

chapter 1

The Key to Success

If you've had difficulty losing weight or have lost weight in the past only to gain it back, did you blame yourself (*I'm too weak ... I'm not motivated enough*), your body (*There's something wrong with me ... I just can't lose weight*), or your diet (*This just didn't work for me*)?

I'm happy to tell you that there's a completely different reason that you haven't been successful. You just didn't know *how* to diet. Once you know *how* to diet, you'll step on the scale and see a lower number reflected week after week after week. You'll drop clothing sizes. You'll experience all the wonderful benefits that come along with a slimmer body: more energy, more confidence, better health, and improved self-esteem, as well as fewer aches and pains. You can have all of this—and continue to have it for a lifetime. It doesn't ever have to slip away from you as it may have in the past. You can end the weight loss–regain cycle—*permanently*.

You can do all this once you learn how to continually follow a diet. The Beck Diet Solution teaches you *how* to avoid cheating; *how* to resist tempting food, even if it's on the table right in front of you; and *how* to cope with hunger, cravings, stress, and strong negative emotions without turning to food for comfort. You'll also learn *how* to motivate yourself to exercise, even if you're not naturally inclined to do so. You'll discover how to do all the things you need to do to diet successfully—by *changing the way you think*.

Most dieters who end up in my office have been on and off diets for years. They all have one thing in common: They don't know how to think like a thin person. People who struggle with weight loss have a mindset that sabotages their efforts. For example, they often have such thoughts as:

- *I know I shouldn't eat this, but I don't care.*
- *It's okay if I eat [this food] just this one time.*
- *I've had such a hard day. I deserve to eat this.*
- *I can't resist this food.*
- *I'm upset. I have to eat.*
- *I ate something I shouldn't. I may as well blow my diet for the rest of the day.*
- *This is hard. I don't want to keep dieting.*
- *I'll never lose weight.*

If any of these thoughts sound familiar to you, you're the perfect candidate for the Beck Diet Solution. This program teaches you how to talk back to your sabotaging thoughts in a convincing way. When you hear that little voice in your head say, *Oh, just eat it ... It won't matter*, you'll be able to tell yourself, *Yes, it does matter ... I want to be thin ... Every time I eat something I'm not supposed to, it makes it more likely that I'll give in again in the future ... It matters every single time ... I'm just trying to fool myself ... If I eat it, I'll get a few seconds of pleasure, but then I'll feel bad ... I can resist this ... I want to lose weight much more than I want a few seconds of pleasure.*

no more "cheating"

The word *cheat* doesn't appear again in this book outside of this box. I've omitted it intentionally because too many unsuccessful dieters have all-or-nothing thoughts about their eating: *Either I'm perfect on this diet or I've cheated ... If I've cheated, I've blown it—I may as well continue to cheat for the rest of the [day/week/month/year].* I've found that people who view themselves as having cheated usually feel demoralized and even "bad," which

makes it even more difficult for them to get back on track.

Instead of *cheat*, I've used the words *unplanned eating* and *overeating*. These terms are less negatively charged. People who use them are able to take a more benign view and say, *Okay, so I ate something I didn't plan to eat or I ate more than I was supposed to. But they're also able to then add, It was just a mistake, no big deal ... I'll get back on track for the rest of the day.*

why weight matters—for everyone

If you're ambivalent about starting the Beck Diet Solution, consider this: Many people gain a few pounds every year due to a natural age-related slowing of the metabolism. Add to this the fact that it takes only 20 or so extra calories a day to gain 2 pounds a year. This means that if you're 10 pounds overweight

today and do nothing about it, a year from now you may be 12 or 13 pounds overweight ... the year after that, perhaps 14 or 15 pounds ... and so on and so on. But instead of gaining, you can lose weight and maintain your weight loss by practicing the principles you'll learn in *The Beck Diet Solution*.

Any reasonable diet will work for you if you have the right mindset.

The Beck Diet Solution is a psychological program, not a food plan. It doesn't tell you *what* to eat—you can choose any nutritious diet you want. That's because any reasonable diet will work for you if you have the right mindset. The Beck Diet Solution teaches you how to get yourself to eat the way you're supposed to eat. It shows you how to talk back to the *I don't want to, I don't have to, or I can't* voice in your head.

To choose appropriate foods and to use appropriate eating behaviors consistently and permanently, you have to learn how to make permanent changes in your thinking. With the comprehensive, step-by-step program in this book, you'll be able to stay on your diet, lose weight, and maintain your weight loss for life.

The Power of Cognitive Therapy

The Beck Diet Solution is based on the principles of Cognitive Therapy (also known as Cognitive Behavior Therapy, or CBT), the most highly researched and effective form of talk therapy in the world. My father, Aaron T. Beck, M.D., spurred a revolution in the field of mental health when, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, his research challenged the theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud and his followers believed that depression and other types of mental illness stemmed from a patient's repressed fears and conflicts, and they kept patients in daily psychoanalytic sessions over a period of years.

My father discovered, however, that depressed patients could get better quickly—often with just 10 or 12 sessions of therapy. When he helped his patients set goals, solve problems, and change their depressed thinking, their

depression quickly abated. Because a major component of the treatment focused on correcting people's distorted thinking, he called this new form of treatment "Cognitive Therapy." The word *cognitive* refers to thinking.

In the ensuing years, my father and researchers all over the world adapted Cognitive Therapy for many different psychological disorders and problems. Hundreds and hundreds of research studies have demonstrated that it helps people with a wide range of difficulties, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, obesity, smoking, and addictions. Even more impressive, people not only get better, but also they *stay* better. They learn how to change their inaccurate, unhelpful thinking in order to feel better emotionally and behave in more productive ways to reach their goals.

A recent study in Sweden demonstrated the effectiveness of Cognitive Therapy for weight loss. People enrolled in the Cognitive Therapy program lost an average of 18 pounds over 10 weeks of treatment. (Meanwhile, people on a waiting list to get into the program didn't lose *any* weight.) But here's the truly impressive part: When the researchers re-evaluated study participants a year and a half after treatment, their average weight had continued to drop whereas the average weight of the people on the waiting list had increased. This is what sets Cognitive Therapy apart from other types of therapy and other types of weight-loss programs.

Compare this result with people who diet but don't receive Cognitive Therapy treatment. Research completed at Tufts University found that between 50 to 70 percent of people who started one of four widely used diets were unable to stay on their diets and continue to lose weight for a year. Even more discouraging, other studies that track how people fare after they lose weight reveal a sobering trend: Most people who lose weight on any given diet regain most of the lost weight within a year.

How Cognitive Therapy Works

Cognitive Therapy is based on the concept that the way people think affects how they feel and what they do. For example, let's say you have the thought *I'm hungry*. If you then have "sabotaging thoughts"—such as,

Cognitive Therapy helps you
identify your sabotaging thinking and
effectively respond to it, so you feel better
and can behave in helpful ways.

This is terrible ... I can't stand it ... I have to eat!—you'll feel panicky and grab some food. On the other hand, if you counter your thought with "helpful responses"—*But it's all right ... I'm going to eat in a couple more hours ... I can wait*—you'll feel in control and get involved in an activity. Cognitive Therapy helps you identify your sabotaging thinking and effectively respond to it, so you feel better and can behave in helpful ways.

Cognitive Therapy teaches people how to solve problems, and dieters can have lots of problems. For example, have you ever strayed from a diet for any of the following reasons:

- You finished all of the food on your plate but didn't feel satisfied.
- You felt upset and thought that eating would make you feel better.
- You were too tempted by the sight of food when shopping at the supermarket.
- You were too tired to cook, so you opted for fast food instead.
- You were too polite to turn down the dessert that your friend baked.
- You were at a party and felt like treating yourself.

To successfully lose weight and keep it off, you need to solve these kinds of practical problems. You'll also need to solve some psychological problems, such as:

- Feeling overwhelmed by the requirements of your diet
- Feeling deprived
- Feeling discouraged when you don't lose weight consistently or lose as much weight as you had hoped
- Feeling stressed by other life problems

Cognitive Therapy helps you solve both practical and psychological problems and learn new thinking and behavioral skills—skills you'll be able to use for the rest of your life. You'll not only overcome your current problems, but also learn how to use your new skills to overcome future problems.

Are You Like Sue?

For more than 20 years, I've used Cognitive Therapy to help many people resolve many different problems, including struggling to lose weight. Sue* is typical of these dieters. Before Sue came to treatment, she'd tried many diets, off and on, ever since high school, only to become mired in a familiar cycle: During the first few weeks or months of each diet, she'd confidently lose weight and feel in control; eventually, however, something would make her stray.

**The names of all dieters in this book have been changed.*

The reasons varied. One day her boss asked her to work late, which, she said, “caused” her to pick up a pizza on the way home. Another time, after an argument with her husband, she was upset and “found” herself eating a pint of chocolate ice cream. Yet another time she “lost control” at a holiday party while at a buffet table covered with one tempting dish after another.

Whenever Sue gave herself an excuse to deviate from her diet, her resolve quickly diminished. She’d continue to eat out of control. Then she’d feel like a failure, decide she’d never be able to lose weight, and give up entirely, eventually gaining back all the weight she’d lost—and sometimes more.

Sue began yet another diet soon after her first session with me. The first two or three weeks of her new diet went smoothly, but then she had a setback. She was so upset by a situation at work that she began “to eat everything in sight.” Fortunately, Sue came to see me the next day. When we examined what Sue had eaten, it became apparent that she had not “totally blown” her diet. I helped her see that if she just got right back on her diet, she would likely gain, at most, a half pound for the week—not a major setback. By changing her thinking from, *I’m such a failure ... I’ll never be able to lose weight*, to *I can start again right this moment*, she was able to get back on track.

Sue continued to have some mild setbacks along the way, but she learned how to keep these setbacks in perspective. She also learned how to prepare in advance for stressful times. She got to the point where she was able to stick to her plan, no matter what was going on in her life. She broke out of her yo-yo dieting cycle, lost more than 55 pounds, and has kept it off for more than 12 years.

Sue’s story is typical of the dieters I work with now and have worked with over the years. It can be your story as well.

Whether you’re depressed or content,
a stay-at-home or working parent, a binge eater or
social eater, a dieting novice or dieting pro,
the Beck Diet Solution can help you.

No Lost Causes

The Beck Diet Solution is based on the same plan that I use with my patients who want to lose weight. It works, regardless of your unique

psychological makeup, lifestyle, and family circumstances. Whether you’re depressed or content, a stay-at-home or working parent, a binge eater or social eater, a dieting novice or dieting pro, this program can help you.

In the past, you may have been able to make short-term changes in your eating habits to help you lose weight. But when the going got tough, you abandoned those changes because you didn’t know how to talk back to such sabotaging thoughts as:

- *Dieting is too hard!*
- *I have to eat this. I have no self-control.*
- *I don’t want to hurt her feelings, so I’ll eat what she made.*
- *I can’t diet when I’m stressed.*

The set of psychological strategies in this book will help you in many ways. You’ll learn how to resist the urge to overeat when you’re confronted with cravings, hunger, stress, social pressures, and myriad other problems. You’ll learn how to follow your diet and exercise programs no matter what happens. You’ll learn how to think like a thin person. These strategies take practice, but in time they’ll become automatic.

My Story

I personally can understand the challenges that dieters face, and I also can attest to the success of using Cognitive Therapy to overcome them. I started dieting as a teenager and went on and off diets for many years. I, too, had lots of sabotaging thoughts, such as:

- *I should eat as little as possible.*
- *If others don’t see me eating, it doesn’t really count.*
- *If I give in to temptation, it’s my fault for being weak.*
- *If I eat something I hadn’t planned to eat, I may as well abandon my diet for the whole day.*

How did I finally succeed at losing weight and keeping it off? I learned from patients I counseled. One of the first people I worked with when I became a psychologist was a woman who suffered from depression and anxiety. After several weeks of therapy, she began to feel better and told me she had a new goal: She wanted to lose weight. Well, it was easy for me to see how unrealistic and inaccurate *her* thoughts were when it came to eating and dieting. I could readily see how *she* needed to change her thinking so she could change her eating behavior. I learned a lot from her and from many subsequent patients who also wanted to lose weight. Then I applied

what I had learned to myself, and I lost 15 pounds. That was many years ago, and I've kept it off ever since.

During the past 20 years, I've learned through trial and error what works and what doesn't. During this time, I discovered a number of crucial factors. For example, I've found that to lose excess weight and keep it off, it's important to do the following:

- Choose a nutritious diet.
- Create time and energy for dieting.
- Plan what and when you're going to eat.
- Seek support.
- Deal with disappointment.
- View overeating as a temporary problem that you can solve.
- Cope with hunger and cravings.
- Eliminate emotional eating.
- Give yourself credit.

You don't yet know how to do all these things—or how to get yourself to continually do these things—but you will.

With the Beck Diet Solution, you'll learn one new skill every day. By the end of six weeks, you'll have learned everything you need to continue losing weight and to be on your way to keeping it off—permanently.

*You'll get to the point where you
react differently when you see food
you know you shouldn't eat.*

The New You

You'll probably find that dieting and weight loss follow a predictable cycle: During the first week or two, you might find that dieting is relatively easy. Then things likely become somewhat more difficult. Cravings set in or intensify. Life intervenes. Your schedule gets busy. You feel emotionally stressed. And you might come up with any number of reasons to stray from your diet.

If you just keep practicing the skills described in this program, however, you'll do fine. Dieting will become easier. Cravings and hunger will diminish. You'll learn better ways to deal with stress. Your thinking will change. In fact, you'll get to the point where you'll react differently when you see food you know you shouldn't eat. Instead of saying, *I wish I could eat this*, and feeling sad, or *It's unfair that I can't eat this*, and feeling unhappy, you'll

automatically say, *I'm so glad I'm not eating that*. At some point, you'll shift from, *I hate depriving myself*, to *I'm happy I didn't overeat!* Just take it one day at a time, as this book suggests. You'll get there!

the solution at a glance

- Cognitive Therapy is a psychological treatment that will help you successfully lose excess weight and keep it off.
- The way you think about food, eating, and dieting affects your behavior and how you feel emotionally.
- Certain ways of thinking make it difficult to follow a diet and to maintain weight loss.
- The Beck Diet Solution takes you through a six-week process to change sabotaging thoughts (that cause you to stray from your diet) to helpful thinking (that will lead to success).