

CHAPTER 1

Yes, Your Body Can Be Perfect

Quick quiz!

BODY FAT IS DISTRIBUTED DIFFERENTLY AMONG WOMEN BECAUSE OF . . .

- a. Genetics**
- b. Dieting history**
- c. All of the above**
- d. I don't know . . . and I really hate quizzes**

The correct answer is “c.” (We will ignore those of you who chose “d.”)

You only need to take a quick look around the gym to appreciate that women's bodies naturally come in many different shapes. Why? A woman's shape is dependent on where she stores her body fat—a phenomenon largely dependent on genetics. If your mother had big boobs and thick hips, you might be programmed the same way. If Grandma Rosalita was all paunch, a Buddha belly could be your natural tendency, too.

One relevant aspect of your genes is your ethnic background, which large population studies suggest plays a big role in body fat distribution. For instance, one study in the journal *Human Biology* found that women of Mexican American ethnicity tend to carry more abdominal fat, compared with women of European Caucasian heritage. So that's one explanation why your tall, leggy Minnesotan

co-worker whose ancestors came from Sweden is likely to have a different body type than your friend whose South American roots make her shorter and more voluptuous.

Your hormonal profile is also linked to your genetic makeup, and it causes your body to keep fat rather than lose it. A 1995 University of Texas study has shown that high estrogen levels may be linked to bigger thighs, while an overabundance of either cortisol or insulin can cause weight gain around the stomach.

Warning! Hormonal differences may help explain why your body stores fat in a particular pattern, but we're certainly not recommending that you buy the latest "hormonal" fat-loss supplement targeted at reducing your estrogen or cortisol levels. There just isn't enough evidence yet that it's a good idea to manipulate your hormones to lose weight or influence where your body stores fat.

There's nothing you can do about genetic factors just yet (though we're rooting for you, Modern Science!), but you *can* manage what those genes have given you. You can control your body fat distribution naturally and safely by making wiser food choices and doing the right exercises for your body type. Here's where answer "b" comes in: You can modify how you live and what you eat. You can recognize what contributes to your fat storage areas. And you can learn to kick ass with what nature gave you. We're going to show you how to do that in this book.

The Obnoxious Party Guest: First to Arrive, Last to Leave

Where you store fat matters not just because of how it makes you look but also because it controls how you lose weight. The Golden Rule of Weight Loss: Where you put on fat first is where you will lose it last. So if you first started noticing a small bulge around your middle, don't expect to kiss that tummy good-bye in a week. Your arms and legs will probably slim down first, no matter how many crunches you do.

The point: There's no such thing as "spot reduction." Barring drastic interventions such as liposuction, you cannot choose where your body will lose fat first, regardless of how much you exercise a specific muscle group. All the leg lifts in the world can never transform J.Lo's curvaceous backside into Paris Hilton's skinny little booty. (Not that we hear Marc Anthony complaining.)

That said, your food and exercise choices have a big impact. For instance, if your tribe has been cursed by thunder thighs since the Paleolithic era, sitting at a desk all day is almost certainly going to make the situation worse. And if you binge on "low-fat" baked

goods, you're kidding yourself. The extra calories will still increase your overall body fat, leaving you with a muffin top regardless of whether you were genetically meant to have one. Here's the truth: Exercising too little and eating too much—even if the food is “low fat” or “low carb”—will cause you to put on body fat.

Another theory suggests that body shape may be related to fluctuations in body weight. A yo-yo dieter whose weight dramatically shifts up and down may be inadvertently causing a redistribution of body fat to her upper body, regardless of her pre-yo-yo body shape. One Austrian study from the Medical University of Graz showed that yo-yo dieters have more fat in their upper bodies and thinner legs than women who haven't dieted as frequently.

A Few Words about Fruit (Though, Curiously, Not about Eating It)

You probably already know the most common way that body shapes are categorized: fruit. If most of your body fat is found below your hips and on your butt and thighs, for example, you're a “pear” because you are heavier on the bottom than on the top. A Pear often has cellulite on her lower abdominal region and legs, while her upper body is relatively slim. When a Pear gains 5 pounds, at least 4 of those are found below her waist.

An “apple,” on the other hand, has a rounder appearance, with more fullness to the top. Most of her body fat can be found around her waist and midsection. An Apple usually has a wide torso with a fullness to her breasts, waist, and upper back. An apple-shaped woman likely has slim thighs and a flat bottom. When she gains 5 pounds, at least 4 of them go to her belly.

If your body doesn't look quite like either a Pear or an Apple type, you may be an “avocado.” When you gain 5 pounds, they're distributed equally between your belly and your butt. Avocados may vary when it comes to the size of their thighs and breasts, but in general, they usually are capable of attaining the slim and trim “athletic body type.” And when you get to that point, we'll start calling you a Banana.

Your basic body shape will dictate how you look even after you lose weight. An Apple can't turn into a Pear. Whatever your shape, though, the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet* will definitely tighten up your body and reduce your overall body fat. This will reduce the areas of your body that make you resemble an Apple, Pear, or Avocado because your body will be in its leanest form, with proportions evened out to more closely resemble that Banana appeal. Apples will be able to look down and see their feet without a protruding

bust and tummy blocking the view. Pears will slim their thighs. Avocados will melt off fat everywhere evenly.

What Kind of Fruit Are You?

Two easy ways to tell (and no quizzes!):

Step #1: Look in the mirror.

Step #2: Take your waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). Wrap a flexible measuring tape around your waist, right at your belly button. Then, measure around your hips at the largest part of your butt. Divide your waist measurement by your hip measurement. If this ratio is less than 0.80, you're a Pear. If it's above 0.85, you're an Apple. If it's in between, you're an Avocado.

Her Perfect Body

WHO: YVONNE B.

WHAT: THE WOMEN'S HEALTH PERFECT BODY DIET PUT AN END TO HER YO-YO DIETING

In the past 4 years, Yvonne B.'s weight has gone up and down like an elevator, from 138 to 98 pounds, from 115 to 103 pounds, from 125 to 109 pounds, from 120 to 115. "I believe that my yo-yo dieting has caused me to gain stubborn belly fat that I'm having a really hard time losing," she says. At 31 years old, she's been frustrated by her inability to whittle her middle back to the awesomeness she was able to achieve in her twenties. "I figure part of it is aging. Part of it is hormones—I had issues with missing my period for over a year. And, of course, part of it is stress and lifestyle—I am much more stressed and my life is much busier and less conducive to strict training/dieting. Whatever the excuse, it's friggin' frustrating!"

But the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet* is teaching Yvonne about making good food choices for her body type. "I'm not crash dieting anymore or trying the newest fat-loss product that I see advertised." By eating better foods more often, she's finally seeing her weight and belly fat decreasing.

And a Banana's waist-hip ratio is also between 0.80 and 0.85, but total body fat and weight are much lower than an Avocado's.

Your Fruit, Your Strategy

On the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet*, your natural body type helps determine what type of diet you follow and what kind of exercise you do. We'll get into details in later chapters, but here's a quick overview of what works best for each body shape.

APPLES

Overall strategy: Increase the musculature of your legs and buttocks while slimming down your midsection.

Diet: A 2006 study from the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire, in Coventry, UK, shows that women with large waist-to-hip ratios, such as Apples, lose more weight and the most abdominal fat when their diets are low in carbohydrates and higher in protein and fat. As you'll learn in Chapter 5, high-fiber, low-carb foods such as green vegetables and certain fruits (including berries and, appropriately enough, apples) are usually the best carb choices for Apples because they are digested more slowly. Good fats and quality protein are also important so that the processing of carbs, and their subsequent conversion into blood glucose, is reduced to a slower pace, preventing the storage of body fat around your middle.

Apples who tend to have higher cortisol and insulin levels can control this by eating more frequent, smaller meals. As we mentioned earlier, cortisol can cause weight gain around the stomach, and this hormone is released in increased amounts when you go too long between meals. Don't worry about how long is too long—on the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet*, you'll eat five or six times a day, so your next meal or snack is never too far off. Insulin is produced when you eat lots of simple carbohydrates (think big plates of pasta) or when you eat carbs without protein and fat (think pasta with fat-free tomato sauce and no meat or soy). A simple food challenge in Chapter 5 will help you determine whether you indeed have typical Apple hormone responses to carbs. Based upon the results of those tests, you will determine which of the book's two meal plans you should follow.

Exercise: A is for Apple—and also for aerobic exercise, such as biking and brisk walking, which you should do to build muscle in your lower body. Thirty minutes or more daily is

the easiest way to lose fat. Also do resistance training to shape up leg muscles and create a higher, rounder butt. Chapter 13 features an exercise plan designed specifically for Apples.

PEARS

Overall strategy: Build the muscles in your upper body, creating the illusion that your bottom half is smaller.

Diet: A Pear generally stores less body fat when her diet is an even balance of protein, carbohydrates, and fats. Her lower-body fat cells will store dietary fat as it's consumed, making problem areas even worse. So eat lower-fat—but not fat-free—foods.

Hormonally, Pears may have relatively higher estrogen levels, compared with Apples, which means you have to be careful not to increase those levels even more with the choices you make. Birth control pills and foods containing phytoestrogens might be causing your estrogen levels to be higher than natural. Problem foods include soy and cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts. Limit your intake of soy and crucifers to no more than three servings per week.

Pears, too, will take the food tests in Chapter 5 to ascertain which of the book's two meal plans is appropriate for them.

Exercise: Concentrate on resistance training that targets the upper body. Hill walking, running, and full-body pushups are also great for Pears to strengthen their bones and define their muscles, while creating the image of a smaller lower body. Cut down on weight-training exercises for the lower body, to prevent it from becoming any larger. In Chapter 14 you'll find an exercise program tailored to Pears.

AVOCADOS

Overall strategy: Increase your musculature and decrease fat in all areas.

Diet: When it comes to how the body responds to food, Avocados are less predictable than Pears and Apples. Some Avocados do better with a diet containing an even distribution of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins, while others lose more body fat if their meals contain fewer carbohydrates. To find out whether you need to keep your guacamole away from the chips, assess how well you tolerate carbs by performing the food challenge in Chapter 5. Then adjust your carbs up or down depending on your sensitivity.

Exercise: The best resistance training for you is an all-over plan with full-body movements such as deadlifts, and the best cardio is higher-intensity interval training (running

sprints on the treadmill or track) for the most fat burning possible. An Avocado-friendly workout program is the focus of Chapter 15.

Get Off the Diet Roller Coaster

We hear veteran dieters muttering under their breath: *It doesn't matter if I'm an apple, pear, avocado, or kumquat—I just can't seem to keep weight off once I lose it.*

There might be a physiological reason for that. A 2007 study in the journal *Appetite* shows that women who are overly concerned about their body image and food choices burn calories slower than women who have never dieted or been concerned about food choices. Constant dieting slows your metabolism over time. If your body is running fine on a low calorie level, it has learned to use calories slowly instead of burning them quickly, making it harder to lose weight, no matter how few calories you take in.

I'm Already a Banana

Really? Congratulations. Frankly, Bananas really shouldn't be dieting at all. Instead, you need to learn how to create balanced meals and eat them often to hold on to your athletic shape forever. When exercising, Bananas need to focus on resistance training to build muscle all over, while limiting the amount of cardio so that muscle gains won't be compromised by excess aerobic activity.

These strategies—conveniently part of the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet!*—will help keep a Banana from turning into another type of fruit. For example, Tracy, a marketing consultant, looked like a Banana until several months ago, when she started to commute an hour to and from work each day. She started to develop what she called chair butt. In the past, if Tracy gained a few pounds, she would find a bit more fat around her belly. However, when her activity level decreased significantly because of her commute, her body fat started to accumulate on her butt, thighs, and hips. Her body had transformed into a Pear.

Then Tracy started the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet* and returned to her normal Banana shape.

Depressed? Don't be. If you are a constant dieter, the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet* will teach you how to eat *more* to weigh *less*.

A Final Word

Those are the basics of the *Women's Health Perfect Body Diet*. The next step is to determine what *your* perfect body will look like and what a realistic weight-loss goal should be. The next chapter will give you clear ideas on how much weight you need to drop and how that will affect the amounts and types of foods you can eat to achieve your perfect body.