

Chapter I

YOUR WEIGHT IS REALLY NOT YOUR FAULT



EVERYONE HAS ENEMIES. Batman has the Joker. Duke has UNC. Joan Rivers has gravity. You? Sure, your cranky neighbor may slice your perennials when he mows the lawn, and the boss's henchman may boil your blood, but to me, the biggest enemies you face are the profiteering junk-food merchants of the food industry.

In a time-strapped society and in your time-strapped life, these piranhas prey on consumers who need a quick fix—a quick fix of fat, fries, and foods designed to hypnotize you with their taste and stretch you at your waist. As you surely can see at any interstate exit, mall food court, or stretch of commercialized suburbia, we live in a world of fast food. We have a world rich with hot dog vendors, pizza windows, order-at-the-counter restaurants, chain restaurants, and extra-value meals—a world where, even when you want to eat healthy, it sometimes feels impossible to do

so. These places pelt you with chips, suffocate your innards with ice cream, and shoot rapid-fire Goobers straight into your mouth.

But fast food doesn't need to be fat food. Convenient eating doesn't have to mean that fat conveniently claims squatter's rights on your gut. Easy eating doesn't mean greasy eating.

The secret of the Abs Diet's success is that you can follow it no matter where you are. If you just remember to eat the acronym—the ABS DIET POWER 12—you'll stay lean, fit, and healthy no matter where you are. You don't have to fall victim to kitchens that have more grease than a mechanic's fingernails, and you don't have to stop enjoying the taste of food to do so.

You can eat fast.

You can enjoy what you eat.

And you can be free from hunger, deprivation, and culinary boredom.

I want to arm you with the information you need to make smart decisions about eating on the fly or on a Friday family night out. Before I explain the Abs Diet plan and give you hundreds of choices for what to eat no matter what situation you're in, it's important to review your nutritional friends and enemies. You know, there are only a few things that you can do to fundamentally change the way your body's chemicals, hormones, and organs function, but the one major thing that you do that changes your body's internal systems is eat. Ultimately, your health is dictated by the nutrients that travel through your bloodstream once they pass through your Fritos hole. Here's a quick primer on the pitfalls of your nutritional world.

Your Enemies

The Hunger-Booster: High-Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS)

I believe there's one primary reason why many people fail on diets—and why they eat poorly to begin with. They're so damn hungry.

Sound simple? Anatomically, it's a little more complicated. And the complication has come in the form of a little-known but shockingly ubiquitous food additive called High-Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS).

Never heard of HFCS before? Then you'll be even more shocked by this next fact: You, the average American, consume almost 63 pounds of it each year.

Sit and think about that for a moment. Sixty-two pounds of it each year—or about 228 extra calories every day—and you don't even know what it is.

And you're not going to be any happier once you find out: See, up until the 1970s, most sweets were made with simple white sugar. Bad for you, but it was what it was. You sated your sweet tooth, your body absorbed the calories, and you got full pretty fast. But about 3 decades ago, food manufacturers discovered an easier way to make sodas, cereals, yogurts, and some 40,000 more manufactured foods taste sweeter. They developed HFCS, which is derived from corn and is many times cheaper—and sweeter—than simple sugar. Today, HFCS is added to a shocking number of foods, including foods you wouldn't equate with sweeteners: ketchup, pasta sauce, and even crackers. And it's screwing up America's metabolic system.

Mechanically, the system works like this: When you eat any type of carbohydrate (like bread or fruit), your body releases insulin to regulate your body weight—pushing those carb calories into your muscles to be used as energy or storing them for later use. Then, like a shut-off mechanism on a gas pump, it suppresses your appetite. That's the signal that tells your body to stop filling; your tank is full.

The problem is that fructose doesn't stimulate insulin so your body doesn't register it the way it registers simple white sugar. That's why it's possible to see people drink 2-liter bottles of soft drinks in a single sitting. Thirty years ago, that would have been an impossible task, but today, HFCS makes the same number of calories go down and, incredibly, still leaves you hungry for more.

Your muscles still need energy, so you crave more food and more sweets. And so you eat more foods containing HFCS, and the cycle continues. Less energy, more flab. HFCS could well stand for Here's Flab Coming to your Stomach.

You don't need to eliminate this artificial foodstuff from your diet entirely, but you need to ensure your meals don't revolve around it, as many Americans' do. So start checking the food labels: If HFCS is listed first or second on the ingredient list, look at the chart on the nutrition label to see how much sugar the food contains. If it's just a gram or two, it's fine. But if you see a food that has 8 or more grams of sugar, and HFCS is prominent on the list of ingredients, it's a sign that you should leave it on the shelf.

FOODS HIGH IN HFCS OR FRUCTOSE

REPLACE WITH

Regular soft drinks	Unsweetened sparkling water or diet soda
Commercial candy (such as jelly beans)	Chocolate candy (check the label; some chocolate bars have HFCS)
Pancake syrup	Real maple syrup
Frozen yogurt	Ice cream
Fruit-flavored yogurt	Artificially sweetened or sugar-sweetened yogurt
Highly sweetened cereals	Sugar-free or low-sugar cereals
Pasta sauce	Sugar-free pasta sauce

The Artery Hardener: Trans Fat

If HFCS is Bonnie, then trans fat is Clyde, because together, the duo is responsible for some seriously heinous crimes against your body.

First, it's important to know that dietary fats are a little like college bands, minus the long hair and low pants. Some are actually good, and some are unbelievably bad. Trans fats falls into the latter category. Trans fat increases the amount of bad cholesterol in your body, for example, and has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and a weakened immune system.

Scientists have estimated that trans fat contributes to more than 30,000 premature deaths every year.

So what exactly is this stuff? Once again, it's a Frankenstein monster that's come lumbering out of the labs of the food industry.

Trans fat is created by combining vegetable oil (a liquid) with hydrogen to create partially hydrogenated oil, or trans fatty acids. Once infused with hydrogen, liquid vegetable oil turns into a solid at room temperature, becoming what we recognize today as Crisco or margarine.

Trans fats are beloved by the food and restaurant industries for several reasons. Number one, they're cheap. Number two, they can stick around seemingly forever without going bad. (How gross is that?) Number three, you can add them to myriad foods in a way you can't add regular oil—a cookie with vegetable oil in it will ooze all over the supermarket shelf, but one with partially hydrogenated oil in it will stay crisp and tantalizing. So it's no surprise that food marketers, eager to deliver the sensuous flavor and mouth feel of fat to millions of unsuspecting consumers, now add partially hydrogenated oils to all sorts of things—chips, frozen foods, fries, muffins, to name a few.

But think about what trans fats are: Fats that are supposed to be liquid but are turned into solids. Now think about what they do when they get inside you. Instead of melting like they would in their natural state, they try to revert to their waxy, solid nature. Once you understand that heart disease and stroke are caused in part by waxy buildups of fat solids in the circulatory system, it's easy to put two and two together. Turning oils into solids isn't doing us a favor—not by a long run.

The good news is that the U.S. government is finally recognizing the dangers of trans fats. In 2003, food companies were required to list these trans fats for the first time. At least this gives you the power to see the enemy you need to fight (though food companies have several years to phase the new nutritional labels in). In the meantime, use these tactics to reduce your intake of trans fats:

- ▶ Check the ingredient list for “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated.” The higher these ingredients are on the label, the more trans fats they contain (with the exception of processed peanut butter, which contains trace amounts).
- ▶ Decode the food label. For those products that don’t list trans fats, add all the fat grams together that are listed on the label and then subtract that number from the total fat content. The number you’re left with is the estimate for the amount of trans fat.
- ▶ Snack on baked chips or chips fried in peanut oil instead of ones with vegetable shortening (check the ingredient list).
- ▶ Pick high-protein breakfasts like eggs or Canadian bacon instead of waffles. If you have toast, use jelly instead of margarine.
- ▶ At a restaurant, ask what kind of oil the chef uses. You want to hear olive oil—not shortening.
- ▶ When eating dinner out, avoid bread, which may be filled with trans fats. It’s better to pick a baked potato, soup, or a salad.
- ▶ Blot oil from your fries as quickly as possible. A napkin can absorb excess grease.

IF YOU WANT	PICK THIS TRANS FAT-FREE OPTION
Candy bar	Dove dark chocolate bar
Cereal	Kellogg’s Frosted Mini-Wheats or Post Premium Raisin Bran
Cookies	Archway fat-free cookies or Pamela’s Products gourmet cookies
Crackers	Ryvita Multigrain crackers
French fries	McCain 5-Minute Shoestring French Fries
Potato chips	Ruffles Natural sea-salted, reduced-fat chips

The Belly Buster: Saturated Fats

Just the name sounds threatening, doesn't it? Saturated fats, as in they're going to sink into your stomach and saturate your organs with soft little globs of putty. Bleeech!

And the truth is just as gross as you imagine it to be. Your body likes to burn some kinds of fats—polyunsaturated (from vegetables) and monounsaturated (from nuts and seeds) fats—as energy. But your body would rather save saturated fats around your belly to use for future energy in case, I dunno, your plane crashes in the jungles of the Philippines or something. Assuming there's no Bataan Death March in your immediate future, however, your body will continue to hold onto the fat it's stored, and the more you eat, the more you wear. Besides raising cholesterol rates, saturated fats have also been shown to increase your risk for heart disease and some types of cancer.

Saturated fats are found primarily in meats and dairy products. "But wait!" you say. "Aren't meats and dairy products part of the ABS DIET POWER 12?" Yes, and that's why I emphasize lean meats like turkey, chicken, fish, and some cuts of beef and recommend that you look for low-fat dairy products like low-fat milk or low-fat yogurt whenever possible. The trick is to get the most nutrients—muscle-building protein and fat-fighting calcium—with the least amount of saturated fats.

The Energy Sucker: Refined Carbohydrates

Consider the simple wheat stalk: There it stands, soaking up the sun and minding its own business, a single droplet in a vast sea of amber waves. Who'd have thought this humble grain would spark a controversy more complicated than the JFK assassination? And yet, the dietary landscape is wrought by forces arguing grain's place at the American dinner table. On this side, the USDA food guide pyramid, which calls for six to eleven servings of grains a day. And on that side, the Atkins addicts and other no-carb adherents who believe that simple stalk of wheat is evil incarnate.

The truth is . . . well, the truth is in neither corner, but somewhere more towards the middle.

The truth is that the human body can't survive without carbohydrates, because grains—like fruits, vegetables, and other carbs—provide crucial energy to feed the brain, the muscles, and

HOW METABOLISM WORKS—AND HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

Even if you're lying in bed, lounging on the couch, or sitting on the toilet as you're reading this, your body is burning calories. It's burning calories to keep your heart beating, your lungs breathing, your brain dreaming about Cabo San Lucas. . . . Hey, wake up!

That calorie burn I'm referring to is your metabolism, and how high it's revving is what determines whether you're losing fat right now—or gaining it. See, your body burns calories all the time, and it burns them in three different ways. One, you burn them when you eat, simply through the act of digestion (remember, it takes more energy to digest protein than it does carbs). Two, you burn calories by exercise and movement, whether you're running a marathon or just walking down the hall. And the last way you burn calories is when you're at rest; that's called your *basal metabolism*, and it refers to the way your body uses fuel when you're not doing anything. Incredibly enough, this is when the majority of your calories are burned—while you're doing nothing.

That explains, in part, why watching those calories tick away on the treadmill or the exercise bike is an exercise in frustration. If the majority of calories are burned during your non-exercising times, then it makes sense to boost your calorie burn during those times, and the way you do that is by adding muscle. In fact, for every pound of muscle you build, your body will need to burn off up to 50 extra calories a day, just sitting around doing nothing. Add 6 pounds of muscle, and you're burning up to 300 extra calories a day, just hanging out being you.

Later on in this book, I'll walk you through the basics of the Abs Diet Workout, a muscle-building, fat-burning, 20-minute workout that will help you create the body you've always wanted.

the metabolism. Grains also provide crucial vitamins, minerals, and fiber, all of which the body needs to stay healthy. For example, a recent study at Brigham and Women's Hospital found that women who consumed 800 or more micrograms of folate a day had 29 percent less risk of high blood pressure than those who consumed less than 200 micrograms daily. Folate is just one of the many nutrients found in carbohydrates.

But the anti-carb movement does have its points to make, because most of the carbohydrates in the American diet aren't rich in all those great nutrients and fiber. They're "refined carbohydrates," such as white sugar, white bread, bagels, waffles, et cetera. Most baked goods, in fact, are made from grains that have had all their great nutrients "refined" out of them.

This causes serious dietary problems for the carb lover. A slice of bread made with whole grains—wheat, oats, or what have you—is full of fiber. Fiber expands once it's in the belly, taking up space, slowing the digestive process, and keeping your energy and hunger levels even for several hours. Take out the fiber, though, and those carb calories go shooting through the digestive track faster than Bill Clinton at a sorority party. There's a rush of blood sugar as the carbs are quickly digested, a burst of energy, and then a letdown as insulin stores the blood sugar and your body cries out for more.

That's why the ABS DIET POWER 12 includes whole-grain breads and cereals, along with fruit, vegetables, and other carbohydrate sources. Carbs have the energy you need; you just have to choose wisely. Read the label; you want to see the words "whole grain" on your bread, cereal, and cracker boxes whenever possible.

Your Friends

The Muscle Builder: Protein

You may think of protein as the staple ingredient for bodybuilders or the Atkins crowd, but protein has more super powers than the

Hall of Justice. For one, protein helps kick-start your metabolism. It takes your body twice as much energy to break down protein as it does to break down carbohydrates, so when you eat a high-protein meal, you actually burn off additional calories at the dinner table. In one study, for example, people who ate a high-protein diet burned more than twice as many calories in the hours after their meals as people on a high-carbohydrate diet.

Protein also flips your satisfaction switch. When you start your meal with protein—say, downing a glass of fat-free milk before breakfast or ordering the shrimp cocktail appetizer at dinner—your body registers its satiation level earlier on, and you wind up eating less. And that effect can carry on throughout the day. Some studies have shown that, if all calories are equal, people who eat a high-protein meal feel fuller and eat less at their next meal than those who don't. In another study, subjects who followed a high-protein diet lost an average of 20 pounds each, compared to just 11 pounds lost by participants who followed a low-protein diet. Amazingly, protein not only burned away fat, it burned away belly fat. The high-protein dieters lost twice as much abdominal fat as their low-protein dieting counterparts.

The Cholesterol Cutters: Polyunsaturated and Monounsaturated Fats

Ten years ago, if I had told you to eat more fat, I'd have been dragged from my office by the diet police and run out of town on a rail. Although it's generally a good idea to cut down on some kinds of fats—like trans fats and saturated fats—other kinds are actually good for you. Good? Heck, they're great.

Our bodies need fat. We need it to deliver vitamins throughout our bodies. We need it to produce testosterone—the hormone that leads to muscle growth. And we need it to keep satiated and full. In fact, one of the important things we've learned recently is that reducing your fat intake doesn't necessarily decrease your body-

fat percentage over the long haul. In a recent study at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, participants were put on either a low-fat or moderate-fat diet. After 6 months, the two groups lost about the same amount of weight. But when doctors checked in after 12 months, they discovered that the low-fat eaters had not only gained back what they lost, but they had added an average of 6 pounds! The dieters who were allowed to eat fats, however, lost an average of 9 pounds—and kept it off.

So, as the song goes, Grease is the Word—as long as it's the

ABS DIET SUCCESS STORY

SHE HAD THE GUTS TO LOSE HERS

Name: Linda Toomey

Age: 35

Height: 5'4"

Weight, Week 1: 145

Weight, Week 6: 126

Body-Fat Percentage, Week 1: 36

Body-Fat Percentage, Week 6: 25

When Linda Toomey had her fourth baby, she knew that she had to get the weight off. She was still carrying an extra 20 pounds she'd gained from her third child, and she wanted to act quickly, because she knew the longer she waited, the harder it would be. At 145 pounds and with four children under the age of 6, she knew that her own health—and belly—might take a backseat to everything else going on in her life. "I'm the queen of excuses," she says.

Toomey also knew that she needed as much energy as possible—especially considering she wasn't getting a full night's sleep anyway, caring for a newborn.

right kind of grease. The two kinds of fats that you'll incorporate into your eating plan are polyunsaturated and monounsaturated. Polyunsaturated fats include the famous omega-3's, which are found in fish like salmon and tuna and work to help clear your arteries. But more research shows that polyunsaturated fat also plays a role in helping speed your metabolism. Studies have shown that people who take omega-3's burned more calories throughout the day than those who don't. And a recent study of more than 35,000 women discovered that those who ate fish high

"At night, I expected to be tired," she says. "But I was tired 2 hours after I woke up."

Her goals: Get her body back, have more energy, and strengthen her back to be able to meet the demands of carrying larger-than-average children.

"I tried other diets, but being so crazy and busy, I didn't have a lot of time for exercise or food preparation. I needed something that was easy and fast to prepare," Toomey says.

She found it in the Abs Diet. "It's not really a diet," she says. "It's a life-long eating plan. I think knowing that you can eat carbs and not resist cravings was one of the key factors. The eating plan was extremely easy to follow, and the whole family could enjoy the meals. I didn't have to prepare different foods for myself."

Toomey also included the 20-minute exercise plan and strengthened her abdominals and lower back to the point where she has no problem lifting her children.

In 6 weeks, Toomey dropped 19 pounds and went from 35-percent body fat to 25. And she also went from a size 14 dress to size 6.

"I'm hoping it motivates a lot of women," Toomey says. "In the past after being pregnant, the waist was extremely hard for me. I may have lost inches from everywhere else in the past, but the waist was my real difficult area. It's amazing how it progressed in a short time."

in omega-3's had the lowest body mass indexes (BMIs)—even lower than vegetarians. (And if you're a vegetarian, there's still no excuse: Flaxseed and flaxseed oil are also loaded with omega-3's, and you can find them in a health food store. Get the ground flaxseed so you can toss it on cereal or into smoothies.)

The other kind of good fat—monounsaturated—is found in nuts, olives, avocados, and olive and canola oils. Monounsaturated fats reduce cholesterol levels, as well, and they also help burn fat and keep you satiated. One study found that subjects who ate a meal with oil high in monounsaturated fats felt fuller than those who ate one cooked with the polyunsaturated kind. And that's a primary approach to how you need to eat: Balance your foods with the ingredients that keep your hunger in check. You want to keep your stomach satisfied—not the folks at Big & Tall.

The Appetite Suppressor: Fiber-Rich Carbohydrates

As I stated earlier in this chapter, it's not the "carbohydrate" part you should be concerned about, it's the "fiber" part. Whole-grain breads and cereals, oatmeal, and berries—these are the real weapons of mass destruction, and the mass they seek to destroy is the one collecting around your waist.

There are two types of fiber: soluble and insoluble. Let's see if I can define them both in one paragraph without making you nod off.

Soluble fiber, like the kind you find in oatmeal, apples, and other fruits and grains, likes to hang out in your stomach. While it's hanging out, it does two things. First, it slows digestion, giving you longer-burning energy throughout the day. Second, it bonds with digestive acids, which happen to be made from cholesterol. When fiber splits, it takes the digestive acids with it, forcing your body to pull cholesterol from your bloodstream to make more. Presto, your cholesterol profile improves. Insoluble fiber, mean-

while, does not like to hang around. It shoots through your plumbing like Draino, picking up miscellaneous fats and whatever else happens to be loitering in your system and ushering them out the back. So both types of fiber help keep all your pipes and fittings in order, and if you eat them regularly, they should delay any need for professional plumbing services in the near future.

The Weight-Loss Wonder: Calcium

In the past few years, researchers have begun studying the effects of calcium-rich dairy foods on weight management. And quite frankly, it's hard not to be cowed by the evidence.

For example, researchers at Harvard Medical School showed that those who ate three servings of dairy a day—to total the recommended 1,200 milligrams of calcium daily—were 60 percent less likely to be overweight. But some of the most exciting research came from a study in which researchers put subjects on diets that were 500 calories a day less than what they were used to eating. The subjects lost weight—about a pound of fat a week. But when researchers put another set of subjects on the same diet but added dairy to their meals, their fat loss doubled, to 2 pounds a week. Same calorie intake, double the fat loss. Calcium, it seems, is going to be one of the most exciting new areas of research about weight loss and metabolism, and that's why it's an important part of the ABS DIET POWER 12.