

The Real You Approach to Weight Loss

Losing weight is hard. If it were easy, everyone would be thin. No one wants to carry extra pounds—and it's not for lack of trying that so many of us do. So what's the problem?

For too long we have heard, “Follow this plan, eat this, exercise like that, and you too will lose weight.” Taking this approach to its likely conclusion, if a diet doesn't work, it's *our* fault—not the plan's fault. *We* must be doing something wrong, or else we'd be losing weight. This is a negative approach, which only fuels the basic insecurity we all have about our ability to lose weight and keep it off. We get discouraged and feel that whatever we're doing just isn't working. We go into a downward spiral, get down on ourselves, get discouraged, and give up. Sound familiar?

The old “just push yourself away from the table and run around the block” advice doesn't cut it anymore—and maybe it never did. Here's why I think such a simplistic approach doesn't work. Life is complicated, and it's not a perfect world. We're so busy and stressed, we become

disconnected from our body's signals. Much of the time we're just not listening, or we're getting mixed signals, which only diminishes our ability to maintain an effective weight-loss plan.

Everyone reading this book knows that losing weight and keeping it off is a tough challenge. My life's work has been helping people accomplish just this feat. I want to answer the challenge every person poses: "Don't tell me what to do, tell me how to do it!"

When it comes to weight loss, one size does not fit all. Most diet plans are not tailor-made, and that's why so many of them fail. *You* must fit into the plan, and not the other way around. The Real You plan *is* tailor-made. It has an individualized approach, and you put together the tools for a successful weight-loss plan that you can live with comfortably.

To achieve *successful* weight loss and maintenance, you need a complete and comprehensive toolbox. Many of us have some of the tools we need, but not all of them. We haven't spent the time to figure out what's missing.

The Real You plan shows you how to find "the right tool for the right job," as the old saying goes. Or in this case, the right tools for the right person—yourself! You need the right tools to evaluate and address your behavior, eating, activity, and medical (BEAM) issues. That's why I call this personal toolbox a BEAM Box. The Real You plan will help you pick a selection of tools for your personal BEAM Box, which you can turn to again and again throughout your life.

Weight loss can be looked at as a giant jigsaw puzzle with many inter-connecting pieces. Your pieces are not the same size and shape as anyone else's. Many factors contribute to weight loss and weight gain. These factors include genetic predisposition, physiological and metabolic issues, emotional and behavioral issues, stress management, cultural and psychosocial patterns, environmental issues, brain chemistry, sleep habits, and many more. From one individual to another, these all play a different role in supporting or sabotaging an effective weight-control plan.

In *The Real You Diet*, we'll take a step-by-step approach to identifying the pieces of your individual weight-loss puzzle and transforming these into practical tools for everyday living. As you read about the individual journeys of some of my patients, I hope you will be able to connect with their experiences in building your own BEAM Box, as they have built

theirs. It takes time and mental focus, but it is within the grasp of everyone, no matter what your starting point is or how much weight you want to lose. You can also build a BEAM Box for weight stability, or the “just don’t gain” approach. That is also weight-loss success.

To build your BEAM Box, you must be totally honest with yourself and be willing to understand both your personal strengths as well as your personal barriers to effective weight management. Know yourself and accept what you’re willing and able to do for a healthy weight. You are good working material! Let’s check out the tools and start building.

Choosing the Tools to Build a BEAM Box

There are four major groups you’ll need to incorporate into your basic BEAM Box. I consider them the four major points of the Real You plan foundation. Each of these groups has a selection of tools to meet your needs—my version of the right tool for the right job!

Behavioral

Eating

Activity

Medical/Biological

For those of you who may need to explore further options, additional power tools can be added to support (but not replace) the fundamental four. These are medication (pharmacotherapy), obesity surgery, and body contouring.

Your first step is to take an honest and nonjudgmental look at yourself and to ask yourself if an entire tool group is deficient. You may have to dig a little deeper to see what tools are missing within a particular group. Many people have gaps in all four areas. If that’s you, there is no reason for panic. It’s okay to tackle one at a time. Others might be missing just one or two pieces of the puzzle, and often that’s the reason that weight loss is a struggle for them, even when they feel they’re doing everything right.

All the right tools must be in place both to achieve long-term weight loss and to sustain the effort to keep it off. Many of my patients first come

in saying, “I’m out of control.” When I ask them about any tools they’ve tried before, they frequently respond, “I have no tools. I don’t know what to do!” By getting them to take a step back and think about their own past strengths and weaknesses in the weight-loss battle, in a nonjudgmental way, I usually can help them get a pretty good idea of their starting position. Most people find that they have a reasonable starting set of skills.

The struggle comes when we start a plan and then get tired of the plan’s routine. Building structure is essential, but things don’t always go as planned, which is why we all need a Plan B. It takes at least a few weeks to establish a set of habits. During that time we have to constantly revisit the issue of what we are both willing and able to do. That’s where developing *specialized* tools in all four areas is vital for all of us.

Think about the following questions; you’ll see that the answers often involve a combination of overlapping tools needed to find a long-term solution.

- What can I do when I’m bored with my eating plan? (Eating, Behavior)
- What about when I’m feeling deprived? (Behavior, Eating)
- How can I plan an activity I can live with *every day*? (Activity, Behavior, Biology)
- How can I handle food sabotage by friends and family? (Behavior, Eating)
- Can I allow an eating indulgence and still maintain control? (Eating, Behavior)
- How can I recognize contentment as an end point? (Medical, Behavior, Eating)
- Can “free foods” take the pressure off mental hunger? (Eating, Behavior)
- Should I talk with my doctor about prescription medications? (Medical, Eating, Activity, Behavior)
- Should I consider a surgical option? (Medical, Eating, Behavior, Activity)
- Can I do something about loose skin after weight loss? (Medical, Activity, Eating, Behavior)

The Four-Point Foundation of the BEAM Box

While you may be tempted to jump to a particular category of interest, I hope you'll take a look at the next four chapters *before* you start to build your BEAM Box. Or, for a quick overview, take a look at the list of tools in appendix C. It's a good way to take an inventory of your needs before beginning the plan.

1. Behavioral Tools

When I think of behavioral change, I think of the willingness to try new things and about the lifestyle issues of eating, exercising, and stress management in a new way. I also think about individual temperaments. Some people are naturally optimistic and are the “glass half-full” thinkers. Some of us are the “glass half-empty” thinkers, expecting things to go wrong. Most people are somewhere in-between and can swing between both extremes from time to time, particularly when it comes to weight loss.

Think of the beginning of a weight-loss plan. Eternal optimism. A fresh start. You're told precisely what to eat and how to exercise. It *must* work. Since the typical plan is not personally tailored to *you*, but to some imaginary perfect-world person, you usually start out strong, complying with what the diet asks. Then real life intervenes, and the novelty wears off. The natural optimism of the new plan falls by the wayside and a sense of impending doom sets in. What started with a bang ends in another diet failure.

With this plan, you can expect different results. When you take a step back, and first identify—and accept—those behaviors that are sabotaging your efforts to remain *consistent* in a weight-loss plan, incorporating them into your BEAM Box, you can utilize the best set of behavioral strategies that work for you.

What your behavioral tools will provide is realistic optimism. You'll select a starter set of behavioral changes to make, and you'll build on them. When you find you're struggling (which we all do), rather than panic

and collapse, you'll be able to tweak your plan, to stay on track, and to learn from your mistakes.

2. Eating Tools

Many of my patients laugh when we first start to talk about what to eat. "I'm a walking encyclopedia of food facts," say many. And I believe them. This set of tools is to make food work for *you*. We must all make friends with food, because unlike smoking or drinking, *we have to eat*. Nature provides an inborn drive to eat for survival, and nothing can take that survival signal away. We must learn to manage that biological signal and separate it from all other reasons for eating.

Here is where I ask you to take an honest look at your food likes and dislikes. We are often confused by what foods are considered "healthy" or pressured to consume the "right" foods for weight loss, without ever taking into account food composition, taste, texture, and enjoyment. Enjoyment and eating? Do those two actually go together? Of course! *Food* choice, not just nutrient and calorie choice, is what we're looking at here. We all have food preferences and aversions, and you'll learn to personalize your eating plan to match your eating style. My favorite motto is: "There are no bad foods, just bad portions."

Calorie *awareness* is a key tool in this area. It is possible to lose weight with either a protein-focused or a carbohydrate-focused approach. It all depends on the food selection and calorie content. While many research studies compete to show which plan is best, there's really very little evidence that one strategy is better than another. I believe it's hard to interpret the compliance results of many research studies, since participants are rarely given the option of which particular diet plan of the comparison they personally *prefer*, and are simply assigned to a group. That certainly can influence their motivation, focus, and long-term success.

We select foods for many reasons, and the eating tools will help you choose foods and structure your meal plans in order to achieve the nutritional balance that nature intended. You will learn to navigate a world where food is available 24/7. The eating tools will transform you into a

mindful eater, to really connect not only with the foods you choose, but with the biological signals for hunger and fullness.

3. Activity Tools

Move more. Sounds easy, so why is it so hard for most of us? Those two words are a huge barrier for many reasons. How and when you do it are negotiable. What does “moving more” actually mean to most of us? Of the whole toolbox, this is often the area where there’s the most confusion about what to do. It all seems too time-consuming and a chore. What is the most frequent reason I hear from patients about their inactivity? “Lack of time.” The next most common reason is the lack of confidence that activity can make a difference in a weight-loss plan, unless it’s a punishing routine. Confusion abounds about building muscle, developing core strength, and activity’s relation to heart health. This tool group will distinguish the different types of physical activity and show you how you can mix and match them to meet your personal needs. You’ll want to evaluate the kinds of activities that you enjoy and are comfortable doing. Plus, you’ll learn how to make a change when you become bored—and even how to recognize boredom. (Do you really hate the treadmill, or are you just tired of it?)

A key feature here is to separate *mental fatigue* from *physical fatigue*, which are often confused with each other. Both make us feel exhausted. The goal is to move more, no matter what you’re doing—it all helps. From the activity of daily living to competitive sports, you will get to choose the combination of tools to mix and match for long-term commitment.

4. Medical/Biological Tools

While most people say, “I feel good enough, I just have to lose weight,” many have not seen their doctor for quite a while—even those on prescription medications for illnesses often related to weight! Whether you’re too busy to make an appointment, or you dread the embarrassment of a

skimpy examination gown, or even just getting on the scale, a visit to your doctor is a must-do, to identify what I call “hidden barriers” to weight loss. (These are described in chapter 2.) These can only be determined by a blood test and a physical exam. It’s important to rule out—or treat—some biological causes, such as hormone imbalances and certain prescription medications, that can interfere with even the best lifestyle efforts.

Power Tools: Supporting a Lifestyle Effort

Adding the power tool of medication or surgery is always a tough decision, and the pros and cons should be discussed to determine your own personal risk-to-benefit ratio. At one end of the spectrum, you hear it’s a “quick fix” or “the easy way out.” This is particularly true when it comes to discussions of weight-loss surgery. Your first step in considering these options is to embrace the idea that a power tool can only support, *but not replace*, your lifestyle effort. This core understanding must be part of any discussion of a power tool. The addition of power tools comes after a thorough evaluation of how the four core sets of tools are working (or not). When it comes to adding power tools successfully, it’s all in the right timing.

Finding the Real You

A final thought before we move on to the important beginning steps of building your new toolbox. The first step is self-evaluation—how to size yourself up before choosing your tools. As you read the next chapter, think about a journey of self-awareness to develop personal insights that fuel success and help explain past sabotage. No matter what size package you are in right now, you’ll be able to pack your BEAM Box with everything you need if you listen to the most important person of all: *you*.