

CHAPTER 1



The New Science of Fat Loss

Armed with the latest advancements of the modern world, our society is fighting an all-out war against body fat and fatigue. And we're losing.

Right now, nearly 8 out of 10 Americans are overweight.¹ Millions of good, decent, motivated people are giving all they've got to get in shape and make it last. Huge amounts of time, effort, and hard-earned money are going into this monumental effort. Yet people are falling far short of the results they hope for.²

We've never had more diets. Or more technology, pills, fitness clubs, and advice columns. Yet even when weight loss seems to work, looking "thinner" in the mirror is invariably the result of losing pounds of vital fluids and healthy muscle tissue, not excess body fat. Inside, people's health and vitality are going down the drain. With all that dieting and deprivation, those on highly restrictive programs are effectively getting weaker by the day. Sooner or later they sense this, and their frustration grows.

We need to revise, radically and rapidly, our view of fat loss. We need to enlist the very latest insights from neuroscience, evolutionary biology, metabolic research, and a host of other fields. Instead of watching our weight, we need to get really smart about the most effective ways to burn off excess fat automatically and continually by enlisting the natural "engine" of energy production as any ally, not an afterthought.

The focal point of this revolutionary new approach is an integrated

group of areas in the brain that I've dubbed the Meta-Stat—"meta" as in *metabolic*, and "stat" as in *thermostat*. The Meta-Stat governs fat burning and energy production. It's the key to fat loss that lasts.

MASTER YOUR META-STAT

Right now, you have between 25 and 30 billion fat cells in your body. Each one of those cells is like a little water balloon waiting to be filled up. Except, as you know, it fills not with water but with fat. In fact, unless you take preventive action, each of these fat cells can easily grow to a thousand times its original volume.

And what happens when those fat cells expand to many times their original size? Well, that's the reason for the weight crisis that we're having today. As the fat cells swell, the entire body gets heavier.

The good news is, just as fat cells swell, they can shrink. In fact, that will start to happen as soon as you begin to understand your natural metabolism and support the genius of that system. Because, as you know, you're a lot more than billions of fat cells. In fact, your body is a complete fat-burning, energy-producing, life-generating power plant.

Let me be clear that not all fat cells are bad. Some are amazingly dynamic and are vital to dispatching dozens of potent chemical signals throughout the body, influencing not only metabolism and muscle strength but also cognition and immune function. As University of Pennsylvania endocrinologist Rexford S. Ahima, MD, PhD, points out, certain body fat cells help "coordinate how much we eat, signaling muscles when they can burn fat, and helping control the flow of energy in and out of cells."³ So keep in mind that the goal is not getting rid of all fat. It's getting rid of excess fat, both from your body and from your plate. That's where your Meta-Stat comes in.

Twenty-four hours a day, your Meta-Stat is hot-wiring signals to cellular structures known as mitochondria. The root of the word *mitochondria* is "little bean," and that's literally what they look like—tiny, bean-shaped energy factories inside every one of your body's cells. The mitochondria contain enzymes that convert food into energy for health and healing. And since fat is part of the food that they convert, your mitochondria need to be working fast, safely, and efficiently if you're going to burn off excess body fat.

Every one of the mitochondria are listening to, and responding to, metabolic signals that you give them—or, more likely, fail to give them. Not once a week or once a day, but *every 15 to 30 minutes all day long*.

These little cellular furnaces await your signals. Depending on the signal they get, they'll either fire up—which results in growth and renewal—or dampen down. Good things happen when they're fired up. But when they dampen down, or are even extinguished altogether, the cells shift toward fat storage or fatigue. When that happens, they underproduce energy and lapse into disuse.

Researchers at Northwestern University and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute have confirmed that wide-ranging molecular and behavioral changes can occur when people fail to regularly and consistently “spark” their metabolism,⁴ which in turn prevents the mitochondria from doing their job. “Timing is critical to keep the metabolic symphony in tune,” says study coauthor Joseph Bass, assistant professor of medicine and neurobiology at Northwestern University.

WORKING WITH YOUR BODY, NOT AGAINST IT

So how, exactly, do you keep your mitochondria firing at an optimal level all day long? Why don't you have to strain with heroic intensity to do it? Will your body really cooperate, without telling you to stop, sit down, and take a rest? To answer these questions, let's take a moment to discuss two closely related physiological processes that guarantee the success of the Meta-Stat approach by outsmarting your fat cells' natural tendency to weigh you down and wear you out.

Metabolism. Your body's trillions of cells are designed to function as energy factories. They are programmed to undergo continual chemical reactions that produce a power-generating component called adenosine triphosphate, or ATP. You need ATP to make your heart beat. You also need it to breathe, move, see, hear, think, sleep, sense, and respond productively in every aspect of your life.

Cells regularly produce ATP and constantly use it. According to some estimates, in an average energetic day, the human body makes and burns up over 100 pounds of this fuel. If we ever allow ATP production to fall, it will result in lower energy and a fall-off in fat-burning power. Among the key “ingredients” that aid ATP production are

oxygen from respiration; water and other fluids; dietary proteins, fats, and carbohydrates; and micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals.

ATP doesn't work alone. Other stimulators of metabolism include muscle activity, exposure to natural light, cool temperatures, controlled reactions to stress, a positive mental outlook, and good-quality sleep. (As you'll see, all of these factors are partially or fully under your control, using the MSON Switches.) Studies suggest that a consistently elevated metabolic rate can increase daily calorie expenditure by 17 percent, and sometimes more.⁵

To summarize, the following are the most important factors in determining whether your metabolism is high or low.

- The timing and availability of key metabolism-enhancing nutrients such as protein.
- Your muscle tone. Your muscles are the prime site for fat burning and energy production. If you allow them to weaken—with age, inactivity, or disuse—your metabolism declines. You can, and must, turn this around.
- Your muscle activity from hour to hour and day to day, not just once in a while.
- A number of key metabolic stimulants.

Thermogenesis. The term *thermogenesis* refers to the heat-producing effects of metabolism. It is the inner furnace that keeps our core temperature just right 24 hours a day.⁶

To measure the results of thermogenesis, just stick an oral thermometer in your mouth. There it is—constant heat, hovering around 98.6°F, generated by your cellular activity. But producing that heat, as you know, requires a lot of fuel. That's good news when it comes to burning off excess body fat to provide more body heat and natural energy. If you know how to turn on thermogenesis and keep it on—not just once a day but throughout the day and night—you have a big advantage. Fuel burning remains constant rather than sporadic.

All the benefits that come from thermogenesis, including constant fat burning and increased energy, are under your 24-hour management . . . if you know how to turn on and keep on the appropriate Meta-Stat switches. The four most vital are:

- Physical activity that engages your muscles frequently throughout the day
- A sensible diet of small but frequent meals, with a focus on key thermogenesis-generating nutrients such as high-quality protein⁷
- Cool temperatures that stimulate heat production
- Increased exposure to bright light, either from the sun or from indoor lighting

The more fat you have inside your body, the less thermogenesis you create. In part, that's because body fat seals in heat. Think of wearing a full-body warmup suit 24 hours a day! Your body needs to burn less fat to stay warm. The leaner you become, on the other hand, the more heat your body must produce on a continual basis. It does this by burning off calories from food and from stored fat.

YOUR FOREBEARS AND THEIR META-STATS

Over thousands of years of evolution, our ancestors developed a collage of ways to adapt to the world. While one generation was begetting another, they were also developing exquisitely precise routines. Some of those routines involved action and rest. Others had to do with exposure to light.

Those who survived and thrived were the ones who could maintain their energy. And they had the greatest strength, not only for carrying loads and hurling rocks but also for resisting disease, healing wounds, and coming up with creative solutions when they were in a pickle.

According to Emory University researcher S. Boyd Eaton, MD, over 99.9 percent of our genetic makeup was formed prior to the beginning of the agricultural age—which was 500 generations, or 10,000 years, ago.⁸ In exact terms, the human genome has changed less than 0.02 percent in the past 40,000 years. Our genes and biochemistry are deeply, even stubbornly, designed to function just as they did long ago, based on ancient cycles of feast and famine, energy and survival.⁹

You and I inherited this master system. As part of our genes, we have a complete blueprint for optimal activity and nutrition to be lean, energetic, and fit. Yet, in a matter of a few recent generations, most of us have all but lost our awareness of it or the ability to use it.

Mind you, we're not to blame for a bit of evolutionary regression. When we can ride in a car or bus, we don't need the energy once required to flee from predators or stay one step ahead of other natural risks. Turning lights on and off at will has made us far less conscious of how our bodies respond to light and darkness and has also disrupted the natural wake-and-sleep patterns (controlled by darkness and daylight) that regulated our energy reserves for so many millennia. Food comes from the grocery shelf or fast-food window, not from hunting and foraging, so the ratio of energy expended to energy consumed is way out of whack. And the advent of powerful medicines has even altered our immune systems—definitely extending our life expectancy but also making us rely more on pills than on body-generated disease fighters.

But despite all these changes in lifestyle, the truth is that your metabolic physiology has been designed to respond with exquisite precision to your signals. Your actions still govern the choices those cellular furnaces make. The ancient metabolic programming is still in place. If you try to ignore that programming, you do so at your own peril.

The fact is, you and I are so highly evolved that our minds and bodies have everything we need to influence and control the Meta-Stat. But to do that, we need to use the skills we've been given (as human beings) rather than the conveniences we've been given (as a prospering society).

Your Meta-Stat has been intricately programmed over endless generations to carefully monitor and respond to whatever signals it receives or fails to receive throughout the day. All you need to do is practice using those signals, and then get in the habit of using them!

CHECK OUT THOSE FAMILY PHOTOS

By now you may be wondering whether I'm throwing away all the evidence that many genetic factors are involved in metabolism and body type. Of course I'm not. We're all different from each other in a variety of ways, and obviously my genetic makeup is different from yours. But that said, I urge you to do a quick family study.

A century ago, a much higher percentage of people—indeed, nearly all people—stayed trim and fit despite having relatively meager diets. Their idea of fast food was an occasional hot sausage at the fair-

grounds. Further, they had no modern exercise equipment for strengthening abs or shaping the gluteus maximus.

Now, look back at the pictures of your great-grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Were they overweight? Rarely.

Well, you might argue that they lived at such a pace, with so much deprivation and duress, that they didn't have the luxuries that we now enjoy—laborsaving devices, leisure time, and the chance to relish life's little pleasures. But in your heart of hearts, you know that's not quite right. In fact, I'll bet you're asking yourself right now: What leisure time?

Actually, there's evidence that those folks may have been far less stressed out than we are. And if you get into the old letters, gifts, and mementoes, you may find evidence that they felt, in many ways, more fully alive. They met the pressures and hardships of their daily life in much the same way that we do. But I would suggest—at least from my own reading of their legacy—that many of my ancestors had a greater appreciation for life's simple pleasures and amazing mysteries. Instinctively, they continuously renewed their own vigor. They sensed how much it mattered.

They didn't fume while sitting in traffic or collapse near-comatose for hours in front of a television or computer screen. Actually, they rarely sat for more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. They climbed stairs, carried wood, took short walks, cleaned the dishes by hand, swept the floors, shook out rugs instead of vacuuming them, made meals without a microwave or takeout, did manual work and active daily chores. Interestingly enough, all these regular activities accumulated into a series of effective, small actions that were accomplished every half hour or so, all day long.

There were other obvious differences, of course, between their lifestyle and ours. They slept deeply in cool bedrooms with the windows open, played physical games instead of computer games, used their inventive minds instead of sitting while a media center beamed passive programming at them. I also suspect, very strongly, that they laughed (far more often than most of us do today) at life's simple wonders and don't-miss-it moments.

If you were to plot out a typical day in your ancestors' lives, it would include very simple and brief muscle-toning, lung-expanding, light-stimulating, alertness-boosting actions every 15 to 30 minutes all day long. Not too intense, either, because they noticed whenever some action

blunted their senses or made them tired. Even with streaks of overeating or nonideal diets, they consumed enough nutritious food to keep the Meta-Stat firing, so they stayed trim, active, and amazingly vigorous.

Necessity may have dictated our ancestors' actions, but we can learn volumes from the life patterns that they followed more instinctively. Today's scientists have come to the very interesting conclusion that we need those regular intervals of action as surely as we need to eat, breathe, and sleep. And, with all of their recent research, scientists also know that if we can add high-quality nutrition to this proven pattern of "sparking" metabolism upward, we gain lasting fat loss and energy.

MAKE IT AUTOMATIC: SOME PRACTICE WITH YOUR META-STAT

In the chapters ahead, I'll offer some guidelines for turning on the biochemical "switches" that control your Meta-Stat. I'll also identify the actions and behaviors that drain energy and cause fat gain. For now, I'd like you to get acquainted with your own Meta-Stat by trying the following exercise. It will take just a few minutes; in fact, you can do it right now. The important thing is to give your full attention to the exercise while you're doing it.

Focus for a moment on your posture. Imagine that a magnet is pulling the top of your head, gently lifting your head, neck, and spine, all the way down to your waist. Don't strain. Just let that magnet pull . . . and pull . . . and pull . . . gently lifting the top of your head as high as it will go. After a few moments, you can mentally turn off the magnet. But stay in the natural, upright, aligned position into which it pulled you.

In this position, shift your focus to your breathing. Instead of filling your lungs and raising your shoulders, fill your diaphragm by expanding your belly. To make sure you're doing it right, rest your hand on the soft part of your stomach. As you do, gently expand your diaphragm, pulling air into your lungs. You should feel your hand going out and in with the rhythm of your breath. If you want, close your eyes while you're doing this. Repeat five or six times.

Now stand up, with your feet about shoulder width apart, and place your hands on your hips. Without any effort at all, you should be able to maintain the upright posture that you just practiced. Continue with the

“belly breathing,” just as you’ve been doing. When inhaling, slowly rotate your upper torso to the right without moving your feet. Return to the forward position as you exhale. Repeat, turning your upper torso to the left. Repeat a total of three times to each side, maintaining your breathing throughout. Again, you can close your eyes while you do this if you wish.

That’s all there is to it!

At this point, I won’t go into a lot of detail about the impact of this simple exercise on your nervous, muscular, and cardiovascular systems. Suffice it to say that this simple three-step sequence has turned on numerous switches critical to your Meta-Stat. Note that you didn’t need to set aside a block of time, join a health club, or subscribe to a special weight-loss program. All the necessary resources for activating your Meta-Stat are right there in your own body.

While the effects of exercises like this one—which appear throughout the book as Meta-Stat Starters—will vary, you can feel the switches. They do bring about subtle physical and psychological changes. By consciously turning on a switch, you alter the way you relate to your body and the environment. Of course, a change in metabolism is something that you can’t feel right away. But you’ll become aware of it over time, after repeated and customary use of the switches.

BURNING BRIGHTER

One of the most fascinating, beneficial characteristics of the Meta-Stat switches, or MSOn Switches, is that they have a cumulative effect. If you activate one, you will feel noticeably stronger and sharper. Activate another switch—or even the same one—after 15 to 30 minutes, and the difference will be even more pronounced.

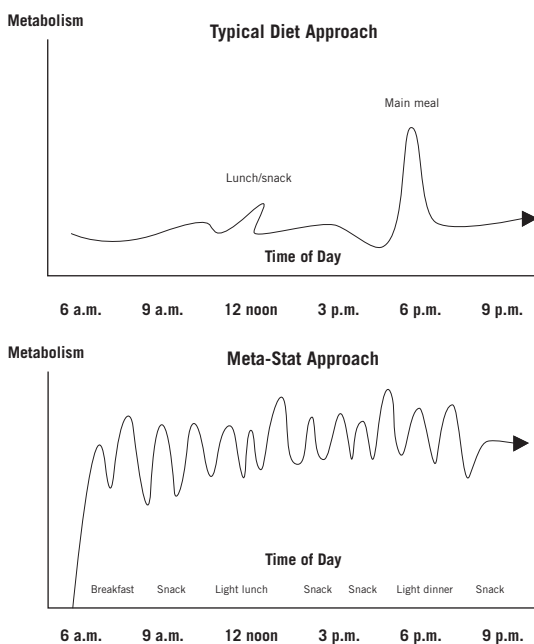
As you get into a pattern of jump-starting your Meta-Stat every 15 to 30 minutes throughout the day, you take your entire physiology to a very high plateau of fat loss and energy maintenance. Yet the effort required to achieve that high level of metabolic function is no more strenuous or stressful than the most normal actions like breathing, stretching, or daydreaming. It is remarkable that such simple actions and behaviors—if they assume a regular pattern—can have such a cumulative power of transformation.

How much benefit do you want from your daily routine of Meta-Stat

Starters? To a large extent, it's up to you. You might think of your Meta-Stat as a biochemical lightbulb that burns off excess fat and generates energy 24 hours a day. Every day, you need to turn it on at regular intervals. Each click of the switch adds a single watt of illumination for fat burning and energy production, so the light—that is, your metabolism—shines brighter and brighter. But you must turn it on for it to work.

META-STAT VERSUS “STATIC”: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

So how does the Meta-Stat approach compare with conventional diet-and-exercise programs? Even the most advanced, “breakthrough” weight-loss programs emphasize tight dietary controls and sometimes intense physical activity. This sort of program may deliver measurable results, at least at first. You actually experience some weight loss. You might even feel better for a while, if the diet is not depriving you of key nutrients and the exercise builds aerobic capacity and strength. Almost inevitably, though, there is a fall-off in results, accompanied by diminished enthusiasm for the program.



Why? If it's a great program, why is sticking with it so difficult? If it shows some immediate results, why do you reach a plateau? If it seems easy at first, why does it require more determination and willpower over time, as days turn into weeks and weeks drag on into months?

As you may already have guessed, it's because these programs do not become automatic, as the Meta-Stat approach does. And they leave out the most crucial factor: timing. They outline what you should eat and how much, they recommend types of exercise and number of repetitions, but they neglect your body's ancient, intricate biological rhythms, and not just the typical sleep-wake cycles. A host of recent research indicates the power and influence of these rhythms, which occur every 60 to 90 minutes during the day.¹⁰

Let's take a closer look at two key timing factors: nutrition and physical activity. Similar patterns apply to other Meta-Stat switches.

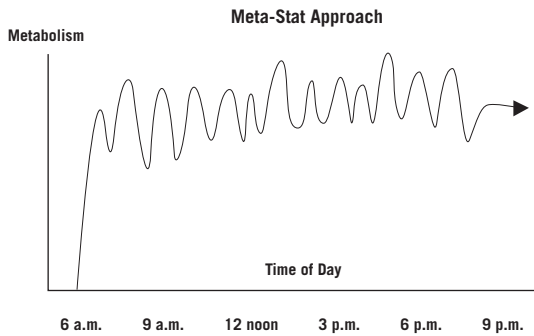
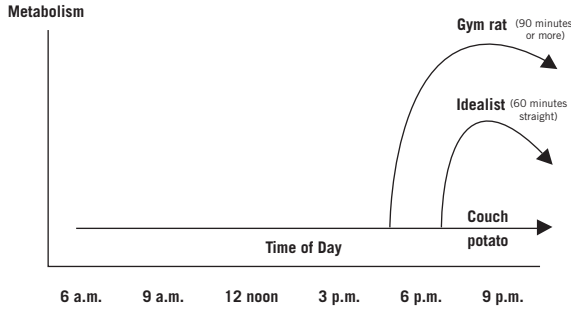
Nutrition and your Meta-Stat. First, if you eat infrequently, as shown in the top diagram on the opposite page, your body slows down fat burning while ramping up fat storage. Similar problems occur when you eat foods that turn off the Meta-Stat. Essentially, your body begins to sense that you are starving (for lack of nutrients in general or lack of the right, energy-producing foods) and "locks" your fat cells so you can put more fat in but you can't get the fat out. On the other hand, when you eat ideal, delicious light meals and snacks at the right times, you dramatically increase your fat burning and energy production all day long, as shown in the bottom diagram.

Physical activity and your Meta-Stat. Similarly, it's simply bad strategy to count on infrequent bouts of (sometimes intense) physical activity. At every gap of more than 15 minutes where there's no "spark" to boost and sustain metabolism, your energy-producing, fat-burning rate plummets. Then it stays at a near-hibernation rate for the day, with only a single upward spike or two. Not nearly enough.

To see the contrast between the Meta-Stat approach and other kinds of weight-loss programs, look at the two diagrams on page 14. In both diagrams, the vertical axis represents metabolism. That's the amount of fuel-burning activity that's going on in your body as you turn food into energy all day long.

In the top diagram, I've charted the metabolism patterns for three

Typical Exercise Approaches



different activity levels. The “couch potato”—well, we’re all familiar with that term. That’s anyone who spends a lot of time sitting down (in the car, on the couch, in front of the computer screen) and very little time moving around. The couch potato doesn’t need much fuel and doesn’t burn much, naturally. So metabolism remains on a day-long plateau.

Compare that daily lifestyle with that of the second person on the chart—the “idealist.” Most likely, this is someone who’s following a traditional weight-loss program. Though daily activities are fairly sedentary—hence, with a low metabolic rate—energy is expended at the end of the day in a burst of conscientious, strenuous activity lasting 30 to 60 minutes.

Also shown in the top chart is the metabolic pattern of the “gym rat”—the person who works out intensively for up to an hour and a half every day. Like the idealist, the gym rat has a concentrated period of strenuous activity, during which a lot of calories are burned. But in many other respects, the balance of the day requires a low level of activity, so metabolism is all but dormant throughout most waking hours.

Skillpower, Not Willpower

Losing fat while maintaining energy could be easier than you think it is. But you will need to make a sequence of specific changes in your daily habits. Many people rely on willpower—doing more of the same, but with greater effort—to make change and stick with it. But willpower works only for a while. The real solution is what I call skillpower.

Simply put, skillpower is the ability to adopt a set of ultrapractical, scientifically sound strategies that are tailored to your own unique needs. These strategies are effective and safe. And they don't require you to list enough New Year's resolutions to rival the length of the US Constitution. When you use skillpower, the results come automatically.

According to more than 50 research studies involving over 30,000 men and women, *effective self-change depends on doing the right things at the right times*.¹¹ It makes little sense to fight fat by going off on a tangent, as diet-only and exercise-only programs do. According to one study, for example, most people who watch their diets are physically inactive, while many exercisers disregard the need to eat a modest-carb, moderate-fat, higher-protein, higher-fiber diet.¹²

Another review of more than 80 research articles indicates that one of the most important elements in successful self-change is perceived control,¹³ a sense that you can take charge of the requisite steps required. According to one leading research team, "People who rely solely upon willpower set themselves up for failure."¹⁴ That's why the Meta-Stat approach adheres to the fundamental principle of "skillpower, not willpower."

Now turn your attention to the bottom chart. This is a graph of day-long metabolism—the key measure of energy—if you take the Meta-Stat approach. Rather than remaining relatively inactive for much of the day, you're constantly jump-starting your metabolism, using the simple, adaptable MSON Switches. You don't need to plan for—or dread!—that ferociously challenging workout at the end of the day. You don't need to count calories or grams of fat or plan your meals with meticulous care to make sure you adhere to a particular program. When your body is in the rhythm of its most favorable pattern, energy production continues all day long, and your "fueling requirements"—small snacks and modest meals—are satisfying rather than restrictive.

DRIVEN BY REWARDS, NOT GUILT

If you have ever followed a restrictive diet, you know what it means to be on a “guilt-driven program.” These programs usually require you to eat certain kinds of foods while severely limiting your intake of others. But what happens if you’re on one of these programs and you eat the “wrong” foods? You’re likely to feel instant remorse. It’s like falling off the wagon. You probably feel as if you’re backsliding or (to repeat an oft-quoted phrase) “getting into bad habits” again.

With the Meta-Stat approach, your outlook is quite different. Food is not something that makes you “put on” or helps you “take off” weight. The Meta-Stat approach emphasizes the bigger picture. I ask you to consider all the factors relevant to your eating habits, such as the timing of meals and snacks, the fluids you drink, and how energized, satisfied, or restful you feel. That way, you can discover your personal preferences for certain eating patterns and types of food. With the Meta-Stat approach, you constantly reward yourself in ways that really count—by taking pleasure in what you eat and by timing your meals and snacks for maximum energy, so you end up feeling healthier, more energetic, and more alive.

Or compare the exercise component of the Meta-Stat approach to that of guilt-based programs. In a guilt-based program, you feel remorse if you skip the health club for a few days, cut short your workout time, or do fewer than usual repetitions. These programs rely on firm discipline and self-denial. Some people start to view themselves as complete failures if they backslide in the slightest way.

With the Meta-Stat approach, there are no stringent measurements, no such thing as backsliding. You are not punishing your body into achieving better performance or chastising yourself for missing an appointment at the gym. Instead, you have a constant range of options, some providing immediate rewards, others benefiting your long-term health and sense of well-being. However you use your personal options to integrate the switches into your lifestyle, you’ll feel the benefits and reap the rewards.

The Meta-Stat approach is rhythmic, instinctive, and natural. It respects your physical and mental requirements for regular sustenance, periodic relaxation, sensory change, and stress release. Your body and mind can fully accommodate the pressures and constraints of any lifestyle. Once you

broaden your range of skills by adopting MSON Switches and the Meta-Stat Starters, creating cycles of relaxation and tension, you have all the resources you need for energy, strength, and weight loss. Your daily cycles become easy and automatic rather than challenging and guilt-making.

With the Meta-Stat approach, stress is not even a factor. In fact, the focus is on stress *relief*, which is far better for your health and longevity. You simply answer your mental and physical needs in the most natural way possible.

START A POSITIVE CHAIN REACTION

One smart new move—something as simple as an extra few seconds of muscle toning here and there throughout the day, sipping some ice water, or eating a small, higher-protein snack instead of going hours until the next meal—can set off a domino effect that ramps up your fat-burning, energy-boosting power, and does it naturally. With a bit of practice, it becomes automatic. Your body's senses will detect a slight dip in energy and prompt you to raise it. In this way, you unconsciously begin to master keeping your Meta-Stat setting on "high."

And it makes lots of scientific sense. As biologist George Land reminded us, every day of our lives, we are either growing or dying.¹⁵ There is no middle ground. "Life is but a mass of habits—practical, emotional, and intellectual . . . systematically organized for our greatness or grief," concurred psychologist and philosopher William James.¹⁶ Can these habits be changed? he was asked. Yes, he replied, we can change these small habits that press us through each day. And then he added that we must recognize that, whether changed or ignored, "these habits bear us irresistibly toward our destiny."

For years now, many of us have been busy attacking fat with well-intended but ultimately ineffective tactics or in a piecemeal fashion that, biochemically speaking, has doomed us to failure. Despite heroic efforts and all the recent popularity of low-carb and no-carb diets, conventional weight-loss programs can actually increase the body's fat-making and fat-storing activities.

In an editorial that appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, F. Xavier Pi-Sunyer, MD, director of the Obesity Research Center at St. Luke's–Roosevelt Hospital in New York City,

sounded the medical alarm, pointing out that nationwide increases in average adult levels of body fat put millions of Americans at increased risk for heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, gout, arthritis, and some forms of cancer.¹⁷ In his words, excess body fat is now at “epidemic” levels in the United States—and being overweight may have as much impact on health as smoking.

So what’s the best way to begin turning things around? With a single choice you can make right now, wherever you are in your weight-loss efforts: Quit trying harder.

Research shows that doing more of the same, only harder—more exercise, more deprivation, more dieting, more willpower, more guilt—isn’t the way to succeed. In fact, it can make the problem even bigger. You become blind to better pathways, and you start accomplishing less and less. Besides, sooner or later, you’re going to reach the point where you just can’t try any harder—where your physical and mental resources are pushed to the breaking point or your spirit wanes. More effort isn’t the answer. It’s time to shift gears and break out of old routines.

