



CHAPTER
1

Get Ready for a Flat Belly

It doesn't matter what your personal stumbling blocks are: baby weight, killer cravings, or (say it with me) "getting older." Belly fat is *not* your destiny. I am delighted to tell you that you can, and will, get rid of it. *Prevention* has found a way to target belly fat that is healthy, real, long-lasting, and works for everyone.

Before we get started, I think it's important to do a "gut check." Chances are, if you've plunked down cold, hard cash for a book called *Flat Belly Diet*, you may wish you had someone else's belly, or wish you had your own belly—from 20 years ago.

I want to ask you to change your thinking. Be kind to your belly. No matter how flat or round, jiggly or rock-hard—it's yours, and it's powerful. It's probably the center of some of your most profound memories. Think about it . . . the laughter you've shared, the romantic dinners you've

had, the butterflies you've felt, the children you may have carried. All these set up house in—yes—your belly. And for that, it deserves your respect. Your appreciation. And more than a little love and kindness . . . even when you're struggling to button your jeans.

How do I feel about my belly?

I consider it my core strength, and I love to feel it move, twist, support me as I go through life's business. It's where food (one of life's greatest pleasures, yes?) touches down, and there are few things as peaceful for me as that not-stuffed-not-hungry-but-just-full feeling. It's also my meditative center, and I sense the calm overtaking me when I fill my middle with deep breaths. Then, of course, there's the role it played in my pregnancy with twins. Anything willing to expand to host two precious, growing, kicking girls earns a special place in my heart for all time.

But the belly betrays. If I'm puffy the morning after a sushi dinner, that's where my outfit feels tight. If PMS strikes, my belly moans and groans. When I gain five pounds, that's where it shows. And, of course, when I go to take those five pounds off, that's where they stay.

One of the best things about being editor-in-chief of *Prevention* is hearing from all of you and learning—clearly and quickly—that I am not alone in my love/hate affair with this fascinating, troublesome part of the body. Many of you have told me that when look at yourself in the mirror, you overlook your familiar, beautiful features, the favorite nuances of your physique. Instead, your eye travels directly to the areas where your fat resides. And for most of us, that's the belly.

For countless reasons that I will outline throughout this book, the belly starts letting us down around age 40. Sometime between our 35th and 55th birthdays (some earlier, some later and some, God willing, never) the

But my vision for this Flat Belly Diet went beyond food. I know that any successful diet acknowledges that we eat for emotional reasons as well as physical ones. Not only does the Flat Belly Diet deliver a healthy, satisfying way of eating—one that will rid your body of fat in the place you told us you want to slim down most—but it will teach you how to *want* to eat this way forever. The mental tricks, tips, and strategies are culled from the latest research and are designed to inspire you, motivate you, and set you up for a better relationship with food for the rest of your life!

Belly Fat Defined

When I toss around the words “belly fat,” I’m actually talking about two different types: *subcutaneous* and *visceral*. **Subcutaneous fat** is best, though perhaps not most scientifically, defined as the fat that you can see, the “inch you can pinch.” Subcutaneous means “beneath” (*sub*) “the skin” (*cutaneous*), and it’s no big secret that this fat resides all over. In some spots—your thighs, underarms, *tummy, anyone?*—it may be thicker than in others, but for the most part it’s everywhere, even on the soles of your feet. A moderate amount of subcutaneous fat is essential for life—for one thing, it keeps you from freezing to death in the winter. But too much of it causes dissatisfaction with how we look (which studies show leads to even more dangerous health behaviors). And worse: Excessive amounts of subcutaneous fat function as a visible sign of being overweight or obese, which studies show raises your risk for many diseases. But I have some great news: Subcutaneous fat responds immediately to this diet plan.

Before you happily skip pages and move to the diet, let’s talk about the second type of fat—visceral—which is much more dangerous and difficult to lose. **Visceral fat** resides deep within your torso and is sometimes

referred to as “hidden” belly fat. I prefer the term “deadly.” Because of its proximity to your heart and liver, excess visceral fat can increase your risk of all sorts of diseases, from heart disease and diabetes to cancer and Alzheimer’s disease. And the most frustrating part? You can cut calories and exercise religiously and still be left with too much of it.

In fact, the only way to minimize both visceral and subcutaneous fat simultaneously is to eat the right . . . fat.

The New Belly-Flattening Nutrient

At *Prevention*, we’ve been talking about the healthfulness of monounsaturated fat—the kind found in olive oil, nuts, and avocados—for decades. Nearly every issue contains some tip or strategy for getting more in your diet. In fact, we’re on such intimate terms with monounsaturated fatty acids that we have a nickname for them—MUFAs (pronounced MOO-fahs). But it wasn’t until the spring of 2007 that we realized just how amazing these fats are. That was when Spanish researchers published a study in the journal *Diabetes Care* showing that eating a diet rich in MUFAs *can actually help prevent weight gain in your belly*.¹

The researchers looked at the effect of three different diets—one high in saturated fat, another high in carbohydrates, and a third rich in MUFAs—on a group of patients with “abdominal fat distribution” or, in language the rest of us non-scientists can understand, belly fat. All three diets contained the same number of calories, but only the MUFA diet was found to reduce the accumulation of belly fat and, more specifically, visceral belly fat.

Bear in mind: *No other nutrient can do this*. And that’s what makes *Flat Belly Diet* unlike any other diet book you’ve ever read. It’s the only

diet to give MUFAs center stage, to make them an essential part of every single meal. And that means it's the only diet that helps you lose fat in the belly *specifically!* In Chapter 5, you'll read more about MUFAs and their various health benefits, but until then, let's take a broader look at this truly groundbreaking diet plan.

The Flat Belly Diet Program

The Flat Belly Diet is made up of two parts—a *Four-Day Anti-Bloat Jumpstart* and a *Four-Week Eating Plan*. The whole thing together takes just 32 days, which studies show is just enough time to make any dietary change a lifestyle. Then, after you've mastered the program and seen the desired changes in your weight and measurements, I give you the tools to keep your belly flat for life. Even though you may be tempted to follow one part without the other, I want you to start with the Anti-Bloat Jumpstart, then move straight into the four-week eating plan. Here's why:

The Four-Day Anti-Bloat Jumpstart isn't just about beating bloat; it's also extremely important in sparking your emotional commitment to the entire program. The four-day plan includes a prescribed list of foods and drinks you can eat that will help flush out fluid, reduce water retention, and relieve digestive issues like gas and constipation, which can make your belly puff unnecessarily. You'll drink Cynthia's signature Sassy Water and eat healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. When we tested this diet on our group of volunteers, one of the participants lost an amazing *7 pounds and 5 inches in the first 4 days (that's just 96 hours)*.

Losing the bloat isn't just a way to fit into your favorite dress again. It's about feeling confident, powerful, and proud of your body. Dropping even

a few pounds of unnecessary water weight can be thrilling and can give you a major confidence boost—essential for success on any diet plan. Plus, I've added a second element to the four-day plan: a Mind Trick at every meal. These quick and easy healthy-eating triggers will serve as mealtime reminders that you have embarked on a new way of life—a new way of living with and caring for your body.

The Four-Week Eating Plan begins the morning after you complete the Anti-Bloat Jumpstart, and it's the centerpiece of this book. Every day you'll enjoy three super-satisfying 400-calorie meals and one 400-calorie Snack Pack. Each meal and snack contains just the right amount of MUFA to make that belly fat disappear. How simple is that? No calorie counting. No math! We chose the quantity of 1,600 calories per day because that's the precise amount for a woman over 40 of average height, frame, size, and activity level to get down to her ideal body weight, while maintaining a high energy level, healthy immune system, and strong muscles. It also ensures you won't feel tired, cranky, irritable, moody, or hungry.

But because no plan fits all, we've provided two different versions: The first one's perfect for people who have little time to spend in the kitchen. In Chapter 6, you'll find 84 different 400-calorie, MUFA-packed Quick-Fix Meals and 28 different 400-calorie Snack Pack options. Choose three meals and one Snack Pack a day and you're done. In a month, you'll have a flatter belly and I'll have done my job.

Sometimes, however, you'll want a more involved home-cooked meal, whether it's family night, or the weekend, or you're just a good cook who likes to flex her culinary muscles now and then. In Chapter 7, you'll find more than 80 recipes that all provide the requisite number of calories and MUFAs per serving, so they can be swapped in for any of your required three meals a day.

WHAT ABOUT EXERCISE?

I exercise every day, walking 50 minutes as part of my commute. (I also strength-train every weekend and try to fit in a weekly Pilates class or yoga session, too.) And I encourage every *Prevention* reader to make exercise a part of their healthy lifestyle.

To that end, I asked *Prevention's* fitness director, Michele Stanten, to devise the exercise program in Chapter 9 for you to follow as you embark on the Flat Belly Diet. Adding a fitness program to the eating plan and mental strategies will mean faster results (it certainly did for some of our testers). And of course, whether you're trying to lose weight or simply maintain good health, fitness is integral.

But what makes the Flat Belly Diet truly special is that *you don't need to exercise to reap the benefits*. If you do exercise, you will most certainly see results faster, and you will gain secondary benefits like improved cardiovascular health and stronger, more toned muscles. But you can still expect to shrink your belly—and lose both subcutaneous and visceral fat—by simply following the eating plan.

If you do not already exercise regularly, you don't have to start doing so right away. I have always been a big believer in the phrase “Small changes, big results.” To me, it's more important that you do *something* to reduce your belly fat than it is to do *everything*, only to find that too many changes are too overwhelming to maintain. If you do not already have a workout routine, incorporating a new way of eating into your lifestyle may be change enough for the first 32 days.

Like the four-day jumpstart, the four-week plan isn't only about what you eat. It's about how you think. In Chapter 8, you'll be asked to keep a daily journal—a key predictor of success on any diet. Every day, you'll be prompted to reflect on a particular aspect of your relationship to food, your belly, your body, and your goals. I call these reflections *Core Confidences*—not only because your belly lies at the physical center, or core, of your body, but also because your attitude is at the core of your ability to succeed . . . at anything.

Let's review:

The Flat Belly Diet is:

A Four-Day Anti-Bloat Jumpstart, with

A daily dose of Sassy Water and

A Mind Trick at every meal plus

A Four-Week Eating Plan, comprised of

Three 400-calorie meals a day of your choice and

One 400-calorie Snack Pack of your choice and

One daily Core Confidence reflection

An *Optional* Exercise Program, plus

The foundation for a way of life you can continue for decades.

Throughout this book, look for the boxes titled **Did You Know?** and **Fast Facts** to learn more about fat, weight loss, and general health. These are quick tips, strategies, and bits of information that experts and readers tell me are useful. And don't forget to read the entries titled **Notes from Our Nutritionist**. These are written by Cynthia directly to you, sharing her own thoughts and advice about how to achieve success on this amazing program. You'll also find incredible success stories from the women (and men) who participated in our Flat Belly Diet test panel—and have a flatter belly to prove it!

I hope that by the time you finish reading this book and following this plan, you will have fallen in love with good, healthy food . . . and your belly. If there's one thing I realized when I turned 40, it was that maintaining a healthy mind and body were the absolute most important things I could do for myself—and my family. I wish that for all of us.

