

SECRETS FROM THE EATING LAB



The Science of Weight Loss, the Myth of Willpower,
and Why You Should Never Diet Again

TRACI MANN PH.D.

CONTENTS

PREFACE ix

PART ONE: WHY DIETS FAIL YOU

CHAPTER 1: Diets Don't Work 3

CHAPTER 2: Why Diets Don't Work:
Biology, Stress, and Forbidden Fruit 17

CHAPTER 3: The Myth of Willpower 33

PART TWO: WHY YOU ARE BETTER OFF WITHOUT THE BATTLE

CHAPTER 4: Diets Are Bad for You 51

CHAPTER 5: Obesity Is Not a Death Sentence 67

PART THREE: HOW TO REACH YOUR LEANEST LIVABLE WEIGHT (NO WILLPOWER REQUIRED)

CHAPTER 6: Lessons from a Lean Pig 89

CHAPTER 7: How to Trick Your Friends into Ignoring a Cookie 105

CHAPTER 8: Don't Call That Apple Healthy 119

CHAPTER 9: Know When to Turn Off Your Brain. . . 135

CHAPTER 10: How to Comfort an Astronaut 147

PART FOUR: YOUR WEIGHT IS REALLY NOT THE POINT

CHAPTER 11: Why to Stop Obsessing and
Be Okay with Your Body. 159

CHAPTER 12: The Real Reasons to Exercise
and Strategies for Sticking with It. 169

FINAL WORDS: Diet Schmiet 187

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 189

NOTES 195

INDEX 243

PREFACE

*“You study self-control? You should study me.
I have great self-control.”*

—NOBODY, EVER

There is no sign on the door of the Health and Eating Lab at the University of Minnesota. That’s my lab, and if I want to learn about people’s eating habits, I can’t let on that I am studying—or even noticing—what people are eating. It would make them self-conscious and stop them from eating the way they normally do. Instead, my students and I tell our research participants that we are studying other things entirely, such as their memory, or their moods, or how they communicate with their friends. But being the hospitable people we are, we just happen to offer them some snacks while we study them. They have no idea that it’s what they do with those snacks that we’re really studying.

For more than twenty years, I have been doing research on eating, both with sneaky studies in my eating lab on campus, and in that other eating lab known as “the real world,” where I have studied dieters going about their normal daily routines, kids eating in school cafeterias, visitors to the annual feeding frenzy that is the Minnesota State Fair, and even astronauts on the International Space Station. Much to my surprise, I’ve learned that nearly everything I thought was true about eating was false, including

the three pillars of the commercial diet industry: that diets work, that dieting is good for you, and that obesity is deadly. The truth is that diets do not work and may be bad for you, and obesity is not going to kill you. I also learned that despite what most people assume, a lack of self-control is not why people become fat and “harnessing” willpower is not the way to become thin.

Along the way I’ve also learned that many people have a vested interest in all of us believing those things are true. The obesity research community, in particular, is not delighted that my students and I dare to question their three sacred cows. I’ve had a well-known diet researcher publicly accuse my young graduate student of doing a disservice to the field by suggesting that diets don’t lead to long-term weight loss. I’ve gotten such vitriolic reviews of manuscripts that journal editors have called me before sending the reviews to prepare me for what I was about to read. I’ve had journal editors unable to find scholars willing to provide reviews of my work (even negative reviews) out of fear of getting involved in a controversy. And I’ve received lots of hostile and decidedly nonscholarly feedback when I’ve spoken up about these things in the media. Some people discount my research by suggesting I must be a bitter fat person (as if fat people cannot be scientists). One online commenter said I was just looking for an excuse to continue stuffing myself “like a Thanksgiving turkey.”

I’m not obese, but I am a science nerd, obsessed with research methods and data, and the results of my studies don’t lie (or have anything to do with what I weigh). I can’t ignore them and I do not want to, because my research points the way to living a healthy life without suggesting that dieting is the answer. And that way to living a healthier life is what I’ll share with you in this book.

In Part I, I’ll share the research that proves diets don’t lead to long-term weight loss and explain why this is so. If you lost a lot of weight and then gained it back, it is not because you lack

self-control. In fact, I suspect you used more self-control than the people who accuse you of not having any. But it doesn't matter either way. Self-control is not the problem, and harnessing it is not the solution.

In Part II, I will make the case that diets are neither harmless nor necessary for optimal health, and that most people simply should not go on restrictive diets. My argument is based on the scientific criteria doctors use when they decide whether to recommend treatments (such as drugs) to patients for other conditions: Does the treatment work? Is it safe? Does it have side effects? For some reason, people rarely ask these questions before urging everyone to diet, but my students and I asked them, and the answers are clear: no, not necessarily, yes.

I understand that we all have an image in our mind about what we want to weigh. The problem is that for many of us, that image is outside of our biologically set weight range. It is possible to maintain a weight outside that range—a small minority of dieters does—but to do so, you would have to make weight maintenance the central focus of your life, above all others, including your relationships with your family and friends, your work, and your emotional well-being. It would be a life of agonizing self-denial, and for what purpose?

Instead, I suggest we aim to live at the low end of our set weight range, which is our leanest livable weight. At that weight you can be happy and healthy, and you can maintain it without making it your life's work. In Part III we will look at twelve scientifically supported strategies for painlessly getting to that weight and staying there. These strategies don't involve calorie restriction or require willpower, because relying on willpower is foolhardy, and this is not a diet. Remember, I run an eating lab, not a dieting lab.

You won't find this set of strategies elsewhere, because most

of them are based on the research conducted in my lab over the last two decades. Not only will the results of this research surprise you, but I suspect the methods we use in these studies will as well. A rule of thumb in my lab is that if there is a fun way to do a study and a boring way to do a study, we go with the fun way. And as we've learned, there's always a fun way. But rest assured, the methodology we use is rigorous. In fact, the goofier the methods, the more rigorous the study needs to be to get published in leading academic journals, as these studies are.

Finally, once you are effortlessly maintaining your leanest livable weight, in Part IV I'll urge you to forget about the numbers on the scale and get on with your life. That means you need to forget about other people's weight, too. Rebel against our weight-obsessed culture by fighting weight stigma, and shift the focus to your health and well-being instead of your weight. I'll introduce you to the reasonable—yet oddly unnoticed—notion that doing healthy things is healthy, whether or not they make you model-thin. Let's get started.

SECRETS FROM THE EATING LAB



The Science of Weight Loss, the Myth of Willpower,
and Why You Should Never Diet Again

TRACI MANN PH.D.

Order your Copy Today!

[AMAZON](#)

[BARNES & NOBLE](#)

[INDIEBOUND](#)

[BOOKSAMILLION](#)

[ITUNES/APPLE](#)

[KOBO](#)

[HARPERCOLLINS](#)

This book is written as a source of information only. The information contained in this book should by no means be considered a substitute for the advice of a qualified medical professional, who should always be consulted before beginning any new diet, exercise, or other health program. All efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this book as of the date published. The author and the publisher expressly disclaim responsibility for any adverse effects arising from the use or application of the information contained herein.

SECRETS FROM THE EATING LAB. Copyright © 2015 by Traci Mann. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail the Special Markets Department at SPsales@harpercollins.com.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by William Ruoto

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mann, Traci.

Secrets from the eating lab : the science of weight loss, the myth of willpower, and why you should never diet again / Traci Mann, PhD.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-06-232923-3 (hardback)

1. Reducing diets—Social aspects. 2. Reducing diets—Psychological aspects. 3. Weight loss—Social aspects. 4. Weight loss—Psychological aspects. I. Title.

RM222.2.M3257 2015

613.2'5—dc23

2014049872

15 16 17 18 19 OV/RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1