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Opening Extract from...

The Core Balance Diet

A 4-week Plan for Women to Boost their Metabolism and Lose Weight

Written by Marcelle Pick
with Genevieve Morgan

Published by Hay House Uk Ltd

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MARCELLE PICK
with Genevieve Morgan



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A Word to the Wise: *No book can take the place of a caring medical professional's advice. If you are currently under a practitioner's/doctor's care, taking a prescription medicine, or working with a chronic disease such as diabetes, please check with your healthcare practitioner before starting this programme. Most of my patients have easily incorporated The Core Balance Diet into their self-care routines, but it is always prudent to discuss any changes in diet and lifestyle with a caring medical professional, preferably one who understands both traditional and alternative methods of care – an approach we call “integrated medicine.” If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, I advise you to reconsider any weight loss programme – now is not the time.*

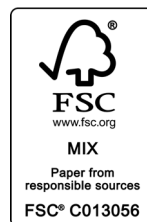
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PLEASE NOTE: This book is a revised edition of the title *The Core Balance Diet: 4 Weeks to Boost Your Metabolism and Lose Weight for Good*, originally published in 2009. Measurements in recipes and information on weight have been standardised for the United Kingdom.

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For my children, Joshua, Micah,
and Katya, and their future.

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Preface

At one point in my life, I was as much as 40 pounds overweight – and up until relatively recently I carried 15 to 20 stubborn extra pounds. From my early teens until my fifties, I was in a constant battle with my weight fuelled by a lot of confusion and self-doubt. As a girl growing up in Australia, I never thought about my body. I ran and played and worked happily; I was healthy and strong and ate regular, home-cooked meals made from food my parents were able to grow, gather or purchase for our home in the Outback. When I was 10 years old, my family moved to the United States, and for the first time in my life I became body-conscious. Girls at school teased me for being bigger than they were (though I was hardly overweight), and I began to obsess over my size. Our diet changed as we began to integrate into American culture, though my mother still cooked for us every day. I was never overweight as a child, but I was never skinny. And boy, did I want to be skinny!

It was the 1960s and all of the cultural icons were sticks – like Twiggy. Through high school, I engaged in all the typical skirmishes we women do to lose weight: I starved myself, I ate only grapefruit for a week, I yo-yoed back and forth between fad diets and I stayed active on the pep team; but I never got really skinny, no matter how hard I tried. During my twenties and thirties, as I started my family, extra pounds crept on and I spent huge amounts of energy trying to lose them. I went on Weight Watchers, measured every ounce of food I ate, and oh-so-slowly lost weight at the agonizing rate of about a half a pound a week. I was stupefied when others in my group who were doing the exact same program would lose two to five in the same time period! It took me a year to lose 15 pounds, and then it came right back on the moment I started eating normally again.

Had I known then what I know now, I would have immediately suspected some underlying issues that were getting in the way of my weight loss. But I didn't know – so I simply ate less, went to the gym early in the mornings and blamed myself for not being disciplined enough to lose the weight. The silver lining to this experience was that I began to tune in to my diet and learn more about the importance of optimal nutrition

and eating organically. I also began to explore holistic and then functional medicine. My weight was stable (even though I was heavier than I wanted to be) and I was healthy and full of energy. It was around then that three partners and I began Women to Women, one of the first medical clinics in the United States to practice holistic healing for women by women, with a mission to change women's health for the better.

Things percolated along for a decade. My family and the medical clinic were thriving; I had a group of supportive and loving friends; and I was living my dream – albeit with 15 extra pounds. I was frustrated by my inability to lose this weight. I felt as if I was doing everything right, but nothing really worked for very long. And then, in my late 40s, things went haywire. My body began to rebel. My mother (with whom I'd always had a complicated and unresolved relationship) fell ill and eventually passed away. At the same time, I began to undergo pre-menopausal hormonal shifts and packed on a mysterious additional 20 pounds – even though I had not changed a thing in my diet or my exercise patterns. Shocking as it was, I look back now and realise that the sudden weight gain was a kind of gift, because it forced me to finally look beyond outdated 'diet' thinking and pay real attention to what I, as a unique individual, needed to do. It was my wake-up call.

As a medical practitioner who has treated women for almost 30 years, I have seen up close the miraculous transformation that can occur when a woman finally begins to take care of herself on every level. Many of the diet and lifestyle guidelines I have set out for you here have been culled from decades of medical experience – and a few 'aha' moments – with real patients. In these pages you will read some of their stories and share in their successes. During all those years, I strove to be a good example of my own teachings and I was able to design the physically supportive concepts set out in *The Core Balance Diet*. By practising them myself, I successfully kept myself well and eventually lost the weight I put on at the menopause – but continued to struggle with those intractable 15 unwanted pounds that had bothered me since early adulthood.

The sea change finally came a couple of years ago when I began to delve into my past, specifically into my relationships with my mother and my father, as well as their legacy to me. When I engaged in this work, I truly began to feel on an emotional level the new direction I needed to take. For this, I must thank the Quadrinity Process and my teachers at The Hoffman Institute (which I'll tell you more about later on when we talk about your emotional work). There, I was finally able to integrate all the aspects of my true self. I finally became whole and balanced – to my core – and almost magically that stubborn, resistant weight that had plagued me all those years simply came off. It has never come back. This was the last piece of my own puzzle that fell into place, and this book just flowed from there. This has been my journey – you are now about to set off

on your own. And it is your very own. It won't look like anybody else's. I am happy to offer you my story as proof that the ideas behind this book are valid and effective if you are serious about putting the energy into following them. They worked for me, they've worked for hundreds of women just like you, and they can work for you.

Marcelle Pick
Yarmouth, Maine
1 July, 2008

Introduction

Why is it so hard to lose weight? And why is it often harder for women, especially around and after menopause? Most of the women I know try anything and everything: They count calories, cut out fat, reduce carbs, and eat only certain combinations of food; they work out more; they even take diet aids such as ephedra, Dexatrim, and ma huang to rev up their metabolisms. And they still can't lose weight.

The fact is I've seldom had a new patient who's been able to lose weight and keep it off by dieting. This is the unhappy truth, though I know many of you won't want to hear it. Over 95 per cent of traditional dieters find themselves at their starting weight or heavier a year later – and that's not because they are lazy or lack willpower. Many of the patients I see have a tremendous desire to lose weight; they just can't, no matter what they do. Some have starved themselves on 1,000 calories a day and gone to the gym religiously just to maintain a weight they aren't even happy with. Those who have managed to lose unwanted pounds inevitably experience 'scale creep' even when they eat well. Not only is this incredibly frustrating, it's also bad for women's long-term health: excess weight is a proven risk factor for a host of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, arthritis, obesity, depression, infertility, hypertension, and heart disease.

As a women's health care practitioner, I see that we've been trained – mostly by advertising and the fashion industry – to think of weight loss as the end that justifies *any* means. We've set it up as a goal that pits us against the natural need to eat and makes us tune out our physical instincts and emotional health when the real answer depends on us tuning in. Weight is not a mystery, but it *can't* be reduced to one simple equation: eat less + exercise more = weigh less. That may work in a laboratory setting, but not in real life, for real women. If it were that simple, we'd be a nation of skinny-minnies. But we're not. We're a nation of individuals, and lasting weight loss is an individual process.

So I'd like you to think about your weight in relation to *you* – your individual height, frame, and musculature. One of the most important indicators of a healthy or unhealthy weight is how much weight you have gained since your 20s. Another is your waist-to-hip

ratio. I like to see some waist definition in women at every age: In a perfect world, one's hips will measure about 10 inches wider than one's waist. For example, if your waist measurement is 30 inches or less, a healthy hip measurement would be about 40 inches. Once your waist measurement outgrows your hip measurement – the difference between them is less than 10 inches – the health risks mount. (Still another indicator is your body mass index, or BMI, which you can easily calculate or look up in a chart; see the Appendices.) But here's an even simpler way to think about it: if you are 30 pounds or more overweight or find that you are a good 10 to 20 pounds heavier than you were at 18; that your belly appears to have a life of its own; or that you feel lethargic, moody, and sick most of the time, there's a good chance that something has gone awry with your biochemistry – that you've lost what I call your Core Balance – and no amount of willpower will help you lose weight until you find it again.

What Is Core Balance?

Think back to the last time you felt good from the moment you opened your eyes in the morning to the minute you closed them to sleep. This doesn't mean no aches and pains and hassles, but the feeling that life is good, that you can cope, that you have the energy, stamina, and resilience to deal with whatever the day – or the future – has in store. You feel content with the way you look. Even your hair looks great. You're on top of the world.

I sincerely hope that you have experienced this at some point in your life. If so, you have an idea of your potential. If not, you have a lot to look forward to.

When your biochemistry and your metabolism are in good working order and your core physiology and emotional health are balanced, your body has a natural optimal weight and biomass that is self-sustaining and incredibly efficient. You feel energised, clear, and fit. Your mood is great and you easily shake off viruses. Your appetite is regular, without cravings or binges, and you feel great inside your skin (and your clothes). You have a sense of lightness that persists no matter how much you actually weigh.

This is the goal of the Core Balance Diet. My weight loss plan is actually a plan to create physical and emotional *wellness*, from the inside out. By wellness, I mean feeling great – in body, mind, and spirit. Real, permanent weight loss can only be achieved if you are well. Period. And being well is the sum of many parts that overlap and interact with one another in a balanced and healthy fashion – or the reverse. It's a puzzle made up of all the pieces of your own personal history, both physiological and emotional, that make you the person you are. You may be able to trick your body (and your mind) into losing

weight for a little while by starving it or following some fad diet, but until you restore your Core Balance, the weight *will not* stay off.

The Core Balance Diet is a programme that targets wellness as its goal and weight loss as a happy side effect. I've written this book to help you achieve it, no matter what the scale says or how you feel right now. I can say with confidence that you will achieve this goal because I've seen it happen over and over again with my patients. And it will happen for you.

Who Will Benefit from the Core Balance Diet?

The short answer is: anyone. Any woman who is struggling to lose weight will find in these pages the solution that – finally! – takes the pounds off and keeps them off. And there are many ways a woman can benefit from the Core Balance Diet even if excess weight isn't her main complaint. If you're wondering whether this book will work for you, take a minute to listen to your body and truthfully answer the following questions.

Please check the appropriate box

Statement	Yes	No
I'm unhappy with the way I look or feel.		
I'm on a diet and not losing weight.		
I lose weight, only to gain it back.		
I can't lose my pregnancy (or menopausal) weight.		
I often have strong food cravings.		
I often feel sick after I eat and I don't know why.		
I'm prone to colds/flu/viruses/injury.		
All my fat is moving to my middle.		
I feel forgetful and foggy most of the time.		
I'm having a lot of health issues or chronic pain.		
Being overweight is normal in my family.		
I'm exhausted, irritable, and/or miserable most of the time.		

If you answered yes to any of the above, the Core Balance Diet will help you.

And the first thing we are going to do together is congratulate you for being honest about the way you really feel. The women I see in my practice put on a brave face a lot of the time, as we all do so that we can do what needs to be done. We power through our days and ignore what our bodies are desperately trying to tell us. The cost of this performance is high, and all too often it comes out of our long-term health and our daily sense of well-being. So many accomplished, apparently cheerful and confident women sit in my office and fall apart after they do what you've just done – answer these questions honestly. They crumble under the relief of finally being able to confess that they feel anxious, ill, fat, hormonal, depressed, exhausted, fuzzy, aching, angry, or all of the above most of the time! But I know – and my patients at Women to Women quickly learn – that you don't have to feel that way anymore.

Entering the Conversation

I am a functional medical practitioner, and I've created the Core Balance programme on the principles of functional medicine, recognising that every person is unique, that health is not merely the absence of disease, and that we can use the body's wisdom to heal. Functional medicine is an integrative model that focuses on patient care, rather than disease care, and uses research from various disciplines to treat complex, chronic health concerns. Even though my speciality is obstetrics and gynecology, as a functional practitioner I have a responsibility to understand the body in its entirety. Like practitioners in many other holistic traditions that stretch back for millennia, I look at the totality of the individual patient – her biology, her emotional life, and her history – and intervene at various levels, using the most appropriate methods available, starting with the least invasive and most natural alternatives, to promote lifelong health and balance.

My practice is based on the principle that the human body functions as an orchestrated network of interconnected systems, rather than individual systems functioning autonomously. So when I talk about your 'core physiology,' I mean all the organs and systems in your body, together with the fluctuating sea of chemicals and hormones they produce, which control metabolism, appetite, sleep, mood, pain, immunity, bone growth, detoxification, and a myriad of other functions. Human beings are always adapting, not only as a species, evolving over millennia, but as individuals: every minute of every day, our bodies scan our internal and external environments and respond with infinitesimal adjustments to our biochemistry. Think of it as a conversation of mythic proportions that connects your mind to your body, your body to your spirit, and – ultimately – your

diet, lifestyle, thoughts, and feelings to the biochemicals that communicate with your DNA and determine the long-term state of your cellular health.

I first began to understand this phenomenon during the controversial days of the diet supplement Phen-Fen. So many of my patients who could never stop binge eating, who could never lose weight, did lose weight when they took Phen-Fen. Now, I don't in any way encourage Phen-Fen use – it's been found to be extremely taxing on the heart, and the drug has been taken off the market. But before that happened, it was used successfully to treat some patients for obesity, and the way it worked was revealing. The chemicals in Phen-Fen, fenfluramine and phentermine, act on important brain chemicals: *fen* increases levels of serotonin and the feeling of fullness and contentedness; *phen*, an amphetamine-based appetite suppressant, activates the same neurotransmitters involved in the fight-or-flight stress response, which short-circuit hunger signals. Many of the patients I saw had dieted all their lives, restricted calories, and exercised regularly – and were still 20 to 30 pounds overweight until they took Phen-Fen. It all clicked for me then. I realised that for many people, weight loss is not related to calories, but to something deeper and more personal – in this case, to these patients' neurotransmitter levels. I then set out to look at the specific balances (or imbalances) in individual patients' core physiology and see how I could regulate them naturally, through nutrition and lifestyle. My treatment protocols – and this book – grew from there.

I'm not the only one who has been treading this path. The field of nutrigenomics, which studies how nutrients and lifestyle choices interact with genes and influence cellular activity, is proving that your cells respond to everything that enters your body, whether you eat, drink, breathe, touch, or bathe in it.¹ That's because nutrients and chemicals in food and in the environment are ingested and broken down by your system, where they serve either as building blocks for your biochemicals or as active chemicals themselves. This is why scientists always say 'you are what you eat'. Moreover, there's increasing evidence that your feelings trigger specific biochemical reactions in the body that can strongly influence your internal conversation – so it's equally true to say that you are what you think and feel.

Toxic Weight

What does this mean for your waistline? In practical terms, nutrient-dense food and supplements, adequate sleep, activity, and healthy detoxification (including exhalation, perspiration, and excretion) enable the conversation between your biochemicals and your cells. Conversely, empty calories, prolonged stress, lack of exercise, emotional

burdens, and too many body toxins disrupt and confuse the conversation. Over time, this confusion throws off your body's Core Balance, and the disruption starts to cause noticeable problems – one of which is that you put on weight and the weight sticks.

All humans have this in common: when the body is under threat or not functioning well, it communicates that fact by way of physical symptoms. And the one irritating symptom that is most common is stubborn weight gain – weight that just won't budge, no matter what you do. In fact, weight gain as a symptom of a body out of Core Balance is so ubiquitous that I've coined my own term for it: toxic weight. You gain toxic weight when your body and mind are overburdened, and you won't ever lose it permanently until you unburden yourself.

As The Core Balance Diet will show you, your body is hardwired to insulate itself from stress by putting on weight – storing reserves of nutrients against hard times, a genetic holdover from our hunter-gatherer days.² This is a biological reality, one that impacts both men and women, but because of differences in our physiologies tends to affect women more. And no amount of willpower can deny it. Extra weight is not a sin, it's a symptom – a sign of a core imbalance, an injury that must be healed before the body will feel safe enough to let go of its reserves. Remove the imbalance and the body will begin to function more efficiently. It will come back into balance, and the weight will come off.

Our job over the next month is to figure out what factors in your diet, your life, and your emotional background are causing you to gain toxic weight. Over the years I've identified six major biochemical imbalances that seriously impede weight loss. They are:

- Digestive imbalance
- Hormonal imbalance
- Adrenal imbalance
- Neurotransmitter imbalance
- Inflammatory imbalance
- Detoxification imbalance

All of these imbalances create extremely powerful obstacles to weight loss, no matter how few calories you consume. That's because they have a harmful effect on your metabolism – the rate at which your body converts food into usable energy. You've probably heard a lot of talk about metabolism and how to boost it, because a higher metabolic rate enables you to burn more calories more efficiently – a primary goal when you are trying to lose weight. But my goal is to teach you how to heal your metabolism first by fixing your core imbalance. There's no point in trying to get an injured runner to run faster; she'll only hurt herself and have to drop out of the race!

The core imbalances I've identified often overlap, so you may have more than one affecting you at once. But don't let that discourage you: I've found that when you begin to restore balance in one area, other imbalances get easier to address and sometimes even correct themselves. The Core Balance Diet will help you identify for yourself the imbalance that is impacting you most right now and give you a customized eating and action plan designed to heal it.

Over the next month, we'll work on clearing away the clutter that's disrupting your internal conversation, and we'll restore support in the areas that are overburdened, thereby removing the most obvious obstacles to your weight loss. At the same time, we'll begin to explore the emotional patterns that may be keeping you from letting go of your protective weight. We'll be taking a month-long class in you: what makes you feel good, what stresses you out, what inspires you, what holds you back. You will learn how your long-term physical and emotional health depends on your body's ability to deal with stress as it affects you personally. This is really what we talk about when we talk about wellness: How do you cope with the bad stuff? What are your burdens? Where do you find support?

Your answers will define the pieces of your individual health puzzle; they'll explain why you can eat and do the same things as your best friend, and she won't gain a pound but you'll gain five! Weight and weight loss are different for everyone, and they're different for you at different stages of your life. That's why cookie-cutter diets don't work. The Core Balance Diet is different, because it understands that you are not a lab experiment, but an ever-changing, constantly adapting, glorious woman who needs to eat! And because you are all that, you always have the potential to make different choices that result in a better and healthier future. This doesn't mean you will eliminate burdens and threats from your life – stress is part of being human – but you will learn how to provide yourself with the right support to keep you lean and resilient, even in the worst of times. Believe it or not, your body already possesses almost everything it needs to heal. You just need to give it a little nudge in the right direction.

If The Core Balance Diet can do one thing for you, I hope it's to convince you that the old way of thinking about yourself and your weight is over. The time has come to get off the diet merry-go-round. You can stop treating your body like a bad boyfriend (one you'd love if only he would change) – you're about to start a whole new relationship with yourself. Soon – in a month, in fact – you'll be sprinting toward the lean, fit body that will see you into your (very) old age. And you've just taken the first step by reading these lines.

How the Programme Works

The Core Balance Diet is a medically based strategy for wellness and weight loss that has proven successful for hundreds of patients at my clinic as well as hundreds of members enrolled in my online health service, the Personal Programme. The method is divided into four stages to help you assess your needs; calm down your stressed-out system; clear the clutter from your diet, lifestyle, and emotions; and then identify and treat the main core imbalances that are getting in the way of your weight loss right now.

Stage I – Tuning In: As we lay the groundwork for your month-long journey to balance, you'll learn about the science behind the Core Balance method and the reasons why it works. I will briefly explain the nuts and bolts of your core physiology, the key components of your food, and how the physical body and the emotions are interwoven. And we'll examine the four corners of health that create a stable foundation on which to build a lifetime of healthy habits.

Stage II – The Core Balance Essential Plan: Here you'll learn the basic eating and action plan that forms the backbone of the Core Balance method. This is the plan you'll follow for the first 14 days of the programme. Its guidelines, the same recommendations I give to all my patients, are designed to clear away the most offensive and distracting clutter from your diet and lifestyle. After two weeks, you may be happy enough with the results to simply continue with this plan for the rest of the month. If you haven't seen the results you want, you can move on to Stage III.

Stage III – The Core Balance Custom Plan: This stage of the programme targets the individual core imbalances that are making it hard for you to lose weight and keeping you from getting the results you want. You'll take my Core Imbalance Quiz to discover which of the six major imbalances is affecting you most significantly right now. Then you'll find a customized eating and action plan to follow for the next 14 days of the programme, complete with suggestions for nutritional supplements, physical activity, and additional diagnostic testing you may need, as well as easy-to-use shopping guides, menu suggestions, and recipes to help you adapt the eating plan to your lifestyle.

Stage IV – Core Balance for Life: Here is where you'll find the key to keeping weight off: the integration of your physical self with your inner life. In this stage, which you should read during the first two weeks of the Core Balance Programme, we'll explore how to

celebrate the natural wisdom of your body and the healing capacity of your heart – at any age. You'll discover the powerful influence that your emotional health has on long-term weight loss and well-being; you'll learn how to shift self-sabotaging emotional patterns, and you'll get advice on how to find professional help if you want to look deeper. This stage of the programme will also help you look and feel your best no matter what the scale says.

Some Food for Thought

Many of my patients are so overwhelmed with conflicting information about diet and health – all the things they think they're supposed to limit or avoid – that they throw up their hands and ask me, 'What can I eat?' Well, while you are on this programme, I really, really want you to eat – often and well. Food is medicine, and in my practice I consider nutrition and hydration to be the first line of defence in healing core imbalances and removing the obstacles to weight loss. Depending on your core imbalance, you may be asked to restrict certain foods for a period of time, but you will never feel deprived or ravenous, because you are going to eat!

The meals and snacks I've planned for you are delicious, filling, and flexible – you can easily adapt them if you're feeding a family, or if you don't like to cook – and most of the recipes can be made in 30 minutes or less. The menu plans are based on quality whole foods in combinations that closely follow the healthiest diet in the world, the Mediterranean diet.³

Over the next month, you may be trying out some new foods, and you may be eating more than you are used to (or maybe you'll be eating less). Remember, we are trying to remove stress, not pile it on, so I'd like you to focus less on the amount of food you are eating (or its quantity of carbs or fat) and focus more on its quality and variety. For that reason, I haven't included calorie counts or nutrient breakdowns in my recipes, though I have paid attention to it for you in putting the recipes together. *Willpower* is not a word I like to use – or a quality I admire – when it comes to women and food. So take all that willpower from your former, failed diets and channel it into carving out time for yourself, for the important self-care elements of the programme. For the next month, allow yourself to move beyond default behaviour like wishful thinking (*I'll only eat 750 calories a day for a week*) and simple equations (*If I go to the gym and spend an hour on the elliptical machine every day, I'll get my body back*) and follow the comprehensive, combination approach laid out in these pages. If you do this for a month, I promise you'll be well on

your way to a lifetime of healthy leanness.

The Core Balance Diet is designed to help you lose weight safely and permanently. A safe rate of weight loss – one in which you are losing fat, not muscle or water – is one to two pounds per week. Some women may lose a bit more on this programme, some a bit less. Because many toxins are stored in fatty tissue and get released into your bloodstream as your body metabolizes fat, I don't advise trying to lose more than two pounds per week; that way, your liver has ample time to detoxify your system. While you are losing fat and bloat, you will also be gaining muscle, so your jeans may feel quite a bit looser even if the scale doesn't show a dramatic shift.

Over the next month, weigh yourself twice a week, at the same time of day each time. Remember that a woman's weight can go up or down as much as five pounds in a day, depending on the time of the month. So use the scale judiciously, just to keep yourself motivated and accountable. If you start to obsess about the numbers or beat yourself up, put the scale away! Instead, rely on the measuring tape, the way your clothes fit, and the way you feel. By the end of a month, you can expect to experience a remarkable shift in energy, well-being, and mood – and drop a dress size in the process, without having to live on lettuce!

The Five T's

Your goal for the next month can be summed up in a little thing I like to call the five T's, which describe the positive changes that will occur if you follow the advice and guidelines in this book. During the next month, you will learn to:

1. Tune in to your wisest teacher, your body.
2. Turn down physical and emotional stress, both of which make it harder for your body to feel safe enough to let go of extra weight.
3. Treat yourself to deliciously yummy food and supplements that will ensure you are getting optimal nutrition to restore balance and health to your physiology and help you lose weight.
4. Tune out negativity in the form of self-sabotaging thoughts and actions.
5. Take care of yourself on every level: body, mind, and spirit.

By the end of this next month, you should be on your way to feeling totally, tremendously, top-of-your-game, tantalisingly terrific! (That's another five T's, just for good measure.)

I hope you will take heart from the truth that losing weight is not as simple as you've been led to believe. But it is doable – infinitely doable. And it all starts with a month of your attention.

So now you need to ask yourself: do you think getting healthy and fit for the rest of your life is worth a month of your attention?

I hope you do, because I certainly do.

So let's start now!

STAGE I

Tuning In

chapter one

YOUR BALANCING ACT

Do you ever feel like a juggler in the centre ring of a circus? You do your best to keep your balance, draw on your available resources, and manage your responsibilities like so many plates spinning in the air. If you're like many of my patients at Women to Women, you rush from one thing to another, grabbing a meal here, a coffee or a nap or a sugary snack there – whatever it takes to keep you going – hoping the whole time that your juggling routine won't come to a dramatic, crashing halt.

Every woman has her own set of plates in the air and her own way of managing them – her own personal balancing act, you could say – that works for her. Until it doesn't work anymore. Women these days are taking on, and succeeding at, so many things: raising families, rising in careers, caring for elders, owning businesses, volunteering, and running increasingly complex households. At the same time, the information revolution has moved our entire society into the fast lane, plugging us in 24/7 and allowing us precious little downtime. In the 21st century, everyone's having a harder time keeping the plates in the air.

As a species, too, we seem to be struggling to maintain our balance. While modern medicine has vanquished most of the acute infectious diseases that were once our greatest threat, chronic conditions are on the rise: obesity, diabetes, depression, heart disease, cancer, anxiety disorders, allergies, chronic pain syndromes, autoimmune disorders, autism, and Alzheimer's disease, to name a few. And I know that many of you may have an intimate relationship with these concerns. If you're like me, you may find it's easy to get overwhelmed by the statistics, by all the bad news.

But here's some good news: statistics are averages in the population. They may represent trends, but they tell only one part of the story, and they do not necessarily tell your

story. Only you can do that. And your story does not have to be like anyone else's – no matter what gene pool you're born into, what diagnosis you have, or how much weight you've gained.

The Power of You

Do you want to know the real reason why it's so hard to lose weight, and why, when we do lose it, most of us gain it all back within two years? It's because we keep trying to solve the problem with simplistic, one-size-fits-all solutions. But you can't fix an individual problem with a one-size-fits-all solution. Creating a healthy, lean body depends on how well your body copes with the demands made on it. This is very personal: what works for you may not work for your friend. The important thing is that you understand what works for you. I wrote *The Core Balance Diet* to help you figure out what your body needs, both physically and emotionally, to thrive.

A well-functioning, balanced body will naturally maintain a normal body weight without requiring epic demonstrations of discipline and deprivation. But most popular diet plans today are still touting the outdated, oversimplified equation: calories in = calories out. In other words, to lose weight you must decrease your input of calories and increase your output of energy. This may have worked well for you in the past, when your body was younger and your metabolism was in high gear, but not so well now. You may be one of the many women I see who, at midlife, are eating very few calories but still gaining weight. There are women who overeat, don't get me wrong, but in my experience there are many more who don't – without seeing the smallest dip on the scales.

In the reductive atmosphere of a laboratory (that is, where things are reduced to the simplest of equations), if a test subject uses up the same number of calories that it takes in, there is a zero net; there aren't any calories left over to store in muscle tissue or fat cells, so, voilà, no weight gain. This has been the golden rule of weight loss for as long as I've practiced medicine, and it has meant more miserable women dragging themselves to the gym at 5 A.M. than I can count, not to mention a ridiculous amount of time spent counting calories. Now, it is true that if you consistently eat more calories than your metabolism can burn, the extra will be stored as fat and you will gain weight. But everyone has a different metabolism that burns at a different rate, and some may be genetically predisposed to burn one nutrient or another more efficiently.

A Calorie Is a Calorie Is *Not* a Calorie

Some of you may have seen the movie *Super Size Me!*, in which a young filmmaker, Morgan Spurlock, spent 30 days eating all of his meals at McDonald's, keeping physical activity to a bare minimum and never turning down an offer to "super-size" his meal. At the end of the experiment, Spurlock had gained more than 20 pounds and his cholesterol had skyrocketed, in direct contrast to his mood, which had plummeted. More seriously, he was on his way to clinical liver damage – in just a month. (I keep telling you, a lot can happen in a month!) Spurlock's experience inspired another researcher, a man named Fredrik Nystrom at Linkoping University in Sweden, to conduct a similar experiment of his own, using a group of 18 college-student volunteers.¹ These students were asked to double their usual caloric intake, eating anywhere from 5,000 to 6,000 calories in junk food a day, and to avoid physical activity as much as possible.

Based on the film and our current ideas about weight control, you would probably expect all the volunteers – after doubling their caloric intake and reducing their caloric output – to be well on their way to obesity, like Spurlock. But that wasn't what happened at all! Now, each of the volunteers did gain some weight. Some gained almost as much as Spurlock, others only a few pounds, and at least one gained half of his additional weight in muscle. More surprisingly, many of the subjects saw no change in their cholesterol levels (one student's actually went down), and none of them had liver problems. What Nystrom discovered was what I've been telling you: everyone responds differently!

The bottom line is, most of the science telling us that input must equal output – or that 'a calorie is a calorie is a calorie' – doesn't adjust for a person's individual metabolism, nor does it take into account the various other physical and emotional factors that may be creating obstacles to weight loss. The truth is actually quite simple: a calorie is a calorie is a calorie . . . until it enters your mouth. What happens next – the way your body burns, stores, or excretes that calorie – is specific to you, and specific to where you are right now. A woman's physiology isn't static; it's a reflection of her biochemistry, her nutrition, and all the things she's doing, thinking, and feeling – consciously or unconsciously – at a particular time in her life. Learning how these factors work in tandem is like trying to fit together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

There's a fascinating experiment I'd like to tell you about. In 2007, a Harvard University researcher, Ellen Langer, studied 84 hotel housekeepers to gauge the impact of what they were thinking – to see how their perception of how much exercise they were getting

would impact their actual body mass.² Langer found that, despite a workday that consisted of almost nonstop physical activity, 67 per cent of the women she interviewed did not believe they exercised enough, and their bodies appeared to bear this out with extra weight. After measuring the women's body fat, waist-to-hip ratio, blood pressure, weight, and body mass index, she found that their body types largely matched their perceptions of how much they exercised. Langer then split the women into two groups; her team took one group aside, told them how many calories each housekeeping task burned, and explained that their daily activity already met the U.S. surgeon general's definition of an active lifestyle. The other group was left in the dark.

Guess what?

After a month, Langer and her team measured the women again and found that in the group that had been educated, there was a decrease in systolic blood pressure (the upper number in a blood pressure reading, which interprets how hard the heart is working under stress), weight, and waist-to-hip ratio, and a 10 per cent drop in overall blood pressure, which includes the lower number, or diastolic reading, indicating how hard the heart is working at rest. (A low diastolic number is a good sign of physical fitness.) Now, it's possible that the education changed the way the women did their jobs, but neither the subjects nor the hotel managers reported a significant difference in their activity – the difference was in how they thought about their activity. This is, in effect, the same placebo response medical researchers see when they study drug treatments: half the time, placebos are as effective as drugs.

What it really tells us is that your thoughts are extremely powerful and that they manifest in your physical reality. On some level, whether scientists can prove it empirically or not (and they are proving it), we've always known that we are one body, not disconnected at the neck. Why else do we describe things that happen to us as 'mind-bending', 'gut-wrenching', and 'heartbreaking'?

Your Body and Your Mind

In the 1970s, Dr. Candace Pert proved, with her groundbreaking work on endorphins, that emotions and thoughts translate into measurable biochemical molecules in the body and vice versa. Her book, *The Molecules of Emotion*, shows that the body and the mind are one. Another movie you may have seen, *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, explores this topic further, showing how quantum theory is being used to prove mind-body concepts through biological physics. In this field of study, scientists are working on building simulations of neurons and brain circuitry that learn from both top-down and bottom-up

experiences. In other words, there's strong evidence that your brain and cellular DNA learn by conscious experience (like weight training or learning a musical instrument) or, more startling, by unconscious experience (like a low-grade immune reaction, trauma, or negative thought patterning). Health pioneers Louise Hay and Deepak Chopra, M.D., have been instrumental in explaining how this kind of responsiveness – or 'quantum healing' – lends our physiology and brain function a plasticity we never before imagined. What this means for you and me is that the potential for physical and emotional regeneration is always at hand.

Repetitive stress can teach one's cells to react in a certain way, and then condition them to keep reacting that way, à la Pavlov, learning some 'behaviours' and forgetting others. Once cells are conditioned – which can happen slowly over time or quickly in one life-altering trauma, as in post-traumatic stress disorder – a cycle is under way in which experiences and thoughts trigger certain biochemicals that target certain cells and cause them to act in an abnormal fashion, which in turn influences their cellular activity and sends the wrong message back to the brain. The most extreme example of such conditioning is drug addiction, but cells can become conditioned to many abnormal states, such as allergies, hyperanxiety, low-grade pain, and bacteria overgrowth. When cells are conditioned to accept these abnormal internal states as normal, a woman may be able to function but in the long term will not feel well. Interestingly, negative life experiences may condition certain extreme responses: for instance, if a woman has been sexually abused in the past, she may experience vaginal pain with intercourse or during her annual exam that has no known physical cause but is no less real. To a lesser degree, loading everyday experiences with negativity influences biochemical activity, which over time can condition cells to behave abnormally. Take, for example, the guilt and conflict many women feel when they eat. Physically speaking, eating is a relaxing activity (see pages 35–36 for an explanation of what happens when you eat), but our culture has loaded food with so many negative connotations that eating has become a very stressful act for some women. How many times have you thought *I shouldn't be eating this* or *I'm so bad* as you swallow? This thought eventually becomes your reality! Soon enough, eating ceases to soothe your body and becomes another threat. The simple truth is that your body and your mind are intrinsically linked at a cellular level – and the same is true of your physical and your mental health. Learning how they all work together is like trying to put together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

I see the synergistic qualities of body and mind play out every day in my patients. I can't tell you how many women come into my office after spending years in conventional medical treatment who are surprised to learn that thoughts and feelings don't stop at the neck. It is always a joy for me to introduce them to the power of the mind and how

quickly that power manifests in the body. To demonstrate this, I often have a patient stand up with one arm extended. I ask her to think of a happy memory – something really delightful – as I press down lightly on her extended arm. Her arm usually lowers slightly, if at all. Then I ask her to think of a sad memory or a painful event. I press down again, the same pressure, and her arm almost always lowers to her side. The connection is that distinct and that immediate.

The ancient concept of body-mind-spirit that inspires all Eastern healing modalities is slowly making headway here in the West (albeit a thousand years late). In the simplest terms, the mind-body connection recognises that you can't separate thoughts and emotions from the body – the body is a mirror for our psychological state. Some people may find this talk a little too out there, but Western medical practitioners have been quantifiably proving the connection for decades, even though opposition from the medical establishment has made change in this country slow in coming. After all, Dr. Thomas Holmes and scientist Richard Rahe created the Holmes-Rahe stress scale in 1964.³ This scale, which is still a standard test, rates over 40 stressful life events, from the death of your spouse to the size of your mortgage, and calculates how much each increases your chances of developing a related physical illness! The mainstream may have been reluctant to admit the deeper implications of the connection, but clearly it's been long accepted that life stress contributes to the risk of chronic disease.

Dr. Herbert Benson, who helped bridge the mind-body divide in the 1970s with his best-selling book *The Relaxation Response*, was a pioneer in the field of behavioural medicine at Harvard Medical School.⁴ With his use of the electrocardiogram, he proved that the heart responds measurably and predictably to emotion-related neuron impulses transmitted by the nervous system. This discovery encouraged others to look further into the relationship between psychological factors and chronic illness. From there, several effective therapies emerged to treat physical concerns by using the mind, such as biofeedback, guided visualisation, and hypnotherapy.

Forty years later, MRIs and PET scans are providing further evidence that certain sections of the brain light up or trigger the release of different biochemicals in response to thoughts and emotions.⁵ And as we know from Candace Pert's work, these agents communicate information through cell receptors across the vast landscape of the body to initiate change at a cellular level. She proved, in short, that what we call consciousness is the body. We experience this instinctively: anyone who has blushed with embarrassment, blanched in fear, felt her knees knock from nervousness or her heart skip a beat with anticipation, shaken with fury, or had an orgasm in her sleep has known the mind-body connection firsthand. These responses are your real-life proof that your thoughts, memories, and emotions manifest in the physical – and biochemical – realm.

Pieces of the Puzzle

Let's say we really are going to put together a jigsaw puzzle. Usually, we have some idea of what the finished product should look like, such as a picture on the lid of the box. We need to clear a space to work, and we need to lay the pieces out in some organised fashion, facing up so we can see what they are. Then we need to start somewhere. Most of us begin with the four corners, then complete the edges, before we start filling in the centre. That way, we get a sense of the size and shape of the whole thing. As the picture slowly emerges, we are better able to fit in difficult pieces and make sense of where we are. Sometimes we need to work on one section at a time; other times we step back and look at the whole table. Either way, we are always working with the finished picture in mind.

Restoring wellness and losing weight the Core Balance way is not so different. Your health puzzle has four corners, four essential elements of your self that take part in your internal conversation. They are: your physical body, everything from your DNA to your nutrition; your instincts, including your spiritual impulses and your reactions to pain and pleasure; your emotions, all your feelings, moods, and memories; and your intellect, your thinking self. If you don't work on all the corners of your puzzle, your picture will never be complete. So as we move through the next month, try to keep all four corners of your health in mind, even when we're focusing on only one.

Every Symptom Tells a Story

Have you ever woken up with a scratchy throat and a runny nose and thought, *Uh-oh, I've caught a cold?* In this scenario, it's pretty easy to make a connection between your physical symptom and a potential cause. The common cold and its telltale signs are, well, common, so you know what to look for. But what if I told you that being overweight is not so different?

Scientifically speaking, it's true. Unexplained weight accumulation, especially in middle age, can be a physical indication of a body under prolonged stress – stress that topples your balancing act by creating more demand for support than you've provided. And by support I mean nutrients, physical activity, sleep, fresh air, sunshine, play, relaxation, and self-care. It's a symptom, just as a runny nose is a symptom of your immune system fighting off a virus. That's it. Stubborn weight gain is not the result of



As we go on, you'll hear me mention the waist-hip ratio more than once. Simply put, this ratio is a measure of the difference between your waist circumference and hip circumference – and a strong indicator of heart health. To find yours, simply take a measuring tape and measure around the widest part of your hips, then measure your natural waist, and compare the two numbers. There should be a difference of 10 inches or more. Keep in mind that regardless of hip size, a waist measurement of over 35 inches for women (especially if our hips aren't correspondingly wide) has been linked to a higher risk of metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease as we age.



you being lazy or bad. It's not a demon lurking inevitably in middle age to grab you no matter what you do. It's a biological reaction to a body out of Core Balance. And going on a crash diet or an exercise binge, depriving your body of nutrients, or yo-yoing between eating extremes only exacerbates the stress by putting you that much more off balance.

Every woman who comes into my practice has a different set of factors, internal and external, at work in her mind and her body at any time. Remember those plates spinning in the air? Those are the external factors – the stress on you from sources outside you. Some of them are obvious, like your workload or the amount of exercise you get. Others are less obvious, like the chemicals in your environment or the lack of nutrients in your diet. How your mind and your body process those factors is entirely individual. But one thing is certain: when the demands on you are more than you can meet, your body will let you know.

One way it may let you know is unmistakable. I call it the Curse of the Muffin Top. You know, that extra belly fat that bulges over the waist of your jeans – formally known as visceral abdominal tissue (VAT). VAT is quite hormonally active and, though it tends to be most common among older women, it can spark a mutiny

in your biochemistry at any age: It creates its own hormones (specifically, the 'satiety' hormone leptin and small amounts of oestrogen) that override the normal hormonal signals and sabotage your appetite controls, putting more pressure on your liver and your heart.⁶ The more belly fat you have (especially if your waist-to-hip ratio is too high, that is, there's less than 10 inches difference between the two measurements) the harder you'll have to work to put down the insurgency and restore normal lines of biochemical communication. You will also be at greater risk of developing metabolic syndrome (see page 126), a spectacularly vicious cycle. Your fat cells, unlike most of your body, do not have your best interests at heart: Researchers have drawn enough evidence to conclude

that VAT is a 'unique, pathogenic fat depot.'⁷ Translation: 'extraordinary disease-causing dump.' Well, okay. At least we know.

So how does stress translate into unwanted weight gain? Stress wears down the immune system, which translates into a host of illnesses and accelerated aging. Scientifically speaking, stress has a deleterious effect on the tiny clock inside each of our cells called a telomere.⁸ Telomeres get shorter each time a cell divides, aging the cell (and, ultimately, you). An enzyme called telomerase keeps immune cells young and active by protecting their telomeres. Cortisol, the hormone that's released when we're under stress, suppresses the immune cell's ability to make telomerase, thereby increasing the rate at which immune cells age and weakening the body's defenses. The more stress, the higher the levels of cortisol, the lower the levels of telomerase. If stress is unremitting, one of the ways your body compensates is to go into self-protection mode by switching metabolic gears (a trait stemming from our feast-or-famine past). Like laying in a lot of wood in anticipation of a cold winter, your body protects itself from long-term stress by storing potential energy as fat instead of burning it. This weight is protective, insulating weight meant to carry you through tough times.

In my opinion, our biochemistry simply has not evolved quickly enough to handle the burdens of a postindustrial, technology-saturated world – in particular, a world of highly processed and overly refined nutrition. It's quite possible that in the next ten thousand years, our systems will evolve to allow us to metabolize all the processed sugar and artificial compounds in our food and our environment without gaining body fat, but that hasn't happened yet. In the meantime, we are paying the price. We're a remarkably resilient and adaptive species, and our brains calibrate our biochemistry to survive under even the most harrowing conditions (think starvation, chronic pain, chronic abuse), but never without some long-term cost.⁹

So, if you're facing a weight gain that has no direct cause – that is, weight gain you cannot attribute to a recent or significant change in your diet, habits, medication, or health – or weight that won't come off even though you're eating well and exercising, it's a signal that your body has taken out an insurance policy against stressful times.¹⁰ It's a natural response, and particularly so for women, who are designed to need more of this 'insurance' over time as they take responsibility for carrying and nurturing other lives besides their own. In our time, we may not have to hunt and hoe and fight for every morsel, but we face some pretty staggering stressors ourselves. (Take a look at my list of possible stressors on pages 24–25. I'll bet you can add some of your own.)

Stress is a very small word for an enormous variety of events that means something different to every woman. In medical terms, however, stress is simple. It is any action or emotion that triggers a response from the sympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic

nervous system, which comprises your brain and your gut, is part of your central nervous system, which manages every other function in your body; it's the woman behind the curtain, orchestrating everything, protecting your survival at a very primitive level and initiating the 'fight or flight' response in the face of danger.

Stress can be real (a car speeding at you) or perceived (watching a movie of a car speeding at you). It can be subtle, taking the form of burdens placed on your physiological systems – for instance, illness and injury on one end of the spectrum and lack of sleep or proper nutrients on the less severe end. And then there's emotional stress. This may be obvious, as in the case of abusive or taxing relationships, overwork, or life crises, or it may be hidden, stemming from deep-seated issues that originate in half-forgotten childhood traumas. Emotional stress may not trigger an instant survival response, but over time it too will topple your Core Balance.¹¹ More and more scientific evidence shows that chronic stress – real or perceived, physical or emotional – takes a tremendous toll on the body, tamping down the immune system, piling on the pounds for protection, and even accelerating the aging process.

A Message from Your Body

In order to counteract all this stress and allow your body to feel safe enough to let go of toxic weight, you need to listen to your body's signals and respond to them with the right kind of support. Remember, restoring your Core Balance means entering into a whole new relationship with your body – one based on dialogue. Your body speaks a primitive language – the language of physical symptoms – and your wellness depends on your ability to understand what it's telling you.

In bits and pieces, or sometimes all at once – all the plates tumbling down in that shattering crash we're so afraid of – your body will eventually revolt if it cannot process the stress that you unwittingly place on it. Think of it as supply and demand

Common Stressors

- Allergies
- Pollution – indoor, outdoor, or noise
- Chemicals – in food, air, drinking water, or personal products
- Chronic disease
- Growing up in a dysfunctional home
- Less than eight hours of sleep per night
- Living in an urban area
- More than a 20-minute commute to work or school
- Currently (or constantly) dieting
- Excess sugar, salt, or animal products
- Processed foods and trans fats
- Excess alcohol (more than one glass, three times a week)
- Nicotine
- Overwork, working without breaks, or multitasking
- Excess caffeine (more than 2 to 3 cups a day)
- Drugs (pharmaceutical or recreational)
- Infections, viruses, or parasites
- Injuries, chronic pain, or major surgery
- Depression
- History of trauma or physical or emotional abuser

– that eternal balancing act. You have a variable amount of resources that can meet a certain amount of demand. If you increase the demand without increasing the supply, you'll lose your balance. The tricky part here is that your brain will try to buy you extra time by convincing you to turn to cheap and easy forms of support, like lattes and chocolate bars. But living on these quick and easy energy supplies is like paying all your bills with a credit card: At some point those debts must be paid, and if you don't have enough money in the bank, you'll be in for a whole lot of trouble.

Good thing you have a built-in ally: your body. As demand starts to outweigh supply, your body throws up red flags in the form of physical symptoms. These symptoms can range from insomnia to worsening PMS and menopausal symptoms to digestive difficulties to mood and skin disorders – it's different for every woman. But for most women, the first sign of the struggle is the symptom we've already seen: stubborn weight gain. No matter what they do, they either keep gaining weight or can't lose it. And many women respond by placing more demands and more stress on the body – by fad dieting, over-exercising, or using more caffeine or nicotine – without adding any more support. Is it any wonder that the body reacts by holding on to that weight, plus some?

You may not think of your body as an ally when you're watching the numbers on the scale creep up. But take your body's point of view for a second: it's just been doing its job all these years in the only way it knows how. To your body, those extra pounds are a very good thing. Just the thing, in fact, to keep you standing tall in the face of all that stress! After all, your body is not setting its standards by watching *America's Next Top Model* or flipping the pages of *Vogue* (it's your mind that does that). Your body is operating on ancient hardwired instructions encoded in your DNA from our hunter-gatherer days. It's insulating you (perhaps too literally) from real and perceived danger. While you may be ready to trade it in, your body is as loyal to you as ever.

Common Stressors, cont'd.

- Tension at work or in a relationship
- Hormonal shifts (PMS, perimenopause, menopause)
- Caring for children or elders
- Boredom
- Insomnia
- Death of a loved one
- Divorce or separation
- Anxiety, guilt, or fear