The 80/20 Rule

L et's face it; some people just love fast food. We love the taste. We love the convenience. We love the price. And we can't get enough of it. Some of us have been eating it since we were kids. We literally cut our teeth on juicy cheeseburgers, crispy fries, and slushy milk shakes. I know I did. My first big job at age sixteen was managing a hamburger joint in my home town on Long Island, New York. I loved going to work because the food always smelled so good—and, as employees, we could eat all we wanted. (Back then, a burger with "the works" was fifteen cents!) Today, I'm a cardiologist and my job is fixing some of that artery damage I handed out in my teens.

But don't think this is another one of those fire-and-brimstone sermons about the evils of fast food. It isn't. Nutritionists and health experts have been condemning fast food for the last decade or so, and it hasn't made much of a difference.

America still leads the world in obesity, in heart attacks, in diabetes, and in cancer. It's time for a different approach and a more practical strategy.

So if you consider yourself a fast-food junkie—or you just can't imagine life without McDonald's, Pizza Hut, or Taco Bell (even though you probably know it's not doing your figure much good)—this book has some good news for you. It isn't going to scold or shame you. And it won't try to get you to forsake your fast-food habits. Instead, it's going to help you accomplish something revolutionary. Something that the health experts and weight-loss gurus say is impossible: to lose weight and improve your health while eating at the fast-food restaurants you've come to love.

Lose weight on fast food? Oh yes, it's possible.

We all know the story of Jared Fogel, the Indiana University student who once tipped the scales at 425 pounds. After trying (and failing at) numerous diets, he settled on a radical plan: two Subway submarine sandwiches a day—a six-inch turkey sub for lunch and a twelve-inch Veggie Delite for dinner. After a year on this diet, combined with daily exercise, he dropped 245 pounds. Since then, he's appeared on *Oprah* and *Larry King Live*. The Subway corporate offices report that people inspired by Fogel's example have lost a total of 160,000 pounds. Whoa!

And then there's Merab Morgan, the construction-worker mom from Raleigh, North Carolina, who ate only at McDonald's for ninety days and dropped 37 pounds in the process.

Impressed? The truth is, you can lose weight on almost *any* kind of food if you have iron willpower and a high threshold for boredom. Most of us have neither. If permanent weight-loss is what you're after, your diet needs variety and flavor so you'll stay interested. I'm willing to bet that, after a year of eating nothing but Subway sandwiches, Jared could barely

stand to look at another sub if it weren't for the endorsement checks he is receiving.

I'm going to show you a much easier and more interesting way to lose weight. Most nutritionists call me a heretic because I tell people it's okay to eat fast food. It is—when you know a few tricks. Obviously, a steady diet of burgers and fries isn't going to help your waistline or your health. But if you know how and where to look, there's plenty of good stuff to be found in fast-food restaurants. This book will help you steer clear of the worst items on the menu—or, at least, help you limit your consumption without feeling deprived.

And that's the real key to long-term success: *knowledge*. We live and eat in the real world, so it's not realistic to expect people to completely abstain from fast food. No way are they going to. And that's fine—because there's absolutely nothing wrong with enjoying a Big Mac, a side of fries, or a shake once in a while.

I'm a big fan of the 80/20 Rule. I believe that if you're eating right about 80 percent of the time, it's okay to splurge the other 20 percent. The biggest reason most diet and exercise plans fail is that they're too rigid. They may work for a week or two, but sooner or later everyone gets tired of following the rules—and, rebels that we are, we break them. But the 80/20 Rule is one you can follow for life, because it gives you room to take a break. That's why the Fast-Food Diet succeeds.

Want proof? Medical studies show that people who are rigid and obsessive about losing weight—you know, the folks who count every carb, eat only special foods, never have dessert, gulp handfuls of vitamin pills and supplements, and so on— fail far more often than people who take a more balanced and flexible approach. The only thing being rigid is good for is making you feel bad about yourself when you slip. And that's a lousy way to succeed at anything.

The truth is, losing weight—or controlling how much you gain—is almost never just about willpower. How can it be? After all, you're dealing with hunger, one of the most powerful urges in life. No amount of willpower or self-discipline can overcome hunger for very long, because our very survival depends upon it.

Take it from a doctor who has been helping patients lose weight with this real-world strategy for decades: this approach really works. Little changes can make a big difference. And brainpower will win out over willpower every time.

In this book you'll learn how to eat smarter at home and in restaurants 80 percent of the time—whether they are of the drive-thru or sit-down variety. You'll see how to lose weight and become healthier, not by sacrificing or sweating, but simply by making wiser choices. Believe me, these small changes will quickly add up to big results. You're going to see your waistline shrink, your cholesterol fall, and your blood pressure plummet, while your energy level and your pride in your appearance start to soar.

And what about the other 20 percent of the time? Hey, that's your business. If you want to enjoy a little splurge, no problem. You won't be breaking any "rules" because, on *The Fast Food Diet*, there aren't any.

This easy-does-it strategy sure beats "eat less and exercise more"—plus a lot of other impossible-to-follow weight-loss schemes that have failed us over the years, such as low-fat diets, low-carb diets, high-protein diets, and many others.

Unlike most other nutritionists, I realize that condemning fast food in a culture like ours is a waste of time—it just doesn't work. Personally, I believe a *real* diet is far better than an ideal one.

For one thing, not all fast food is bad. There are quite a few menu items that are highly nutritious and modest in calories.

In the chapters ahead, I'll guide you to making smarter choices when you're dining out so you'll end up consuming fewer calories while feeling just as full and satisfied. You'll learn how to select the fast foods that are the most nutritious, are the best tasting, and will help you lose weight—even if you dine out three, four, or five times a week—or every day, for that matter!

Rest assured, your choices won't be limited to salads. Far from it. I'll point you to plenty of menu items that are off limits according to most nutritionists and weight-loss gurus—yet I'll show you how to enjoy them and still lose weight without feeling hungry an hour later. Besides, most fast-food salads are hardly weight-loss fare. You might be shocked to learn that a McDonald's salad with ranch dressing contains almost as many calories as a cheeseburger!

Are You a Candidate for a Heart Attack?

There's an easy way to tell. Once upon a time, doctors relied upon something called the body mass index (BMI) to determine who was at risk for heart disease. But these days, that's old-school. Scientists have just discovered a method that's more accurate—and much easier to calculate.

It's called the waist-to-hip ratio. You simply measure your waist and divide it by the measurement of your hips. If the number you get is higher than 0.85 in women or 0.9 in men, you're in the danger zone. The higher the waist-to-hip ratio, the higher your risk of heart attack. It's as simple as that.

And what if you find yourself over the cutoff point? The best way to lower your risk of a heart attack is to lose weight. That's what this book is all about.

The Fast-Food Diet is ultra-practical. It works by fitting into *your* lifestyle, instead of turning your daily schedule topsy-turvy. It shows you how to make clever little changes in eating habits you're already comfortable with, so you actually lose weight and improve your health without trying too hard. It's just what the doctor ordered because it makes the pleasure principle work *for* you.

As you're about to learn, it really is possible to lose weight on fast food. In fact, it's easier than you'd ever imagine. Take it from me: You can eat fast food several days of the week and still achieve sure and steady weight loss.