

Chapter 1

Getting Started

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding how weight affects health
- ▶ Tailoring a diet to suit you
- ▶ Recognizing the particulars

The first edition of *Dieting For Dummies* was published in 1999, only five years ago. Since then, however, the number of people who need to lose weight has exploded faster than a tub of popcorn at the Cineplex. The science of weight loss has grown as well. We now have a better understanding of how our bodies store fat, how hunger is controlled, and why some people gain more easily than others. And we know more about applying the technical knowledge into practical how-to steps to help you lose weight and keep it off. That's what this book is all about. Translating the science of weight loss into an actionable weight-loss program that you can use.

Weighing In on Your Health

The statistics from the Centers of Disease Control are startling: Sixty-four percent of adult Americans are overweight or obese. It's an historic high. That's why this book starts with an analysis of the health aspects of being overweight in Chapter 2. We didn't plan it that way to scare you. Although it's scary when you realize that death as a result of being obese is closing in fast on the death rates from smoking. We started the book with health, because we think it's the most important reason to lose weight. It takes the emphasis off short-term goals — the vacation to the beach, for example — that promote the use of fad diets and gimmicks.

10 Part I: So You Wanna Lose Weight?

And, while we're on the subject, we should mention that we hate the idea of "going on a diet," because it means, eventually, going off the diet. But more important, diets are about denial. Humans are programmed for pleasure. We are wired to enjoy plenty of flavors and textures. Denying any one of the sensory aspects of food means that you'll eventually go off the diet. See Chapter 6 for an explanation of your relationship with the foods that you eat.

The external messages and signals that bombard you are designed to make you eat, eat, eat. Unfortunately, those messages aren't about eating healthy foods. Portions are huge at restaurants; the ingredients and cooking methods that most affordable restaurants use and the items they serve all conspire against your health. Chapter 7 gives the details about what we've called the *Conspiracy to Consume*. Chapters 13 and 15 discuss in detail the ways you can spot the healthiest foods (in grocery stores and at restaurants) amid a tsunami of marketing terms, techniques, and tricks. And in Chapter 14, you'll find easy ways to turn the foods you love — that may not get the highest marks nutritionally speaking — into foods that can fit, easily and healthfully, into a life-long eating plan.

Getting motivated

Have you promised yourself that you'll get back to your senior-year weight before your 25th reunion? Or maybe you've vowed to lose weight before your wedding or your daughter's wedding. Everyone has set deadlines. And, unfortunately, most everyone has busted them. Losing weight to look better is one place to find your incentive. Many successful dieters get started with external motivators like appearance. Then as they progress on their weight-loss plan and start feeling healthier, their motivation internalizes.

Chapter 12 can help you internalize your motivation. When you start moving, not only will you start losing weight, but also you'll sleep better, be in a better mood, and have more energy than you've had in years.

Finding support

And as you read through this book, you'll come across references to many studies that we've included to illustrate and support the ideas we're giving you. Most of them involve *successful losers* — people who lost weight and kept it off. We think that hearing their experiences can help you reach your goals, too. If we didn't think that the information in this book could help you to reach your goals, we wouldn't have written it. We may not have met face to face, but please know that we're rooting for you.

Setting goals

To figure out where you're headed, you need to know where you are. Part I and especially Chapter 3 can help you to examine your current weight and help you determine your healthiest weight — you may not have as much to lose as you think.

And Chapter 4 can help you understand some of the reasons that you became overweight in the first place. We know that you'll find those reasons supportive, not punitive. And, we know that they can motivate you to reach your goal weight.

Understanding Conflicting Advice

"Eat pasta." "Don't eat pasta." "Diets don't work." "*This* diet does work." "Wine is good." "Alcohol can kill you." For every health claim, a counterclaim comes right back at ya. We understand that you're bombarded with information about eating right. In fact, if you rely on news reports to decipher nutrition advice, it may appear that recommendations change as often as a traffic light. Remember that news is news because it flies in the face of convention.

Despite the headlines, no one food or food group is better — or worse — than another. (See Chapter 24 for an explanation of some of the most frequently circulated diet myths.) Folks today tend to remember the sound bite, not the big picture. This book gives you the big picture, because it's a summary of many studies, opinions, and recommendations and offers you the knowledge to understand the science. Specifically, Chapter 20 takes a critical look at the many diet plans that you often hear about on those news programs and lets you know which ones may help you and which ones are just bunk. Chapter 16 gives you details about getting guidance from a weight-loss professional — when to do so and who to trust, and Chapter 19 talks about the various weight-loss programs that you may consider trying and runs down the pros and cons of each.



One of the objectives of this book is to decipher and review all sides of the eating-advice controversy when conflicting opinions arise. For example, many well-respected scientists from well-respected research universities have heavily criticized the venerable Food Guide Pyramid. We explain the issues in Chapter 9 and tell you how the conflicting advice may affect how you eat.

12 Part I: So You Wanna Lose Weight?

Customizing Your Weight-Loss Plan

We promise you that this is the most personalized diet book you'll ever use, because it helps you write your own weight-loss plan. Chapter 10 has the specifics. The weight-loss plan that you find in these pages is based on changing the ration of calories stored and calories burned. Of course, to lose weight you must burn more calories than you take in. (See Chapter 8 for more information.)

Obviously, one way to do that is to eat fewer calories, and Chapter 25 gives you a quick list of the easiest ways to do that. However, we don't want you to live your life counting calories and grams of fat or minutes of exercise. Of course, keeping lists and tallying calories is a good place to start. But eventually, your weight-loss plan will evolve into a healthy lifestyle. Eating for pleasure may sound like a frightening proposition if you're a typical overweight American. But when weight loss is about eating the things that *you* like and making your health a priority instead of an afterthought, success is assured.

You may have forgotten how it feels to be satisfied after eating a meal rather than full or stuffed. In Chapter 5, we talk about hunger, how to turn it down, and how to get back in touch with its subtle signals. That's part of eating nutritiously, too. Our bodies are wired to send codes and signals before, during, and after eating to tell us when to eat and when to stop. It's all part of Mother Nature's insurance that we survive. It's a remarkable system, but it's a little antiquated when you figure that (luckily) famine is rare in our society.

Being active

Eating is only half of a healthy weight-loss plan. We want to move you to move. So, we place a large emphasis on physical activity. Because we don't want to kid you into thinking that you can lose weight and keep it off without a little sweat, we show you how easy it is to incorporate exercise into your day without sucking yourself into a pair of spandex shorts or signing up for base-pounding Tae Bo classes — unless you like that kind of thing, of course.



When an activity is fun, you're more likely to stick with it. The important thing is to find some form of exercise that you like to do.

Chapter 12 outlines an easy plan. Not only will it improve your self-esteem, it will help the weight come off easily. It's yet another part of Mother Nature's grand scheme: Exercise burns calories, but it also regulates your appetite and keeps hunger in check.

Getting help for special circumstances

Simply cutting calories and adding physical activity isn't the whole weight-loss picture today. Some people need special help, because of their age, a unique medical problem, or because they're so active that the normal weight-loss advice doesn't apply.

For example, "wanting to lose a few pounds" may not accurately define your weight-loss goals, because you're one of the 30 percent of Americans who are obese. We give you details on drugs that have helped other obese people lose weight in Chapter 18. If you've tried diets and medication in the past and still haven't been able to keep your weight within healthy limits, surgery may be an option. Chapter 17 explains in detail the procedures available and everything you need to know, from cost to what to expect after the surgery, and how your eating plan will be changed.

Another group of overweight people who need carefully designed and prudent eating plans are children. Their nutrition requirements for growth and development can't be supported on the kind of weight-loss plan that an adult would follow. For them, that would mean too rapid a rate of weight loss. If you're the parent of a child who's overweight, turn to Chapter 22 for some advice. Likewise, athletes who are following a training schedule shouldn't cut calories dramatically or their performance suffers. Their diet prescription requires precision and balance. It's all outlined in Chapter 23.

And while we're talking about young people, tweens and teens are at high risk of taking dieting too far. We take a close look at anorexia and bulimia and other eating disorders in Chapter 21. If you suspect that you may have an eating disorder, or love someone who does, this chapter has many ideas and resources for support.



Above all, just remember to think of this book as a reference. It's not just a book about dieting; it's a manual for healthy living.

14 **Part I: So You Wanna Lose Weight?**