then it’s the weekend so... Yeah.

You'll probably futz around like that for a few months or so and you'll have moments where you pat yourself on the back for being "good," but those moments will probably start to get fewer and farther between...and then the Fuckits will take over (more about the Fuckits later), and then in a year, you'll probably slide back to where you started. But maybe at that point you will be excited for the next roller coaster. Maybe it's all about probiotics now.

It's not that all those fad diets/lifestyle experiments are evil or stupid or anything. The problem is that they are a costly distraction from what is actually going to help you reach your goals: your habits.

Think about it. We all know what to do. Eating vegetables is not a secret. The benefits of exercise aren't exactly breaking news. Most of us have figured out that water is a healthier choice than a Wildberry Cooler. It's not that we don't know what to do. We just don't know how to make ourselves do it. Consistently. Automatically.

In this book, I'm inviting you to get off that roller coaster of highs ("I'm really doing it now! This is totally my thing!") to lows ("I suck. I'll never be a fit person and I should probably just accept it".) Instead, I want you to come ride the merry-go-round of healthy, repeatable habits. A merry-go-round where you basically repeat the same stuff day in and day out. There are highs and lows, but it's just the horse bobbing up and down gently—nothing you are going to lose your lunch over. The merry-go-round is way less exciting, I know. There are no "secrets" or "ground-breaking techniques" that will blow your mind. You won't have that high when all you can talk about are ketones and

how you've found the next big thing. Instead of the thrill (and crash) of the roller coaster, the merry-go-round is generally pleasant, but it doesn't take all your attention. It just keeps going around. You will probably lose interest after a while.

Which is fucking awesome.

I don't know about you, but I've got better things to think about than weighing my food or calculating the calories I burned during a spin class. When you are taking care of your health intuitively and automatically, you can save your precious brain power for shit like running for office, closing the gender wage gap...or just enjoying a damn meal with your family without worrying about "being good" or "following rules." Let me tell you—eating without all that bullshit is so much more delicious.

And that's what I want for you—a delicious quality of life in every way. Because of the healthy habits I'm about to teach you in this book, I now have a body that I'm thrilled with. And not in a fakey-fakey, "I love my tummy because it's a reminder of the fact that my body carried two beautiful kids" type of way but in a "who wants to see a million pictures of me in my bikini?" type of way. But the real gift is a brain that is completely uncluttered with thoughts about "how to lose belly fat fast." It's fucking *rad*.

I certainly didn't start out this way. If you told my twenty-year-old self that I would become a fitness expert, I would have tripped over my platform boots and dropped my cigarette. I am not one of those fitness professionals that came out of the womb doing cartwheels and

swinging a shiny ponytail through life. More of a participation ribbon kind of kid. While other kids were running around the schoolyard, I would have been hiding in a bathroom stall reading *Harriet the Spy*.

As I blossomed into womanhood, I decided that I liked beer, Whoppers with extra mayo, and guys who wore capes and eyeliner (but that's another story). Point being that by the time I hit my late twenties, I was sedentary, puffy, and unhealthy. I felt uncomfortable every time I sat down because my waistband cut into my belly. I'd always be picking my shirt away from me so people wouldn't see my rolls. There was no way I'd wear a bathing suit in front of my friends, no matter how inviting the pool looked. In group photos, I'd always go to the back and try to hide half of my body behind someone else. I was always bigger than my boyfriends in an era where "waif" and "heroin chic" were what was considered hot. (I mean, WTF, right?!)

I know what some of you are thinking: *Cry me some first-world tears*. I'm not saying my life was a Greek tragedy or anything; I've never been obese or faced the kind of discrimination and health problems that obese people face. But I was always thinking: *If only if I could lose ten, twenty pounds, everything would be so much better*. Whenever I'd schedule an upcoming event, I would start to scheme about how I could lose ten pounds before the big day.

So, I tried all these things (familiar, anyone?):

- I tracked my food.
- I ate low fat.

- I did yoga.
- I had meal replacement shakes.
- I didn't eat past 8:00 p.m.
- I skipped breakfast.
- I drank nothing but lemon water with cayenne and maple syrup for ten days.
- I tried diuretic teas to release (ahem) "water weight."
- I made cabbage soup.
- I ran a half marathon.
- I ate nothing but salad.
- I ate nothing but meat and butter and cream because carbs were bad.

And year after year, I got fatter.

Not only fatter, but I was exhausted from all the effort. Worst of all, I was unhappy with my body and mad at myself for not being able to just lose the weight. So I drank too much wine and smoked too many cigarettes. Every time I saw a picture of myself I thought, *That can't be me*. It was impossible that I was that girl in the mirror. And I was so *pissed* at myself for not being able to nip it in the bud. I was smart and generally accomplished... Why wasn't I able to make myself *do this*?! I would punish myself for "being undisciplined" by skipping meals or doing longer workouts. I signed up for a really expensive gym membership with orange slices and fancy lotions in the change rooms because I thought that if it was really expensive that would force me to

go and get my money's worth. (It didn't, by the way. I walked in, felt like the only person there who wasn't already in amazing shape, tried to get a machine to work, and didn't know what I was doing. Walked out. That visit cost me \$300.)

So it wasn't that I wasn't trying. I was trying really hard. And I bet you've tried really hard. It is not your fault if this shit hasn't worked. It's nothing to be ashamed of if you've been caught up in the weight-loss roller coaster. Most importantly, don't you go hatin' on yourself if you think about this stuff too much and you think you should be above it all.

The weight-loss industry marketing cycle is a powerful force that is worth \$66 billion (That's a *B*, y'all. We are talking serious coin here.) And all that weight-loss hype is making us all fatter (and sadder). But the good news is that by picking up this book, you are politely excusing yourself from that \$66 billion party and instead have already starting making a huge shift toward developing healthy habits, mental freedom, and a totally slammin' body.

Imagine this: You wake up with tons of energy. Probably didn't even need the alarm clock. You easily slip into clothes you love and you are totally happy with what you see in the mirror. You spend the day feeling energized, clear-headed, and positive. You can eat anything you want but you automatically choose the healthy food that makes you feel good and satisfied and you never ride that wave between starving and stuffed. The ripple effect of your healthy habits has been fantastic. You are in a better mood for your family, you have more confidence

at work. You feel kind of sexy for the first time in about fifteen years and the effect on your relationship has been...um...how shall we say... fucking hot. Not only that, but your whole family has started to shift their habits along with you. Your kids are better behaved, and your husband has more energy and seems younger. (Ahem. See above re: relationship.) You've got a little extra money in your pocket because you aren't flushing it down the toilet on expensive supplements (literally...you think your pee is naturally that color?). Best of all—you've got all this extra time and brain space that you used to spend tracking your macros and trying to burn off extra calories at the gym. Now you can spend that time hanging out with your girlfriends, starting a business, saving the whales, or whatever the fuck you want to do with your life.

Here's how it's going to go down: In part 1, I'm going to encourage you to "Get Your Head Out of Your Ass." This is the mindset stuff you are going to want to skip, but let me say this in very clear terms: **DON'T FUCKING SKIP IT.** Otherwise, you are screwed. We are going to get totally clear on why you want to lose weight in the first place. (Newsflash: Maybe you actually, um, don't want to lose weight. Maybe this project doesn't even need to happen. #mindblown.)

Then we are going to make sure you understand that it's actually a feeling you are chasing—not a number on the scale. You don't really care about losing twenty pounds—you care about having the feeling

you think you will have when you lose twenty pounds. Maybe you want to feel sexy, or strong, or confident... In any case, that shit is only going to happen if you start practicing that feeling now—at exactly the weight you are at. You heard me. It's Law of Attraction time: if you want to feel good, you've got to focus on feeling good. Roll your eyes if you want, but if you skip this stuff, you are doomed to repeat your old patterns. Just telling you now.

Part 2 is “Just Tell Me What the Fuck to Do to Get Skinny Already,” and this is where we get down to the nitty-gritty of why you haven't been able to sustain any healthy living initiative so far and why this time is going to be different. Expect some smarty-pants research that you can quote at dinner parties if you insist on being that asshole. Then we are going to get into the 7 Habits of Highly Healthy Motherfuckers, so you can stop getting distracted by clickbait bullshit and instead focus on eating your vegetables like a grown-ass woman.

Once you've got your healthy habits down, I'm going to teach you in part 3 “How Not to Be a Big, Fat Quitty McQuitterface.” We'll get super-practical about designing your environment in “The Life-Changing, Magical Art of Getting Your Shit Together” and then get really deep in your self-sabotaging mental muck in the final chapter, “How to Fight the Fuckits.” You know, those moments where you think, *Fuckit, I'll start on Monday?* I've got a solution for that.

Ready to make this the last time you start a healthy living project? Because it's time to reclaim your brilliant brain, your bangin' body, and your delicious life. It's time to get Healthy as Fuck.

*. PART 1 .*

**GET YOUR HEAD  
OUT OF YOUR ASS**



A background of light gray sunburst rays emanating from the center, filling the top half of the page.

. INTRODUCTION .

**SO, YOU WANT TO  
LOSE WEIGHT...**

---

SO. YOU WANT TO LOSE WEIGHT.

That's not even a question—it is pretty much a given these days. There is the assumption that if you don't have a freaking thigh gap, then you should want one. And you are kiiiiind of lazy if you aren't working on it.

Don't get me wrong. As a society we *are* kind of lazy. We move too little. We eat too much crap. There are rising rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes in children, fer fuck's sake. But somewhere in between—

*I can't see my feet/an entire season of Game of Thrones is my idea of a marathon/yes please I would like that super-sized.*

And

*Washboard abs/ultramarathon running/eating an entire banana is my idea of a wild night*

—there is a lot of room for *being normal*. Which is totally healthy.

So just pause for a second and think: What if you decided that you didn't have to lose weight after all?

I know. It's crazy. Just stay with me here.

I know you want to be healthy. If you didn't, you wouldn't have picked up this book. (And if you are seriously out of shape, uncomfortable, facing health issues, and your habits are such that you barely managed to take your hand out of the KFC bucket to open this book, then I am so excited to help you change all that. No judgment. I got you, girl.) But what if you are more in the muffin-top category? The "I've been trying to lose the last ten pounds for the last ten years" category? The truth is that your belly fat is probably totally normal. And healthy. (If you want to double check, I've got a quick assessment at [www.fitfeelsgood.com/book](http://www.fitfeelsgood.com/book).)

I'm guessing you don't like the way it *looks*. That's totally fair. (And in the next chapter, I'll go on to explain why there is nothing shallow or unfeminist about wanting to get fit just because you think it looks hot.) But before you decide to change your habits in the name of hotness (as you will learn to do in this book), it's worth considering that the body ideal you are striving for is probably just a fashion trend that is exaggerated by highly processed and Photoshopped images. Fashions change and so does the ideal body. Imagine if people had subjected themselves to shoulder implants to conform to the shoulder pad rage of the 1980s. Trying to attain a certain look that happens to be popular right now might not be worth the pain in the ass—or the

abs. Even if the coveted thigh gap (or whatever is the latest thing) could be realistically achieved, it's totally possible that a different body type will soon be in favor.

Even in my tender young lifetime (*cough* forty-two years *cough*), body trends have varied wildly. I can remember times when Kim Kardashian's bum would have been an embarrassment. I clearly remember distinct periods of wanting to look:

- diminutive (but top heavy) like Winona Ryder in *Reality Bites*
- gaunt and vulnerable like Kate Moss for Calvin Klein
- powerful and badass like Linda Hamilton in *Terminator*

By the time we all manage to “break the internet” with champagne glasses balanced on our prominent Kardashian butts, the pendulum will swing back toward Twiggy again and we'll all start freaking out about having defined collarbones or something and be incredulous that we ever worried about our butts at all.

The truth is that body trends are as transient and fickle as the butterfly collar or the overplucked eyebrows of the '90s that we all deeply regret. There's nothing wrong with following trends or wanting to look a certain way—I still freaking *love* that Linda Hamilton look—but you've got to make sure it's worth it before you drag yourself through another “Let's get fit now, seriously this time” effort.

Look down at your body right now. Seriously—do it. (Extra credit:

Try to do it with love and no judgment.) These are the simple facts: The body you are looking at right now is the result of:

1. Your genetics
2. Your habits

It's as simple as that.

You can't choose your genetics (obvi). But you can absolutely choose your habits and therefore change your body. Which is what this book is about. And in consciously choosing and creating your habits (rather than defaulting to your norm) you are consciously choosing the body that is right for you. It might not be the body that society thinks you should have. It might not be the body that you had once for about fifteen minutes at the peak of doing some completely unsustainable diet. It *will* be the body that is the result of your genetics and your *chosen* habits that you can cultivate and sustain for life. The habits that actually make you feel good.

Because here's the deal: It's not that hard for most people to move from having an unhealthy amount of body fat to having a healthy body composition. But it might be a serious pain in the ass to go from a normal amount of fat to being super "cut," depending on your genetics. The great news is that *you* get to choose. Not society or fashion trends. In fact, you *must* choose. Or you will be fucking miserable.

Let me give you an example. My awesome and hilarious friend,

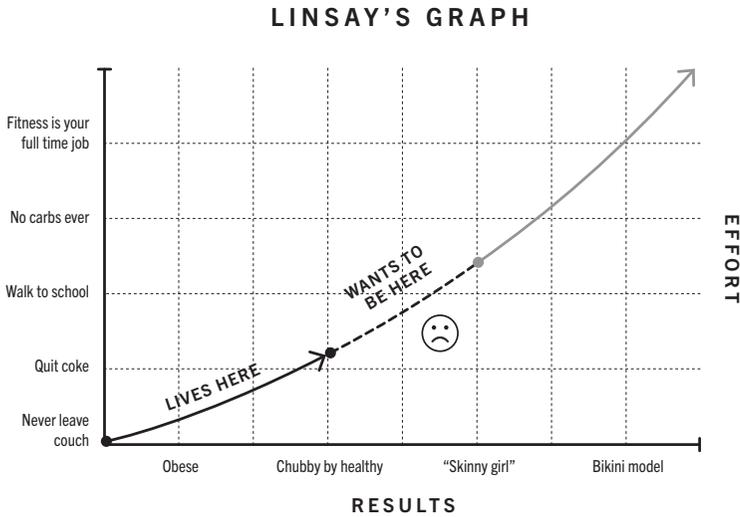
Beth, was obese for most of her life. Her parents were big, and she grew up in a household with unhealthy habits—lots of TV and most dinners were takeout or frozen microwave meals. In her twenties, she decided to stop drinking Coke all day and start walking to school and back. In doing so, she dropped a lot of weight, and although she was still chubby, she could shop at “normal” clothes stores, and she felt much better. She got so many compliments, and she was really happy with her success.

Beth was easily able to maintain her new habits, and her weight normalized at her new set point. After a while, everyone got used to her new weight and stopped mentioning it. Beth noticed that the compliments had dried up and worried if she still looked good. She decided to kick it up a notch, and she went on a strict low-carb diet (even picking the croutons out of her salad). In doing so, the compliments returned, and Beth was able to get down to a weight that she had never dreamed of. She did it. She was one of the “skinny girls.”

But.

She was also kind of fucking miserable. She had to really plan out her food before going anywhere, and it was a pain in the ass. She had gone from being the “fun, outgoing one, who was up for anything” to the one who never accepted a drink and anxiously asked the waiter whether there was any sugar in the glaze on the salmon filet. In short—she was at her dream weight. But she found it fucking HARD.

Below is an example of an effort-to-results graph for Beth:



So, I'm guessing you know what happened next. Beth couldn't sustain her extreme low-carb diet and she reverted back to what was a more natural set point for her: no Coke, daily walking, drinks occasionally, eating the shit out of the croutons on the salad. And, given her genetics, this meant she was no longer "one of the skinny girls."

And I wish I could report that Beth made this choice consciously and is totally at peace with it, but instead, she's like most women in modern society. She starts every week weighing herself and feeling like a failure because she's not at that goal weight she was once. She tells herself, "That's *it!* No more croutons! No more drinks—you can have soda water. It's time to get back to being one of the skinny girls. For real this time." She gives it a shot for a day or two and of course, it proves to be too hard to sustain for long. And so the cycle continues.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Let me tell you another story as a comparison. It's mine. As I've mentioned, I was always a bit chubby. Genetically, I'm lucky—my parents are both lean—but I grew up with the carby convenience habits of a lot of kids in the '70s and '80s: cereal for breakfast, bagel for lunch, pasta for dinner. I was also extremely physically awkward and would have preferred to die than be caught playing sports or, like, "trying" at something. By the time I'd reached my twenties, I had slowly gained enough weight that when I'd go clothes shopping, I'd always reach for the very back of the rack and hope there was something big enough to fit me, even though I'm only five foot four.

I tried everything to lose my belly fat, and I rode that weight-loss roller coaster like I had a season's pass and I wanted to get my money's worth. Eventually I developed one of the 7 Habits of Highly Healthy Motherfuckers that you are about to learn: exercising consistently. In doing so, I got quite a bit fitter, and I was reaching toward the middle of the rack when I went clothes shopping. Maybe sporting a muscle or two. But when I nailed down my nutrition (again, using the habits you are about to learn), that's when my body really started to change. I'd go into a clothing store and the saleswoman would hand me a pair of jeans to try on and I'd look at her incredulously, thinking she'd mistaken me for a twelve-year-old.

And I know that sounds like a happy ending, but, like Beth, I found this "peak skinny" hard to maintain. It required that I measure all my food and avoid any alcohol. Drink my coffee black. I was doing it, but the austerity didn't quite match my sense of who I was.

So I decided to consciously choose a different spot on my graph.

Did you catch that? I made a choice. I didn't "fall off the wagon"; I consciously decided that fitting into the tiny teenager jeans wasn't worth the effort. This is where I think my story deviates from Beth's and from so many other women, who are constantly beating themselves up in the quest for perfection. Instead of relentlessly striving for peak skinny and berating myself for not adhering 100 percent to the strict rules that made it possible, I have decided to love the body that I have when I'm eating well 80 percent of the time. Because that feels like a reasonable effort to me. You might like more freedom than me and want to put less effort into your healthy lifestyle. Or maybe you are happy to be totally hard-core and eat well 90 percent of the time.

The point is to choose your effort consciously—and then your only job is just to be happy with the results. I never look down at my belly (and yes, I have a belly) and think, "Dammit! Why did I screw up at that restaurant when I was out with my friends and have drinks and appetizers?!"

Instead, I look down at my belly and think, *This is the belly I get when I choose to eat well 80 percent of the time. I chose this belly. I could choose to have a six-pack, but that would mean that I would track every calorie and never drink booze. I already know that is not the right choice for me. It makes me less happy. I also know that if I were to eat healthy only 50 percent of the time, my belly would get bigger and I'd feel sluggish and that would make me unhappy. THIS is exactly the belly I have chosen. Now I get to love it.*

The problem, I think, is that most women operate like Beth. Constantly striving for a body that doesn't match the effort that they can give sustainably. And they are constantly beating themselves up about it—rather than just letting that “ideal weight” idea go fuck itself.

So, what if:

- Your body fat is not that unhealthy and totally within the range of normal?
- The specific body type you desire—whether it's a tiny waist, huge shoulders, a big bum, or a thigh gap—is probably just a fashion trend that's likely to go away in a couple of years?
- Getting leaner would be possible...but maybe not worth the effort?

Would you still want to lose weight?

What if...as of this moment...you were no longer hoping to lose a couple of pounds? (I know it's crazy, but stay with me here.)

What kind of space would that free up in your life?

- Would it create room for other meaningful self-improvement projects? What intellectual or spiritual pursuits might be fun to explore if you were finished worrying about what your belly looks like?
- Would you stop punishing yourself with exercise and start participating in movement that you love?

- Would you start focusing on other health metrics—sleep, stress reduction, and maintaining positive social connections?

I'm not trying to dissuade you from wanting to lose weight. On the contrary—my transformation from a chubby, inactive person to someone of above-average fitness who freaking can't wait for bathing suit season has been one of the most rewarding journeys of my life. The ripple effect into every area of my life has been incredible. I'm so excited to share it with you so that you can recreate a life-changing transformation in your own life.

But I want you to start this transformation understanding that *YOU get to decide on* the body you want. And it may be the body you currently have. Or, it may be that you will choose a body with six-pack abs.

Either way, your journey to loving the shit out of your body starts now.

## . CHAPTER 1 .

# DROP THE GUILT AND GET YOUR HOT ABS—EVEN IF YOU HAVE A WOMEN'S STUDIES DEGREE

ONCE UPON A TIME I WAS A FAT ACTIVIST. WHICH IS NOT AN activist who happens to be chubby (although I was that too). A Fat Activist is someone who advocates to change anti-fat attitudes in society. And now I'm a fitness expert who is writing a book about how to lose your fat.

I'm telling you this story because I want to invite you to drop any first-world guilt you might have about wanting to lose your muffin top—and give you total permission to go and be the MILFiest MOFO you want to be.

My activist journey started in 1998, when I was front-row center in my Women's Studies 101 class. Doc boots were ON. The prof put up a projection of this ad from the Body Shop that had a graphic of a chubby Barbie doll with the caption: *There are three billion women who don't look like supermodels and only eight who do.*

It's the kind of thing that people would share on Facebook today and everyone would hear the shit out of it.

The prof asked for our reactions to the ad and you might be surprised to hear we tore it to shreds, but it was a Women's Studies class; that is what you *do*. The prevailing objection to the ad was that the Body Shop was supposedly promoting self-love while profiting from our insecurities by selling us products. If we didn't all want to look like supermodels, then why would we want to buy your peppermint foot cream? This led to a discussion of how The Man is keeping us enslaved by perpetuating such a narrow definition of beauty that we spend most of our lives being distracted by chasing that ideal instead of smashing the patriarchy.

Fast-forward a couple of years and I became a full-on Fat Activist while on tour with a musical theater company. For a year I traveled with a cast of about one hundred singers and dancers in what was basically a petri dish for eating disorders. For example, people would get a part in the show on the condition that they lose a certain amount of weight before the tour started. When we showed up for duty, we were all warned that if we gained weight during the tour, we might lose our role because "you will no longer fit into the costume." To make matters ickier, during the show, management would have chubby people with beautiful voices singing backstage while thin people lip-synced into dead mics onstage. Not only that—we were given no control over our food choices during the tour, which was provided by the company. Cue bulimia epidemic, stage right.

Fresh from my Women's Studies days at university, I staged a bit of a revolt with a few renegade castmates. We advocated for "body blind" casting and wrote letters to the management to insist they rewrite their policies. Within our cast, we attempted to neutralize the word *fat* as a body tissue, not a pejorative. We educated about how obesity is socially constructed and not a personal failing of character or commitment to one's health. We taught that big can be beautiful and that people with lots of body fat are not automatically unattractive, lazy, or unhealthy.

And I still believe all these things. *With all my heart*. I never assume that a person with extra body fat wants to lose weight. I never assume that someone eating a Big Mac combo doesn't know what they're doing. I never compliment someone on having lost weight like that's invariably a good thing.

This is where my mindset was at when I started my fitness company, a company that came as a bit of a surprise. I had started teaching exercise classes after my tour because it was enough like musical theater to satisfy my needs: colorful spandex costumes, cheesy music, everyone looking at *me*—so it met many of my late-twenties essential job criteria. Even though I felt like a little bit of a fitness impostor (it's possible I might have had a smoke on my home from class once or twice during those early transition years), teaching exercise classes helped pay the bills while I wrote and produced documentary plays that were supposed to change the world. After some minor theatrical successes, I had a sudden epiphany that I actually liked teaching my fitness classes more than my theater stuff. A bunch of my clients gathered together

and asked me to start a boot camp, and that's how I found myself one day standing in a park at 6:00 a.m. with a bullhorn wearing a T-shirt with my new company name on the back.

But you see, mine was a *different* kind of fitness company! I called it Fit Feels Good, and we were all about feeling good! We never talked about weight loss! We never posted before-and-after pictures or talked about getting your body ready for summer. But in doing all of this, I was *completely* ignoring a major reason why my clients were hiring me. The truth was that most of my clients wanted to lose weight. As I type these words, more than half of American women are trying to lose weight. And in my insistence on a “feel good,” health-oriented-only narrative, I was effectively silencing them. And I was judging their deepest desires. And I didn't even realize it.

Then I met the Orange People and I changed my mind. You know who I'm talking about. Those people who do bikini or bodybuilding competitions. They live in the grunting section of the gym, get an orange tan, and then flex onstage in a crystal bikini with a blinding, neon smile and a butt harder than marble? The Orange People were those for whom I would have reserved my snottiest eyerolls during my Women's Studies/fat activism days. As such, they were not people I would have met through my social scene. But at this point in my fitness career, I was training and certifying new personal trainers, many of whom were bodybuilders who wanted to pass on their knowledge. And guess what? Umm...they were really knowledgeable.

Sculpting a specific kind of physique and timing it to be in peak

aesthetic shape on a specific day takes some serious scientific chops. It also takes a hell of a lot of work. My (admittedly lovely) bodybuilding students would proudly show me their competition photos and I would gasp at the extent of their transformation. (Because, let me be totally clear: They never looked like that in person. That fitness-magazine-cover glory is a one-day event. Totally impossible to sustain. But I'll pass on some useful information from the Orange People in later chapters because it's crazy interesting stuff.) And so I grudgingly started leaking some admiration toward those Orange People.

And then I began to wonder why their event, the one they trained so diligently for, was any different from any other peak athletic event that we all generally accept as a worthy pursuit. Was it really so much more admirable to run a marathon than to compete in a bikini show? Both require extremely hard training and self-discipline. Neither activity particularly benefits society. Okay, sure, maybe you collected a couple of bucks for the charity run, but let's be honest, that was a bit of an afterthought. I think we can all agree that most people are doing it for themselves and for the sense of accomplishment it provides them.

Which is fucking GREAT.

Can you imagine what would happen if more women just did shit for themselves and for the sense of accomplishment? I don't care what it is. Walk the West Coast Trail. Drop ten pounds and fit into a size 6. If you're squashing those aspirations because you think they're shallow or selfish, you're doing yourself—and society—a huge disservice. And

women do squash their aspirations. All the time. Let's take a look at a typical conversation between two women, one of whom wants to lose weight:

**Jen:** "I'm on a diet! I want to lose ten pounds so I can look like a smokin'-hot MILF at my son's bar mitzvah next month!"

**Michelle:** "What? That's *ridiculous*! You don't need to go on a diet! You're perfectly fine the way you are!"

At a glance, this looks like a perfectly acceptable exchange. Jen's ambition isn't particularly noble or anything. She doesn't need to lose weight for her health. She just wants to look hot. And Michelle is just being a good friend by telling her that she doesn't have to change a thing. My problem with it is that Michelle is (a) stating her opinion about Jen's body, which is kind of irrelevant, and (b) squashing Jen's ambition.

Imagine if we played that game with women who want to make more money.

**Jen:** "I'm starting a side business! I want to make \$100,000 a year so I can treat myself to sweet-ass vacations!"

**Michelle:** "What? That's *ridiculous*! You don't need a side business! You have a totally average income and your vacations are fine the way they are!"

Obviously that would be a total bullshit response that completely

disrespects Jen's ambition and her right to say what she wants for her own fucking vacations.

To expand on the income analogy: I'm not saying that everyone needs a high income. Just like I'm not saying that everyone needs a magazine-cover body. It is perfectly possible to be happy with an average income, and obviously money isn't everything. It is also perfectly possible to be happy with an average body, and looks aren't everything. But if you *want* to make a gazillion dollars and have Tina Turner's legs, then You. Fucking. Go. Girl. Don't let anyone squash your ambition and mansplain to you that "you need to love yourself the way you are."

There's nothing shallow or selfish about wanting to be the absolute best version of yourself, whatever YOU decide that is. In fact, it's the greatest gift you can give to the world. And yet, the idea persists that getting rid of your muffin top is a shallow or selfish pursuit, and that taking care of everybody else first is what makes a woman noble.

**There's nothing self-loving about resigning yourself to a body that you aren't proud of, that doesn't feel good, that doesn't reflect who you want to be in the world.**

Right now my primary mission is running my online transformation program. And I can't tell you how often I'm asked this question when someone is thinking of joining: "Will my family like this food?" Not "Will I like this food?" Not "Will these foods help me feel good from the inside out?"

The irony here is that taking care of yourself, focusing on your dreams, your health, your ambitions actually does end up being for the whole family. Because when Mom gets fit, the whole family gets fit. When Mom gets healthy, she's modeling healthy habits for everyone. And when Mom is happy and feels confident in her own skin, she radiates. And the whole world benefits.

Here's the truth: People register for my online program in order to lose weight. And they do, don't get me wrong: twelve pounds on average. But then guess what happens when those women find themselves residing in a body that feels good to them? When they've built the confidence that comes with setting a hard goal and doing the work to achieve it? Guess what happens when they create solid habits that eliminate the need to spend precious brain bytes counting calories and carbs?

**Wanting to get leaner, stronger, sexy AF isn't the patriarchy getting you down. Feeling shitty about your body is the patriarchy getting you down.**

*A lot of stuff happens.*

When Denise finally dropped below the two-hundred-pound mark after years of struggle, she realized that it's possible to change her life in any way she wanted, and she decided to start an online business. Michelle got

the confidence to start dating again. Diane lost thirty pounds, got off her diabetes medication, and felt amazing when walking the red carpet at her play's Broadway opening. Lisa lost only ten pounds before she

got the courage to quit her shit job and move to her dream cabin in the mountains.

This is *your* life. So don't you dare feel guilty or shallow or unfeminist about wanting to lose your muffin top or sculpting your Kardashian butt or whatever you want to do with your own damn body.

The ultimate act of defiance is to love your body *right now* exactly as it is and then shoot for the stars to make it the most badass Temple of Awesome that *you choose* it to be. If that means a six-minute mile, great. If that means six-pack abs, great. If that means being a bit orange and turning sideways while flexing, great. Our job as woke women is to accept every *body* exactly as it is without judgment (including our own) and to cheer on anyone who is working to improve themselves—whatever that means for them.

## . CHAPTER 2 .

# FIND THE FUCKS

### I'VE GOT GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS.

The good news: getting lean and healthy and staying that way for life is actually pretty simple. The bad news: if you want different results than you're getting now, you are going to have to do something different.

You would think that's a big "Um...duh." But, let me tell you, if there's one thing that people hate, it's changing their behavior. I mean, a lot of people will tell you that they are an easygoing, go-with-the-flow type person, until you ask them to go with a different flow than the one they are used to.

Take the hundreds of people who pay good money for my online transformation program. Usually they will have heard about the program from a friend who got great results, or maybe they read some

review online. In the beginning, they are so excited to get lean and healthy once and for all that they're practically doing jumping jacks in front of their computer. They slap down the investment, thinking this time it's going to be different.

Then they get their grocery lists and menu. They show up in the Facebook group asking if it's okay to adjust the program to accommodate their current habits. "Can I still have toast with peanut butter every morning? Because I really love my toast with peanut butter."

At this point I have to gently ask if their current habits are giving them the results that they want. The disturbingly obvious answer is no. Which totally sucks for them. Because most people are pretty attached to what they are currently doing. To admit that what they are currently doing doesn't work would be to say that they had wasted all that time and effort. It would be like admitting you just spent the past ten years digging for gold and then learning that there was never any gold in them thar hills. You had been given the wrong map. Usually, by the time they get to me, they have been digging for a long time.

Imagine you run half marathons and do yoga and eat a low-carb diet. You've been doing that for so long now that it's part of your identity as a fit person. But the truth is that you aren't seeing the fat loss results you want. What's your natural, totally understandable response? You run more and do more yoga and start eating beef jerky for breakfast and try to kick-start some results around here. But you get more frustrated because you're noticing diminishing returns from all those efforts. The routine that used to work well isn't delivering the

same results, and you are busting your ass just to maintain your fitness, and nothing is improving no matter how hard you try. You start to think: *How much more diligent must I be? How much harder must I work? Is something wrong with my thyroid? Why does God hate me?*

The truth is that when it comes to weight loss, most people are executing Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing and expecting different results. Is it any wonder that so many people feel batshit crazy when it comes to weight loss?

I know you might be working hard already and putting in a solid effort. You might already be logging your hours on the treadmill and ordering the salad dressing on the side and Googling sugar-free, grain-free muffin recipes. But if you aren't getting the results you want, I'll say that that effort is good for only one reason—it satisfies a puritanical work ethic of being industrious and busy. I'm going to argue that you are actually letting yourself off with “easy effort.”

What do I mean by easy effort?

It's a concept that's made the rounds in personal development circles, but I heard it from John Berardi of Precision Nutrition. Easy effort is hard work that feels familiar. Kind of like putting in time at a job you hate. Or playing the martyr in your family by doing all the housework. Putting up with bullshit in your marriage in order to avoid having a confrontation. Taking another online course on how to be a life coach instead of just putting yourself out there and doing it. Running three miles a day because it's what you've always done. All that shit is hard work, but it's the devil you know. It doesn't require a

lot of mental effort. It also requires nothing new from you. It allows you to feel busy but ultimately will never really change anything.

Real effort frightens the bejesus out of you. Easy effort is just a slog you have to get through.

Real effort demands improvement. Easy effort lets you stay basically the same.

Real effort accomplishes something meaningful. Easy effort lets you tick a box on a to-do list.

Change happens when you drop all that distracting busywork and actually try something new. You know, the stuff you've been avoiding because it's too intense? The stuff you probably suck at because you haven't put the required practice time in yet? The stuff you can't manage while you're in autopilot mode so you make yourself too busy so you have a good excuse to not try it? Yeah, that stuff. That's the stuff that would put you on a whole new trajectory.

That's what I'm talking about.

I'm going to ask you to suspend all your "rules of healthy living" that you may have accumulated through years of various diets. It may feel uncomfortable or even scary AF. Instead, we're going to get back to basics and create healthy habits that will last for life.

The act of building new habits and skills will require some effort. You are going to have to use your brain when you don't want to. You'll have to unplug from autopilot. You'll need to surrender to being sucky

at new skills for a little bit. You may have to deal with a little grumping from the people around you who liked things the way they were. But if you want to change your body, you have to do something different. And yes—doing something different can feel hard. But the good news is this: those healthy habits are eventually going to be effortless (I'll tell you how soon, so chill).

Think of anytime you learned a new skill and what a pain in the ass it was when you first started. Think back to that first week at your current job. The new procedures, the names you had to remember, the skills you had to develop. It probably felt a little overwhelming. While I was trying to get my acting career off the ground, I worked briefly as a travel agent. And at the end of those early days at my travel agency I felt like my head was going to explode trying to learn all the computer codes to pull up the fares for the various airlines and then add on our commission and taxes, etc., etc. I'd flop onto my couch at the end of the day with a shaking hand holding a glass of pinot grigio and sob into the phone to my best friend, "I can't do it! I swear to god, travel agents are the smartest people in the world."

While I still hold the utmost respect for the intelligence of travel consultants, I will say that I eventually got the hang of it and it didn't seem like that big a deal. I could quote fares while doodling on a piece of paper and wondering what was going to happen on *Ally McBeal* that night.

The same thing will happen with your Healthy as Fuck journey.

At the beginning, it's going to feel like a lot of work. Your first BBQ without beer might feel like an agony. Your first day without five cups of coffee might feel like moving through ectoplasm. The first time you don't "help" your child finish her ice cream cone might feel like everything is wrong in the world. But you can do it. And after a while it will become absolutely effortless. And just because it's effortless doesn't mean bullshit easy effort. I'm talking about foundational skills that deliver continuous results. But you'll only get there if you want the results badly enough.

You know who the real badasses are when it comes to pushing through the really hard stuff? Who don't fuck around with bullshit effort but constantly make the kind of effort that's actually worth a damn? Little kids.

The other day I was watching my six-year-old son at skating lessons. He would glide a few feet before his feet slipped out from underneath

**When was the last time you pushed yourself through that level of pain in the ass in order to build a new skill?**

him, sending him sprawling onto the ice with zero dignity intact. With minimal drama, he got back up and did it again. And again. And this was the effort-cherry on top of a day at school where he struggled and stammered through every word as he learned how to read. That's working hard for real.

When was the last time you pushed yourself through that level of

pain in the ass in order to build a new skill? Because most of us adults will give a little effort and then give up, saying that we “don’t have the time right now” or “life is too crazy.” It’s usually crazy with busywork. It’s up to you to clear space and energy for the important shit.

It’s understandable: Humans are like any other living organism. We seek pleasure and avoid pain. Which is why every now and then I’ll have a client who says, “I want to lose weight, but I just can’t stop eating cheese and drinking wine every night!” I’ll respond, “If that’s the case, then you don’t really want to lose weight.”

I’m not saying that to be a total bitch. I’m just pointing out that she clearly associates more pleasure with cheese and wine than getting in shape. The problem is, she *thinks* that she wants to lose weight. But in the moment, she *feels* like wine and cheese. And guess what? Your feels are going to win over your brain. Every time.

Did I just tell your life story? Don’t freak out. Girl, I *got* you. We are breaking that cycle now. And remember—I told you that I currently eat healthy about 80 percent of the time. This isn’t about forbidding wine and treats for the rest of your life. I don’t want to live that way, and I’m guessing you don’t want to either. This is about creating automatic healthy habits that allow for those exceptions with minimal impact. When you have automatic daily habits that serve your goals, you can also have a habit of a small Friday-night indulgence and still have a body that is getting fitter. But if you can’t seem to get those consistent daily habits off the ground and you are stuck in a pattern where you just can’t execute the behaviors that you know you

should, I guarantee it's because you associate more pain with changing your current habits than the pleasures of what is on the other side of that change.

That's why I'm not just shoving a bunch of workouts and recipes at you. This is where we collect all the *F*s—all the fucks and all the feels—that are going to drive you forward, over the hump of changing your current behavior so you can create healthy habits for life.

This is where we find your *why*. Because if you're going to choose unsexy delayed gratification over the ever-so-alluring immediate variety, we're going to have to switch a few things up. We're going to have to create some strong new associations.

Ready? As we move through the next section I want you to actually stop reading, close your eyes, and really reflect on this stuff. Even better if you write this stuff down. If you aren't a "Dear Diary" kind of person, I get that you might feel like a doofus, but let me tell you something—it's a lot more doofus-y to spend your whole life wondering why you can't make lasting behavioral change. When you take a moment to close your eyes, feel this shit, and actually write it down, you get mad props for real effort, rather than the easy effort of skimming the page.

First, I want you to connect with the pain of your current situation. **WARNING: THIS WILL SUCK.** That's the point. I want you to *go there* and inject all the feeling you can into it. You know all those feelings and insecurities that you drown in food and booze and distraction and fake news? Yeah. We are going to feel those now. Put on your big-girl panties.

Write down what will happen if things stay exactly the same as they are right now, if you continue on your current trajectory. For example:

*If nothing changes, I'm going to continue to get heavier every year. I will spend the rest of my life feeling uncomfortable every time I sit down because my waistband is cutting into my belly. I will always feel a little out of breath. I will always worry that my kids and my spouse are embarrassed to introduce me to their friends. I will spend every summer feeling sweaty and uncomfortable because I don't want to wear shorts and a tank top. I will start to get health issues that will seriously impact my enjoyment of life and worry my family. I will never have the energy to do the things that I want to do.*

Do you feel seriously yucky yet?

If not, go back and re-do it. Remember—you will naturally avoid pain and move toward pleasure. We need to you to feel the pain of your current situation, or you won't have enough fucks to fix it. Write that shit down in a rainbow diary with a lock if you need to, but do the work.

Now I want you to close your eyes again and take yourself to pleasure island.

You know the hopes and dreams that you don't allow yourself

to really connect to because you've tried losing weight so many times that you can't bear to get your hopes up again and it's easier to believe there is just something incurably wrong with your thyroid or your big bones or your genetics? *GO THERE*. What will life be like if you *nail* this thing? What would be so freaking *awesome* about having exactly the body and energy that you want? What if you were actually the hottest person you know? What would you do with the extra brain space if you never thought about losing weight again? What would you do? What would you wear? How would you feel? For example:

*If I had the body and health of my dreams, my entire life would be fucking amazing. I would wear such awesome outfits and I would feel proud about the way I look. I'd walk out of the house thinking, I hope I run into ALL my ex-boy-friends at the grocery store today. I would be that fun mom who has the energy to run around laughing and playing with the kids and I could just let loose with them and I wouldn't feel like a fool or out of breath. They would love it so much if I actually climbed on the playground equipment and chased after them. I'd have so much more energy to get shit done that I'd basically be superwoman checking shit off my to-do list like no one's business. Garage organized? Book club started? Cat taken to the vet? Check, check, and check, bitches. I could stop being tired all the time and be in*

*a much better mood for my family. We'd fight so much less and actually enjoy each other's company. And don't even get me started on what it would do for my relationship if I started feeling sexier and initiating some midweek lovin'. I might even buy some undies that aren't entirely practical and give my partner the shock of his life. And then I'd strut into work with so much confidence (in my awesome outfit) that my boss would be like, "Wha? Who is this amazingly brilliant leader and why has she been hiding behind her computer all this time?" Basically—I'd be the person I was always meant to be. I could stop hiding my awesome.*

You should keep writing until you feel like you are going to burst with excitement about your hot new bod and your new, amazing, healthy life. You should be mentally picking out bikinis with a big-old smile on your face. You should feel so pumped up about your vibrant health that you want to run out of your house and arm wrestle unsuspecting strangers just so they can feel your POWER. Your new goal should feel not only exciting but absolutely essential.

Keep going until you feel connected to your deepest sense of self and what's important to you. Remember that the difference between going on a diet or trying something for a while and actually changing your life for real is changing your sense of identity. You need to distill your "why" down to the core of your new identity. You've got to OWN this shit.

I want you to finish the end of this sentence: “I am going to push through the initial discomfort of habit change and lose weight once and for all because I am the type of person who...”

For example:

*...because I am the type of person who lives life to its fullest and there’s no way my physicality is going to get in the way of that.*

*...because I am the type of person who models healthy living for my kids and brings my best self to all my relationships.*

*...because I am the type of person who will not tolerate being sick, boring, and tired. I have one life to live, and I want it to be awesome.*

Keep going until you feel like you are going to cry when you read your one sentence about why you are really going to do this right and lose the weight once and for all. This is your “why.” These are your *Fs*.

Now I want you to stay with *that* feeling. That feeling, that identity that you’ve just connected to—that’s the person who is going to skip the wine and cheese. *That* person doesn’t give a *fuck* what’s on Netflix at 11:00 p.m. because they have a workout to get to the next morning. That is the person who is going to push through and actually have the balls to make real change, who won’t get distracted

or placate themselves with easy effort that is actually just avoidance of the real shit.

Once you've found your *Fs*, I want you to hold that vision and ignore everything else. I mean it. Don't let any obstacle steal your attention. It's all about that vision.

Now, I know this sounds like your standard goal-setting vision board shit. But let me tell you about how I saw this work in real life. It happened while I was pretending to die an excruciating death in theater school.

The acting exercise seemed simple: We were told to imagine that we were in a room—and we had to leave the room in absolute silence or we would die. It was up to us actors to come up with some imaginative circumstances around this premise, but the most important part was doing the emotional preparation for the scene. We had to imagine how we would die and really connect to what was at stake—the potential pain, the consequences of getting it wrong. (Ahem. Just as I've encouraged you to do above.) In this case, you have to picture actors huddling in all corners of the room, listening to death sounds on their headphones for proper gruesome inspiration. People were looking at pictures of their family that they wouldn't see again if they made a sound while trying to get out of the room. I burned a little pile of my own hair and smelled it to imagine my flesh burning. Like, we WENT there.

The next part of our emotional preparation was to focus on the objective: why we wanted to live. Which we sort of fuffed off a bit because,

like, who doesn't want to live. Duhhh. Also, we were theater students and it was much more dramatic to wallow in the hair burning, etc.

What happened was this: One by one, we all failed the exercise because we made a noise while trying to escape and therefore "died." Sometimes the actor would scuff the carpet a bit, or their knee would crack as they stood up. But always, *always*, because the door to exit the room creaked. I mean the motherfucker CREAKED. There was no way around it. And every time, the prof would raise his eyebrow, shrug, and say, "You're dead," then mark a big, fat *F* next to our name in his notes.

Eventually we all started to get pissed and protested that the assignment was ridiculous. The fucking door CREAKED. There was no way to escape the room silently! It was physically impossible. To which my unsympathetic prof replied, "If you want to live, the door will not creak." I thought he was a total dick.

Until someone passed the exercise.

I still remember it. Her name was Christine. She was calm from the very start. (Most of us were quivering wrecks by the time we had done our "emotional preparation" for the scene.) She had unwavering focus on the door. When she started to move, there was no question of her joints making a noise—she was floating across the room. Every movement was fluid, economical, and purposeful. She reached that fucking creaky-ass motherfucking door that had been our collective undoing for weeks (causing untold actor hissy fits) and put both her hands on it and slowly, confidently, opened it and escaped.

It was the most beautiful and fascinating thing I had ever seen. We were all gobsmacked.

“That,” my prof said with a steely gaze at the class, “is what happens when you truly want to live.”

Unlike the rest of us drama queens, Christine had spent less time mentally jerking off on grisly imaginations of her own death and instead got Absolutely Fucking Clear on why there was no way she was dying. Dying was not an option. She was going to live.

And this is how you need to be about your new body and health. It’s happening. You are going to make it happen. You are going to be like my son who never asked to quit skating lessons even though he bailed on his face all the time. Because he’s a little boy growing up in Canada. Giving up on skating would be like giving up on walking. It’s just not an option. You are going to be like a little kid learning to read, no matter how frustrating it is to build that skill because reading is fucking rad and there’s no way you are going to grow up illiterate. That’s what it feels like when your objective is part of your identity, when it’s rooted in your deepest values.

Look, I know you skipped that exercise above when I told you to find your *Fs*. When I asked you to really go there and find that statement where you distill all those amazing feelings of why this life change is important to you down to one essential sentence about your identity. But I’m telling you right now that if you don’t find the *Fs* right now, this journey is going to be a short one. You are going to skip to part 2 and take a stab at “the diet,” and then two weeks later you are going

to come down with a case of the Fuckits. And I suspect you've already tried that strategy.

I repeat: Weight loss is actually really simple. There's actually a chance that you will have to do LESS in order to release the last ten pounds, twenty pounds, or whatever you are working on. But in order to get different results you are going to have to do something different.

Shifting your habits is going to challenge you. And I mean *really* challenge you—not just add more easy work that makes you feel like you've checked a box. If you are going to rise to meet that challenge, you are going to need a strong reason why. So if you didn't do the exercise, I suggest you go back and do it now.

Once you are all fired up and so fucking clear on why you are going to live—I mean *really* live, in a body that feels amazing to you—let's just skip to the good part and get you there immediately. Like, now.

## . CHAPTER 3 .

# WOO-WOO ALERT: IT'S ACTUALLY ALL ABOUT HAPPINESS

IF YOU ARE A FELLOW CHILD OF THE '70S OR '80S, YOU MIGHT remember a *Sesame Street* book called *The Monster at the End of This Book*. The story revolves around Grover, who is freaking out because he heard there is a monster at the end of the book. As you turn the pages with your grubby toddler fingers, he gets more and more frantic, with illustrations of him trying to nail the pages together to avoid getting to the end and facing the monster. And, of course, when you get to the end, the monster is him. Cute, adorable, lovable Grover.

It's some deep shit if you think about it.

This may not be what you want to hear, but I'm just gonna go ahead and say that this book ends the same way. Your weight-loss journey ends the same way. Even when you achieve the body of your dreams, there you are. The monster is you. If you have a lack of confidence now,

that same lack of confidence will creep in, even at your goal weight. After the initial rush is over, your brain will find its default settings, and no matter how hot you look in those jeans, you are going to feel pretty much the same way you do now.

And this is where you say, “*What?* That’s bullshit! If I’ve done all the work to get down to my goal weight, I want to feel like Scarlett Johansson!”

Exactly—you want to *feel* like Scarlett Johansson. You don’t actually want to lose weight. Let’s get clear about that. Do you really care about your gravitational pull on the earth? Nah, fuck the earth—you just want to be buff. Why do you want to be buff? Because you want the feeling you think you will have when you are buff. Sexy. Confident. Free. Proud. Happy.

It’s the *feeling* that we really want—not the actual weight loss.

This is one of the most misunderstood things about goals: we usually lose sight of what we truly want. We think we want that sweet job or a million bucks or for George Clooney to give us a massage. But no, we want the feelings we think will ensue—in essence, happiness.

Don’t believe me? Think about it. Take any goal you have and ask yourself *why* enough times, and you will always get to *happiness*.

**Example: I want to win the lottery.**

Why? So I can buy a geothermal biodome and live in the country.

Why? So that I can feel in harmony with nature and hang out with my family.

Why do you want to do that? Because it will make me happy.

**Example: I want to have visible abs.**

Why? Because I want to rock a bikini with pride.

Why? Because I'll feel sexy and proud of myself for doing something really hard.

Why do you want that? Because it will make me happy.

Do you see what I'm getting at? You don't really care about having a flat belly or qualifying for the Boston Marathon or whatever. You care about *feeling* gorgeous, athletic, energized, alive, attractive, light, accomplished. Basically, happy.

What I'm proposing is that you skip right to the end and start working on being happier NOW. Otherwise you are going to get to the end of the book and discover the monster of unhappiness is right there waiting for you—at any weight. You'll get your flat abs, but then find that your upper arms are utterly unsatisfactory. And that is not a cute surprise like it was for Grover at the end of the book. Your lack of fulfillment will ultimately create a monster that will set you up for a lifetime of discontent. There is no way I'm going to let you get to the end of this book and find that monster. That Monster of Dissatisfaction can totally suck it. Starting now.

Which is why we are going to start the most important part of your training program immediately—and that's training your brain to access those happy feelings. Right now. At exactly the weight you're at.

Here's the thing, my love: if you can't be happy now—at exactly the weight you're at today—you won't be happy at your goal weight. It will

be like trying to use a muscle that has atrophied from lack of use. Just like you've got to train your upper body muscles so you can do push-ups, you've got to train your brain to be able to access your sexiness, your confidence, your freedom, your pride, and your happiness.

Now I can practically hear some of you shouting at me: "But, Oonagh, I can't practice feeling happy now—you don't understand. I'm, like, *gross*. I've got this secret cellulite that no one knows about, and my thighs chafe when I walk out of the shower, and my boobs rest on my belly when I sit down, and if anyone ever saw me naked with the lights on they would turn to stone..." Et cetera, et cetera.

First of all, I hate to take away your special snowflake identity, but everything you think is secret and gross about your body is probably totally common and normal. We just never see it.

Side note: This is why I kind of think everyone should be naked all the time. It would be the ultimate smackdown to the shame that so many people have about their *totally normal* bodies.

When I was traveling with that theater company, one of the coolest things we did was tour Scandinavia and stay with local families. Taking a sauna is a part of basic hygiene in Finland, so my host family would often ask if I needed a snack, a drink, or a sauna. Coming from Canada, where a sauna is a fancy-schmancy spa thing, I opted for the sauna when the opportunity first presented itself.

So there I am, sitting in this wooden box with my towel wrapped around me, congratulating myself because the steam is probably good for my pores or something, when much to my horror, the whole Finnish

family comes in to join me—*whipping off their towels* to sit on them, and casually asking if I have any brothers or sisters back at home.

I later grilled my Finnish friend (FF) about this shocking mixed-gender family nudity:

**Me:** “So, you’ve seen your dad...naked?!”

**FF (laughing):** “Of course! He’s my dad! You’ve never seen your dad naked?”

**Me (barfing):** “Of course not!! He’s my *dad!*”

For us, growing up in North America, nudity = sexy times. So, the only nudity we see is in porn (or ads and Instagram feeds that are trying desperately to look like porn). Finnish kids grow up seeing normal body diversity in their peers and parents, and there are studies that indicate it leads to a much healthier body image later on in life. I know my two boys are going to be exposed to my post-breastfeeding boobs until they weep for mercy. And when they get older and realize that nudity actually does = sexy times occasionally, they will be going into those situations with realistic expectations about what human bodies actually look like.

So, whenever you feel shame or embarrassment about your body, know that what you think is hideous and unlovable about your body is probably totally normal and on display at a Finnish sauna somewhere at that very moment.

Second, I’m going to challenge you that it is totally possible for you

to be happy or sexy or whatever you want to feel at exactly the weight you are right now. Let's look for evidence that this is possible.

Have you ever seen anyone who is your size or larger who is sexy? I just Googled “sexy plus-size celebrity,” and now this book is never getting written because I'm just gonna stare at Danielle Brooks and Ashley Graham all day. If it's possible for them to be gloriously hot at their size, why not you at your size?

On the other hand, can you collect any evidence that skinnier doesn't always equal sexier? Have you ever seen anyone who is skinnier than you but holy-shit not-sexy-at-all? I'm thinking about Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons* as my Exhibit A.

The point here is to bust your false beliefs that your weight is what determines your sexiness. Keep researching until you are forced to admit that it's *possible* to be as fat as you are right now and still be sexy as all hell. And that even when someone gets skinnier it doesn't always mean they're sexier. Once you've got overwhelming evidence of diverse bodies also being hot as hell, I'm hoping you might realize that even *you*, with your hideous, probably-totally-normal-and-therefore-glorious body can be sexy and happy right now, at exactly the weight you are. Once you believe it's possible, it's time to start training. Because if you want to feel sexier when you lose weight, you've got to start accessing that feeling *now*.

Throw on your “Eye of The Tiger” confidence mix. (If you don't have a playlist of sick tunes that make you feel like strutting, go to my site and grab mine: [www.fitfeelsgood.com/book](http://www.fitfeelsgood.com/book).) Bust out the clothes

that make you feel incredible at exactly the size you are right now. Dance in your living room. Sing sultry torch songs in the car on the way to Walmart. Wear red lipstick to vacuum the house. Go flex in the mirror and congratulate yourself on being A Powerhouse That's Not to Be Trifled With. Take your first belfie (butt selfie) and send it to someone who deserves to bask in your magnificence.

And yeah, it might feel like total bullshit at first. But that's no different from any muscle you are trying to train. When you first start working out, you are weak as hell. Because you've never asked your body to do anything, your body has wisely conserved the energy and allowed those muscles to atrophy. You also haven't created any neural pathways to do that particular motion, so it feels super awkward.

Then, you start doing push-ups. Your body will say, "Holy shit! Girl is doing push-ups! We need to figure this out neurologically and also strengthen those muscles, so we suck less and get the job done."

The same process applies to feeling sexy, confident, and happy. When you first start practicing these feelings, you will feel awkward and weak, but the only way to get better at it is to train and start practicing. Because, again, the ultimate goal is those feelings.

On the other hand, if you've been training for something your whole life, you will be amazing at it. Let's say you were a trained belly dancer. You would automatically start twitching your hips when music comes on. You wouldn't even have to think about it. Your core muscles would be strong because you would be used to activating those muscles. You would also feel totally confident in a belly top because, like the

physical act of dancing, feeling confident and sexy in a belly top is a neural pattern you'd been practicing your whole life. No big whoop.

The problem is that most people who want to lose weight have been practicing shitty neural pathways of discontent and self-hatred. They are literally training themselves to feel shitty by repeating their negative thoughts over and over again. For example, if you look in the mirror every day and think, *Gross. I hate my muffin top. I look like someone stuffed Jabba the Hut into skinny jeans. Look how it hangs over my pants. I need to cover that shit up. I would be so happy if I didn't have a muffin top*, then here's what I can guarantee you: You won't be happy when the muffin top goes. Because you haven't been practicing being happy. You've never looked in the mirror and found something positive to think. Your brain hasn't built those neural pathways. How could it even know where to begin thinking positive thoughts? It would be like expecting your muscles to do a full pull-up when you've never even carried your own groceries.

If you continue to focus on negative thoughts and somehow managed to lose your muffin top, you will look at your new body in the mirror and think, *I'll be happy when my thighs don't touch*. Or *Look at all that gross, loose skin. I should look into surgery*.

And here's the other thing—you probably *won't* lose your muffin top if you are looking in the mirror and thinking, *Ugh, I hate my muffin top*. It will probably just get bigger.

Because that kind of self-hating bullshit *doesn't work*. It has the opposite effect.

A 2017 study from McGill University found that feelings of shame and self-criticism are associated with increased hunger and weight gain. On the other hand, feelings of confidence helped with habit regulation and weight loss. Another study done at Duke University asked women to eat doughnuts quickly. After the doughnuts, some of the women were given messages of self-compassion, telling them not to be hard on themselves for indulging. The other half didn't get any self-love message. Later on, the women were given bowls of candy and invited to eat as much as they wanted. Guess who ate almost three times as much candy? The ones who didn't get the reassurances that it was okay to eat the doughnut.

I know you think that if you play boot-camp sergeant with yourself, you will be able to shame yourself into behaving properly, but negative, self-hating thoughts will lead to negative, self-hating behavior. There is no other outcome. No one ever *hated* themselves into a body they loved. That has never happened.

Remember the pleasure and pain exercise from the last chapter? I had you connect to the emotional pain of your current trajectory in order to change it. But once you've got that emotional fuel, you've got to be 100 percent focused on what you want: the pleasure of having the hot and healthy body you want. Remember the story about the one girl in my theater-school class who focused on her objective of living versus the rest of us who kept focusing on why we didn't want to die? She was the only one that lived. Let me give you a few examples of how this self-love-positive-thinking-woo-woo shit plays out in the real world when a girl is just looking to lose a couple of pounds.

My client Cathy had a beach vacation planned, and it was important to her to look and feel amazing for her big trip. The problem was, she really didn't. She hadn't been on top of her food and nutrition for the past couple of months, and she was feeling it. So, she posted in one of my online groups: "Okay guys, I'm going to try a cleanse this week to get in shape for my trip—wish me luck!"

A few days later she posted: "So much for my cleanse. I just killed a bunch of toast with half a jar of peanut butter. What is wrong with me? I can't believe how much I suck."

Now imagine these two alternate versions for Cathy's inner get-ready-for-vacation monologue:

**Cathy Number 1:** "Oh shit, shit, I screwed up so badly! I can't believe I'm so fat. I've got my trip coming up! How did I let this happen? I suck!"

**Cathy Number 2:** "Even though I'm not at my goal weight yet, I still totally love myself and the body I'm in right now. I'm going to have the best time on my trip. I'm going to make mostly healthy choices with a few indulgences and come back feeling refreshed and ready to smash my fitness goals. I'm so excited for ALL of it!"

Cathy Number 1 is mad and disgusted with herself and feels like she should be punished. Cathy Number 2 is realistic about her body's current condition but still giving herself tons of love, with full confidence

and excitement that she is on her way to achieving her goals. Now you tell me, who is going to have more fun on her trip? Who is going to come home and end up getting ripped and healthy? And who is going to end up in the peanut butter again?

Example 2: You are going to a wedding. Your ex will be there. For whatever reason, you've gained fifteen pounds. It's time to put on your dress and it's, um...tight. Like, two sizes too small.

**Internal Monologue Number 1:** "SHIT! Fuckfuckfuckfuck this is too small omg I can't believe I'm so fucking FAT! How did this happen?! It's all those cookies from that bakery on the way home from work. I can't believe I'm such an idiot. Well what am I going to do now? Everyone is going to be talking about how fat I am. Maybe if I wear a blazer over the top, people won't notice. But I will get heatstroke in a blazer. Well, that's the price I pay for allowing myself to get into this condition. That's it. Right after this wedding weekend I'm going on a cleanse, and I'm never eating those cookies again, and I'm only going to have salad all this week. This sucks."

**Internal Monologue Number 2:** "Woah! This dress is tighter than I remember. Well, I guess that's what happens when you discover an awesome new bakery that's on the way home from work... WHOOPSIE DAISY. But actually, it kind of looks sexy in a Kardashian-over-the-top kind of way, and my boobs look AMAZING. I should remember to lean over all the time to show

off—this is by far the best cleavage I’ve ever had. And my legs look amazing in heels. Why don’t I wear heels more often? Could I be that mom that does the grocery shopping in heels...?”

Now, which one of these people is going to have a wicked time at the wedding and be super attractive? Which one is going to end up looking tense and weird and probably cry when the bouquet hits her in the face? Which one is probably going to drop the extra fifteen pounds over the next few months? And which one is going to start a cycle of “cookies to cleansing” and wind up even heavier?

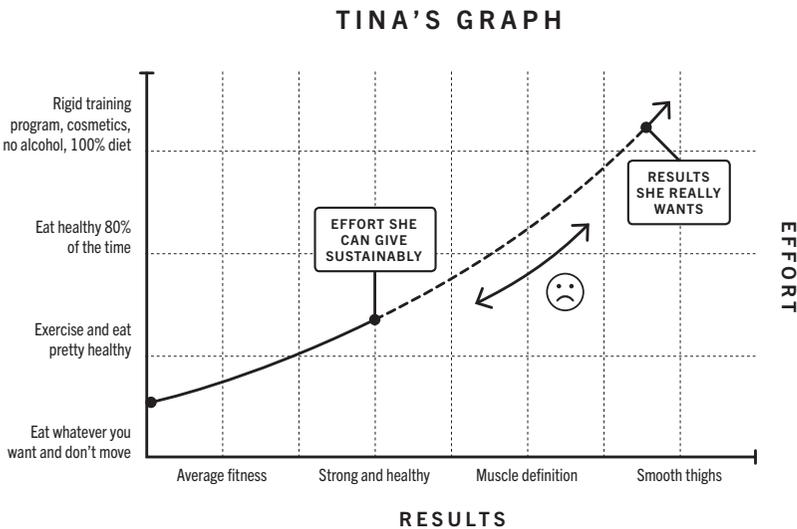
Now, don’t freak out and think you are doomed if you are someone who currently has a pattern of negative thoughts. Next time you catch yourself having harsh thoughts, here is your new pattern interrupter: *Even though I sometimes beat myself up, I accept myself exactly as I am. Besides, the fact that I am now aware of these negative thoughts means that I’m getting sick of this script and it’s time to move on. Yay, me!*

Example 3: I got this question from a client named Tina. “What is the best way to burn more body fat, especially on the front and back of thighs? I eat mostly well, feel very strong, and I’m working out, but how do I get defined muscles and reduce the appearance of cellulite on my thighs?”

I know Tina personally. She isn’t lying when she says that she eats well and works hard and has muscle...and she probably isn’t lying when she says she also has cellulite. (About 90 percent of women do. If Tina lived in Finland, she would know this and wouldn’t expect her thighs to look like marble.)

So, as a personal trainer, I was faced with a decision. My first option: I could tell Tina about a whole bunch of strength-training exercises that will build her quadriceps and hamstrings. Tell her to limit her already healthy eating and reduce all carbs and alcohol to really lean out and get some definition. Tell her about using Preparation H and fake tanning cream to reduce the appearance of cellulite. (Little tip I learned from some of my bodybuilding students when I was teaching the Personal Trainer certification course. Told you those Orange People know their shit.)

So yeah, Tina could achieve her goal, but it would be a lot of work. And I suspect that Tina has enough work to do in her life. Putting in that kind of effort for her thighs would probably be way beyond the effort that Tina could sustainably give. Here's an example of an effort-to-result chart for Tina:



My other option was to ask Tina WHY she wants muscle definition and no cellulite on her thighs.

She'd probably roll her eyes and say "Duh," but if I asked her "Why?" enough times, we'd probably get down to the fact that she wants to tone up her legs and reduce the appearance of cellulite to feel confident and hot in a bathing suit or short shorts.

And who would blame her? Feeling confident and hot RULES. But I would argue that the most efficient way to achieve the goal of feeling confident and hot is simply to practice feeling confident and hot with the thighs you have. Like I said, confidence is the first muscle you need to train.

So here was my suggested training program for Tina:

- Do activities, listen to music, and wear clothes that put you in the state of feeling confident and hot.
- Hang out with people who think that you (and your thighs) are fucking awesome. Ghost on anyone who makes you feel yucky about yourself.
- Challenge yourself to go ahead and wear the short shorts, and every time you hear yourself thinking *Oh no—can they see my cellulite?* try to replace that thought with something like *Everyone is looking at my bella hot legs. You're WELCOME, world.*

Now, I'm not saying this stuff is easy. But on the other hand, neither is a grueling leg-training program combined with no carbs or alcohol. And which one will make you happier in the end?

Here's *my* example of training my confidence and happiness muscle. I have always been self-conscious of my midsection and wanted to challenge myself to bare my midriff with confidence. This is a picture I posted on Instagram right before making my shirtless debut at the gym:



Now, some of you are probably thinking, *Easy for her to practice feeling confident—she is skinny!*

And others might be thinking, *Huh. Her body isn't that hot. I don't know if I would go topless if I were her. Yikes.*

And some of you may be thinking, *Jesus—did she really post that? I can totally see her nipple.*

And to all those thoughts I have two things to say:

1. As I mentioned, I breastfed two kids. Nipples happen. (Finland knows what's up.)
2. What other people might think about my body is their shit. I have no control over it. I'd go bonkers if I tried to anticipate what people might think of my body and adjust it accordingly. And it's not my responsibility. I have one—and only one—responsibility, and that's *my* shit. And by “shit” I mean my thoughts and feelings about my body.

Those thoughts and feelings about my body are the exact muscle that I was working on that day at the gym when I decided to expose my never-seen-before, pale-ass midriff and walk around the gym like some kind of glorious glowworm.

And here's what I did to control my shit for my shirtless debut (about which I was minorly terrified, which is why I had to have that pep talk with myself in the bathroom) and strengthen my feelings of confidence: anytime I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, or heard any of the usual self-criticizing mental chatter, I gave myself a completely outrageous compliment. *They should really start paying me to have a membership here, showing up looking this good. Or I look so hot that people are probably hoping I don't wipe down the equipment after I use it.*

Feel free to get ridiculous here. The point is not to delude yourself into believing that you can quit your job to start a modeling career, but to interrupt your pattern with humor and start to build positive

associations with your body. Those outrageous compliments made me giggle a bit internally and, yes, made me happier and more confident.

Now, does this mean that we just go around doing whatever the fuck we want and as long as we keep the vibes high, we will lose weight and be happy? Not quite. Often when you ask people what would make them happy, the answer involves a corkscrew and a Netflix binge. This is an example of confusing happiness with pleasure.

Here's the difference: Pleasure is a momentary feeling that comes from some external source. The external source could be circumstantial (you just made a sale, that hottie texted you back, you found an awesome parking spot, you got the job) or sensual (you just ate something delicious or tucked into a cozy bed on a cold night). Happiness, on the other hand, is internal and long lasting. It's the difference between the *pleasure* you feel when someone gives you a compliment ("You look like you've lost weight!") versus the *happiness* of feeling so good in your own skin that you don't give a fuck what other people think of your body.

Pleasure is hitting the snooze button on a cold morning. Happiness is feeling yourself getting fitter and stronger and healthier from your morning workouts. Pleasure is sleeping with the hot stripper at your friend's bachelorette party. Happiness is playing footsies with your farty, but very funny, partner.

Now, I'm not knocking pleasure. Pleasure is a very good thing, and too many people are depriving themselves of pleasure for no good reason. I think people should give and get as much pleasure as they can out of life. The problem arises when pleasure comes at the cost of

happiness. In order to have happiness, you have to feel like you are progressing toward your goals in a meaningful way.

So if you are looking for pleasure at the end of a fork or the bottom of a glass, it's time to quit it and find something else that's going to make you feel good in the moment. And I have suggestions coming up for that in part 2. We are about to get super practical on how to apply all this woo-woo shit.

But before we get there, I want to commend you for actually taking the time to Get Your Head Out of Your Ass. There are a whole bunch of people who are going to skip ahead to part 2: “Just Tell Me What the Fuck to Do to Get Skinny Already.” They are in danger of approaching this whole thing like just another diet. They are looking for the book equivalent of the meal replacement shake system.

**The problem arises when pleasure comes at the cost of happiness.**

You are the one who took the time to go deep and get clear on why this weight-loss stuff can be such a head fuck. In doing so, you have a much better chance at building healthy, long-term habits that are gonna make you one healthy and lean, sexy motherfucker.

Before we continue, let's review what you've figured out so far:

1. Do you actually want to lose weight? Is this a priority for you right now? If you do, that's totally awesome, and don't let anyone try to make you feel guilty about it!

2. Do you give enough F's that you will change your habits, even though you might be pretty damn attached to your current habits?
3. Do you understand that it's not really weight loss you want, but the FEELING you think you will have when you lose the weight? And that you need to practice accessing that feeling right now, at exactly the weight you are?

Check, check, check, and check? Awesome. Let's do this.