

THE THIN WOMAN'S BRAIN

Re-Wiring The Brain For Permanent Weight Loss



DILIA SURIEL

The
Thin Woman's
Brain

*Re-wiring the Brain for
Permanent Weight Loss*

Dilia Suriel

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It is my belief that humanity will evolve because of female consciousness. A substantial amount of our potential is squandered when so many women feel ashamed of their bodies. If just 1% of this wasted energy could be re-channeled toward positive activities, our entire race would be richly blessed.

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Chapter 1 – La Gordita

Wired to Overeat

Every year over 10,000 diet books hit the market. Unfortunately 90% of these books are just reshuffling the chairs on the Titanic. They are just:

- a) Atkins with a new lipstick, or
- b) Paleo Paleo Paleo, or
- c) So challenging that if you exerted the effort required by the diet regiment, let alone afford all of the ingredients, you would lose weight by the sheer effort necessary to follow the diet.

But here is the most important statistic that anyone considering losing weight should know. Most of the people who manage to lose weight dieting, gain the weight back within the first year! This includes people who have participated in “The Biggest Loser” or had their stomach stapled. This is the most repressed statistic in the diet industry: Only 3 out of every 100 people who reach their goal manage to maintain that weight loss beyond the first year. Take one solid minute to truly ponder the consequences of that statistic:

Visualize yourself as part of a group of 100 enthusiastic, committed people, who through food restriction and significant exercise generate a daily caloric deficiency. Now visualize that this group has the perseverance and stamina to stick to that regimen for months whatever is necessary, AND all of the members of this admirable group actually reach the weight goal. Hurray! What an amazing achievement!

One year later these 100 extraordinary people reconvene and to their shock only three remain at their weight loss goal. The remaining 97 have either returned to their weight prior to the regimen or have actually gained more weight than when they started the program! Only three, 3, not even nine, but three, have managed to keep the weight off!

Are we really that spineless? Do we really lack that much willpower? Or is there another explanation? If you conduct a postmortem with the 97 people that could not claw onto their hard fought weight loss, what you will find is that after they attempted to go back to *normal eating* they experienced hunger far more often than prior to the weight loss program. Since ending the diet they also have become preoccupied, some even obsessed with food.

There is a little known organization named the National Weight Control Registry. Their database tracks individuals that have managed to maintain more than 30 pounds of weight loss for more than twelve months. The objective of this organization is to learn why certain individuals are able to hold onto their weight loss. In December 2011, the New York Times published an article where they interviewed some of these extraordinary individuals. The successful dieters shared how they have maintain hyper-vigilance to retain their lost weight. Many of them still have to count calories every single day; some of them call ahead to restaurants before they attempt a meal out. The Times reported that for these individuals weight maintenance efforts are as much work as losing the weight itself. It is a time-consuming, carefully planned, lifelong commitment, predicated on unwavering willpower. Far from peaceful thinness, it is very hard work. Even spokesperson for national weight loss companies report that the effort required to keep the weight off is as significant as the effort exerted to lose the extra weight.

But let's examine one simple fact. There was a time in our lives where maintaining a healthy weight was not a struggle. There was a time when we were lean without counting anything. There was a time

that we didn't obsess about food, there was a time when we didn't eat compulsively. Then there are the other questions: Why are we different from women who don't have these types of food struggles and are thin? What has been altered? That was the pivotal question that changed my life!

Let me introduce myself. I was trained as a scientist and majored in physics and mathematics at a prestigious university. After undergraduate school, I pursued a master's degree first in electrical engineering, finally settling into computer science. For my entire professional career I worked in the computer industry in jobs ranging from interface engineer to professor of programming languages, culminating at director-level international consulting engagements. I have a track record of solving complex corporate problems and have worked in eight distinct cultures. And while I'm not looking to impress you with my credentials, I do want to share that I'm a world-class analyst. I just happened to wake up one day knowing that I needed to use my analytical talents to end the dieting hell that I've lived for too many years.

Until the age of 26, I was naturally thin, then for three years, I had invested my hopes, my dreams and fourteen hours a day, seven days a week in my own business. I gained forty pounds during that period of time. Forty pounds! When I finally emerged from the grind of the new business with compulsive weight training and dieting, I lost the forty pounds.

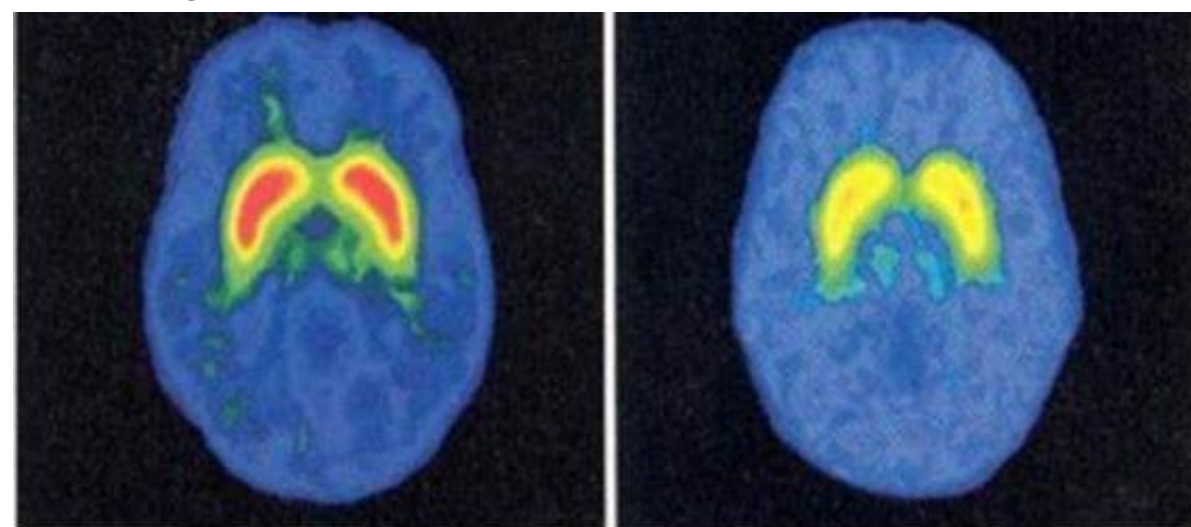
But something within me was no longer satisfied with my "normal" weight. Even though I had bludgeoned myself back to my original weight, I was now seduced by my newfound weight-loss skill; I was now shooting for the *latest idol*. My models were no longer the voluptuous bodies of the movie stars of the '60's, the Raquel Welch, Brigitte Bardot and Ursula Andrews. My new ideal had morphed to ... Twiggy, whose body looked like an undernourished teenage boy. I stayed in diet mode because I no longer felt good about my weight. My ideal had transfigured from a size 12 to a size 8 and I couldn't experience myself as attractive in a size 8.

The cycle of losing weight, gaining weight remained for most of my adult life. I believed that the right tools would help me eat less and move more – you know the mantra. I believed what the helpful friends did, that all I needed was BETTER INFORMATION about food and exercise! But in reality I was an expert on all of that. The worst of it was the self-hatred: I was "La Gordita," the fat woman. I felt drained. My self-loathing undermined the faith I needed to lose weight. The oppressive shame of living as a fat woman was emotionally damaging. But I never gave up. I continued to diet because like most of the population I believed that was my only option until I noticed that thin women were different and I caught a glimpse of my pre-diet days.

In the past 10 years, science has made significant progress in understanding why it is so difficult for chronic dieters to achieve long-term weight loss. Our flavor-enhanced food, unrealistic body image, frantic lifestyles and chronic dieting has caused our brain to change. We've become food obsessed, deplete our limited willpower to resist the plethora of tempting food all around us, use food to soothe ourselves as part of our frantic lifestyle and when we eat, we do so compulsively. These brain-level changes have been documented via brain imaging technologies; scientists can measure statistically significant differences between obese populations when compared with those that are naturally thin. Specifically the studies show that there is a measurable difference between obese population in the level of activity in the area of the brain responsive for shifting thought and also the area responsible for weighting the pros and cons of our decisions. Additionally brain imaging technology can now show the amount of dopamine that the brain of an obese person produces *is lower!* Contrary to popular belief an obese person experiences less pleasure than her thin counterpart. The obese person then needs to eat more food to experience the same amount of pleasure. This is graphically depicted in the "Brain Reward Center" fMRI images below part of a report jointly conducted by Gene-Jack Wang, M.D., head of medicine at Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Nora Volkow, M.D., director

of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

So now that we understand why it is that we have to eat a lot more food to experience the same amount of dopamine as our naturally thin counterparts, let's take a look at the fMRI that substantiated this finding. Below are brain scans comparing the brains of a naturally thin person (on the left) to an obese person (image on the right) when eating the same food. First, let me tell you a bit about dopamine. Dopamine is the pleasure neurotransmitter, the key chemical that carries signals that we experience as pleasure. The red in the scan of thin person's brain indicates a high dopamine level, a healthy dosage of pleasure. In contrast the yellow in the obese person's brain indicates a reduced dopamine level; the amount of pleasure experienced is substantially lower. These scans show that the naturally thin person is able to experience greater levels of pleasure than the obese person when eating the same food. Despite the popular misconception that obese people love and get greater joy from food, the truth is that the more severe the food addiction, the less pleasure the food addict experiences when eating.



Famine Brain

From the perspective of man's evolution dieting is a last second phenomenon. It was a mere blip in the 1920's but it was not until the late 1960's that as a society, as a species, we began recurring cycles of dieting that triggered the famine brain mechanism.

Weight-loss dieting, by definition, requires lowering food intake below what the body needs to maintain its present form. Although there is no real food scarcity, all of the built-in mechanisms that ensure our survival register a drop in fat. This decrease then fires up the neural circuitry, which deploys an army of hormones that trigger the imperative to overeat. We call these mechanisms famine brain for short.

Extreme diets prime the brain's reward system for overeating behavior, researchers are finding to their dismay that *any* kind of weight-loss deploys our personal neurochemical arsenal. The body, it seems, doesn't "know" when it's storing too much fat; it only "knows" when it's in jeopardy of losing fat. So, in a valiant attempt to regain homeostasis, our system lowers our levels of hormones that indicate satiety signals (leptin and insulin), and pumps the hunger hormone, ghrelin, into the bloodstream. Scientists still don't know how exactly the brain- and physical-hunger systems interact to support or override each other. What we do know is that for many chronic dieters the result is a brain that is food obsessed.

Restoring the Healthy Brain

While the cause of obesity is multi-faceted, the common thread among these changes is due to the plasticity of the brain, also called neuroplasticity. As the brain adapts to modern lifestyles, which includes stress, overabundance of food, flavor-enhanced products, it is changed. The good news is that we have also learned to take advantage of that neuroplasticity and we are now able to “rewire” the brain to its healthy state, we are able to restore it back.

This new form of rehabilitation is called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). It is a widely accepted therapy used by psychologists around the world and has been used to successfully treat obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, addiction, and various other issues. This book provides step-by-step instructions on how to apply CBT to restore your brain to your natural brain, that of a thin woman.

There are four basic steps:

1. Learn to differentiate between brain hunger (as opposed to physical hunger)
2. Interrupt the food fantasies
3. Name the real need and address it
4. Experience success and measure progress

In contrast to brain hunger, physical hunger has tangible, objective signs: your stomach grumbles, your blood sugar level is low, you would welcome a variety of foods to end the physical hunger. Brain hunger typically craves very specific foods and its one physical sign, salivation, are usually triggered by external events. Step 1 is the willingness and courage to name the two types of hunger. “I have zero evidence of physical hunger but I want craving food, I’m experiencing brain hunger.”

In Step 2 we interrupt the food fantasies. For us, food is like the suave car salesman who is a friend only he wants us to buy a car. Using several cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, we learn to redirect our entrenched thought patterns. We must recognize the pleasure hallucination for what it is in our current wiring. Incorporating mindful practices, we learn to witness our craving and our old belief that food is going to make us feel better. In contrast to willpower this step is where we calmly observe the craving but are not compelled to act on it.

In Step 3 we name the real need. Are we tired, stressed, disappointed, angry, frustrated, or what? We need to take a break, go for a run, express disappointment, in other words, meet an emotional need and address it instead of stuffing it with food.

In Step 4 we continuously recognize our successes, appreciate our progress, and move forward. The human psyche is one where we must experience progress to continue any long journey. The last step of restoring the brain from that of a food addict to its healthy relationship with food is not only a function of the level of food addiction but also how much pleasure we are able to experience as we progress. The less severe the food addiction and the more pleasure we are able to experience as we recognize our progress, the shorter the rewiring process. Likewise, acute addiction and an inability to experience the pleasure of progress will slow the rewiring process.

There is no diet prescribed in this book, although we do show that flavor-enhanced, high sugar or saturated content are addicting. Ending food addiction will mean ending consumption of these types of foods. The step by step programs in this book will restore your brain to a healthy relationship with food. It is not about overpowering your desire for food. Success is not dependent on willpower. You will learn how you inadvertently allowed food to become way too important in your life and how to regain control.

healthy perspective toward it.

This book is an invitation to women like me, who for many years followed the yellow brick road enticed by a magical diet, but were never able to remain at the Emerald City. As with all universal stories, you may recognize yourself in its mirror. If you do, my sincerest wish is that your reflection will also set you free. I'm profoundly moved by this new path; the damaging shame that has weighed my soul down is finally over! Let's embark on this journey together.

Chapter 1 Summary

Our chronic struggle to lose weight is caused by the dieting cycle that has modified our brains become food obsessed. The issue is not to find a novel way of how to lose weight; most of us are experts on that topic. The real issue is why we can only eat sensibly through Herculean, white-knuckle efforts. After sharing my personal story on the weight loss roller coaster, I know that you have lived through the many disappointments, the horror of watching your hard won weight goals evaporate in a matter of days after many, many months of hard work. I finally understand how we can comprehensively end the dieting madness. I'm going to share my experiences, backed by the latest scientific studies, that returning to our Naturally Thin Woman's brain is the foundation to lifelong and peaceful thinness.

We briefly mentioned the science of neuroplasticity and why is it that we live in craving mode swinging between starvation and binging. The objective of this work is not to change our behavior to mimic a Naturally Thin Woman, nor adopt her thinking or beliefs, but to return to feeling about food like a Naturally Thin Woman.

The rest of this book is an invitation for you to reclaim your Naturally Thin Woman's brain, and includes the tools to return to peaceful thinness.

Chapter 2 – The Thin Woman’s Brain

My exciting new journey began during the last evening of the get-together with my lifelong friend when I took a long walk with one of these Naturally Thin Women, my dear friend Alexandra. We had a meaningful history of trust and intimate communication. I shared with Alexandra the deconstruction of my life on the diet maze. I then followed with the disbelief that, once again, I had regained all of the weight I had lost plus additional pounds. At this point Alexandra’s eyes teared up, my friend truly loved me and she was saddened by the fact that not only had I lived through such demoralizing experiences but that they had profoundly damaged my sense of personhood. Being overweight was such a foreign concept for her. She simply did not understand how someone with my tenacity, intelligence, means, and “Navy-Seal willpower” could live the emotional hell that was my “life on endless diets.”

For all of her adult life, Alexandra had been a size 6. She loved to cook, she ate whatever she wanted and even though she was a mature woman, she (unlike most American women) had never, ever been on a diet. I was genuinely interested in what made Alexandra *naturally thin*. She was the first of many naturally thin women that agreed to answer all of my questions regarding her relationship with food.

Naturally Thin Versus Will-Powered Thin

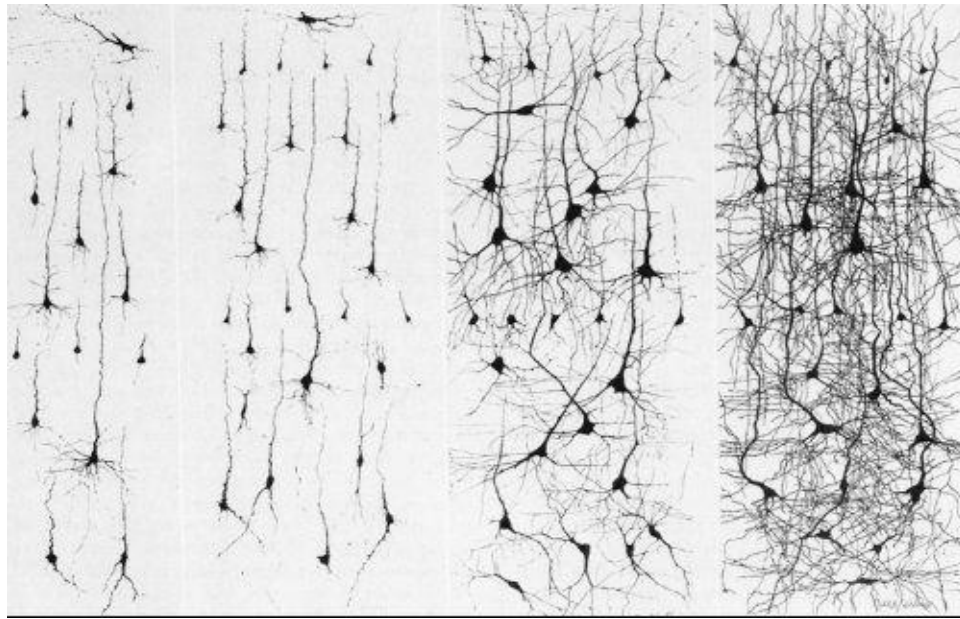
I would like to make a critical distinction between Naturally Thin Women like Alexandra and women like my other friend Piper, who through willpower, self-denial, and strict routines, experience long periods of thinness. What I discovered is that there is a discernible difference between women like Alexandra and Piper: Alexandra has a healthy relationship with food, in contrast to Piper, who maintains thinness through compulsive calorie-counting, excessive exercising, and a life centered on her preoccupation with staying thin at any cost. I knew Piper's strategies awfully well, as I had achieved many periods of thinness via those same fanatical methods.

The tools used by Will-Powered Thin Women such as smaller plates, a strict eating regimen, counting every calorie, and drinking massive amounts of water, are all meaningful aids and can be leveraged as helpful stepping stones. This book, however, is not about giving you more stepping stones; you can find plenty of those in most women's magazines as you are checking out at the grocery store. What we are presenting is a way to go beyond the crutches, because when the crutch is discarded prior to meaningful healing, the injury returns. Likewise when weight loss is predicated on the use of aids, it is temporary and fleeing. Natural thinness is not a function of willpower, as willpower is limited and is depleted by our many external demands, and by our emotional challenges. And functional crutches are meant to be discarded when their purpose has been fulfilled.

What is a Neural Net? How is It Relevant to Healthy Eating Behaviors?

The central nervous system (which includes the brain and spinal cord) is made up of two basic types of cells: neurons and glia. Neurons are the information messengers. They are the structures that emit the electrical impulses and exchange chemicals that lead to signals to be transmitted between different areas of the brain and between the brain and the rest of the nervous system. Everything we think and feel is correlated to neuron activity that initiates in the brain and affects other parts of our body and is also reflected in the neurons in the spinal cord.

Below you'll see several photographs of neural circuitry in the brain. These photographs show how those neural nets grow and interconnect as we develop any new skills and/or awareness.



The first photograph is the baseline; the second reflects the growth after 3 months, the third after 12 months and finally 2 years after the baseline. As we humans learn new skills, our brain's wiring becomes increasingly more complex and interconnected.

As someone who for many, many years fed an overeating behavior, I now know that there is a substantial amount of neural circuitry supporting those behaviors. One way to think about those overeating neural nets is that they are part of the organic program that emits electrical and chemical signals every time emotional, situational or social stress triggers hunger. What we learn in our program is that with equanimity we can restore the neural nets that recognize brain hunger and with practice we strengthen them so we are able to accept brain hunger for what it is, our old wiring ceases executing its programming. So our goal is to restore our Naturally Thin Woman's neural nets.

The change is biological, brain level and measurable by CAT scans and MRIs. It is about restoring our Naturally Thin Woman behaviors, such as the capacity to experience satisfaction, even in the presence of a sumptuous feast. It is not about a coping tool like calling a friend or, in our case, running to the refrigerator every time we experience stressful challenges. It is not emotional in nature either; it is not trumping one longing with another. Many of us have experienced periods of resisting the most enticing smorgasbord while in the initial stages of love. This is essentially what goes on in Will-Powered Thin women's brains where one force – the desire to overeat – is overpowered by a stronger one – the desire to stay thin. Many of us are able to sustain this suppression mechanism, but only when we have sufficient emotional energy to overpower our voracious appetites.

I've lived the Will-Powered Thin Woman's regimen, and what I know for sure is that the moment the

small plate is not available or the lover disappears, life feels stressful, then I, like most women, resort to overeating. ~~What we'll present in this book is a rewiring of the brain, the restoration of the Naturally Thin Woman's neural nets, where we choose the behaviors that lead to a healthy relationship with food. This is not an act of willpower, nor an intellectual construct; it is a sensation caused by organic brain structures, the Naturally Thin Woman's neural nets, that don't equate overeating with pleasure.~~

The goal is to move from the cerebral understanding of concepts to the Sacred YES! when, in that moment, we can acknowledge the pleasure of food *and* have the capacity to acknowledge it *without* the overwhelming compulsion to indulge in it. At a biological level the Naturally Thin Woman's wiring is different; it is organic and natural, which leads to trust and generates brain signals without the stress that Will-Powered Thin Women experience from their internal conflict and negotiations over what they should be eating. There is wisdom in Naturally Thin Women's wiring that allows them to simultaneously accept the potential pleasure of food and consciously choose to forfeit or postpone that pleasure to a time when they are next hungry.

Let's be crystal clear regarding women who eat like Alexandra versus women who eat like Piper. There are *physiological* differences between Alexandra's brain and Piper's brain – those who are naturally thin versus those who work relentlessly at being thin. Thin at the price of high stress and willpower is a recipe that we have all tried and consistently failed. There are healthy and viable options to lose weight once and for all.

Nine Key Behaviors of Naturally Thin Women

For the past two decades the field of neuroplasticity, the science behind rewiring the brain, has had consistent success in helping people with a range of challenges from alcohol or drug addiction to depression to obsessive-compulsive behavior. These success stories juxtaposed with how Naturally Thin Women relate to food prompted my two crucial questions:

1. What exactly are the brain-level differences between “naturally thin” women and chronic overeaters? More importantly:
2. Can we rewire our brains to experience food like a Naturally Thin Woman?

With these two questions I embarked upon the final leg of my journey toward peaceful thinness. My first task was to interview several Naturally Thin Women. After multiple interviews of women as diverse as the rainbow – from a street vendor to a former U.S. Congresswoman, from a high school dropout to a college professor, from a stay-at-home moms to senior executives – I found nine key behaviors that most of them shared:

- a) A Naturally Thin Woman does not obsess about food; only *physical hunger* prompts her to eat.
- b) A Naturally Thin Woman enjoys food, but it is not the obsessive love affair experienced by most overeaters.
- c) A Naturally Thin Woman makes time to enjoy her meals.
- d) A Naturally Thin Woman can assess her body needs against her food options.
- e) A Naturally Thin Woman dislikes the physical discomfort of being bloated or stuffed.
- f) A Naturally Thin Woman eats whatever she wants while considering the impact of calories.
- g) A Naturally Thin Woman does not consider food as her primary source of joy.
- h) A Naturally Thin Woman’s body awareness is attuned with nature.
- i) A Naturally Thin Woman is able to experience the ups and downs of life.

Let’s dig deeper into these nine key characteristics of Naturally Thin Women and contrast these characteristics to those of chronic dieters.

- a) A Naturally Thin Woman does not obsess about food; only *physical hunger* prompts her to eat.**

For many years my delusion was that Naturally Thin Women dreamt about carrots and apples while fantasized about pizza and ice cream. After I became food obsessed, there wouldn’t be a period of more than 40 minutes in my typical day where I wasn’t contemplating breakfast, planning a morning snack, scheduling lunch, strategizing an afternoon snack, arranging a light dinner, and then rewarding myself with a late evening snack. If I could not sleep, I knew that stuffing myself would help me fall asleep. I was “hungry” most of the time. Food was the pleasure of my life. Food was the dependable friend that would energize me, allow me to power through physical limitations to complete my work, soothe me, and give me an excuse to get together with friends. Food was constantly and permanently in my mind. Food had become my lover.

In contrast, for a Naturally Thin Woman, food is a physical necessity, similar to how most of us feel about filling the car with gas. Some of us fill our tanks every Sunday night, others as soon as it gets to the ¼-tank mark, and there are those who wait until the engine is running on fumes. Most overeaters seldom experience true hunger – like hearing our stomachs growl or feeling out of sorts because our blood-sugar level is a bit low. We think about food around the clock, taking every possible excuse to snack and dine and eat again. Our obsession with food grabs us like an emotional undertow and repeatedly drags us away from the shoreline of healthy eating.

Biologically, the overeater's brain is food-obsessed, which is not natural for human beings. ~~Diets~~ restrictions affect the neural nets in the appetite-control center of the brain and lead to what has been termed "famine brain," the driving obsession that locks our brain into compulsive longing for food. So, paradoxically, dieting is the perfect mechanism for developing the food obsession that is characteristic of most overeaters. And how is this obsessive, persistent brain state developed?

One of our fundamental biological imperatives is to nourish ourselves. Whenever the body experiences a drop in blood sugar level or it registers a lower fat content it triggers a small army of hormones that we experience as overwhelming and compulsive mandates to eat. Within our brains are receptors wired so that once the brain is in famine mode it drives us to overeat. The biological intent of these mechanisms is to be able to endure periods of food shortages. When our bodies register a drop in body fat or we experience low sugar levels our brains are wired to deploy a battalion of neurotransmitters, hormones and chemical mediators which prompts us to avoid famine. The mechanisms evolved over thousands of years to ensure our survival. The glitch is that the brain cannot differentiate between a body with excess fat and a body that has depleted its fat stores and is truly starving. The survival mechanisms that compel us to overeat are triggered by even the smallest drop in body fat.

Food obsession also stems from the suppression mechanism that restricts or forbids certain foods and encourages others. When we diet we forbid ourselves from having fat, sugar, carbohydrates or whatever it is that we are not supposed to eat during the diet. Harvard School of Medicine's Daniel Wegner, Ph.D., conclusively demonstrated that telling our brain *not* to think about a specific item is the most effective way to make the brain obsess about it. This mechanism has been demonstrated in a brain challenge, "For the next 60 seconds do not think about a polar bear." This restriction – and it can be carbs, fat, sugar, calories or whatever food category we are supposed to avoid this year – becomes the phenomenon that Wagner terms "ironic monitoring process." Most of us know it as the *Polar Bear Effect*.

Most of us have experienced that diets work only under ideal conditions; in other words, when we are hyper vigilant, rested, and relaxed, because it is only then that our suppression mechanism can override the obsession that makes us want to eat. However, as soon as we are stressed or challenged whenever our willpower is depleted, we immediately seek out the very substance that we have been suppressing. Anyone who has ever been on a diet knows that [willpower](#) is not an unlimited resource.

A key experiment jointly conducted at the University of Florida, the University of Utah and Case Western Reserve demonstrated that most human beings have a limited supply of self-control, and after continual demand, that supply can dry up. The scientists termed this phenomenon *ego depletion*. Ego is what Sigmund Freud described as our ability to consider the consequences of wearing a low plunging blouse to work, or slapping someone on the face. The researchers determined that a task requiring self-control can have a hindering effect on a subsequent task also requiring self-control, even if the tasks are completely unrelated.

The "ego depletion" studies have been critical in obliterating the commonly held notion that there is infinite willpower and that the issue with most women who don't adhere to their diets is lack of willpower.

b) A Naturally Thin Woman enjoys food, but it is not the obsessive love affair experienced by most overeaters.

Once a Naturally Thin Woman experiences physical hunger, she selects what she will eat; choosing food is not an obsessive or fantastic reverie. Whenever I used to think about food, my brain lit up like a pin-ball machine. Whereas a Naturally Thin Woman derives sensory pleasure *in her body* from the

physical act of eating, my greatest pleasure was generated by fantasizing about the pleasure of the food, ~~daydreaming in my head about the amazingly delicious food I was going to eat~~ – something soon.

Think of it this way. Suppose you've met someone that you feel overpoweringly attracted to, so much that you spend days or weeks fantasizing about the idyllic romantic encounter that will transpire the next time your paths cross. And then you actually spend time with this man and your impeccably scripted plan becomes a terribly awkward exchange that leaves you feeling disillusioned and wondering how on earth you convinced yourself that this man was your perfect mate. The food-obsessed brain invests a great deal of time planning the next eating rendezvous and, in most cases, the act of consuming the food is not as satisfying as the fantasy itself.

Naturally Thin Women do not tell themselves that in order to continue being thin they cannot eat specific foods. This is perhaps one of the most surprising differences between the wiring of Naturally Thin Women like Alexandra and a Will-Powered Thin Woman like Piper. Alexandra thoroughly enjoys bread, butter, and fat-laden foods, trusting that she will stop indulging in them when her body tells her that it is satiated. Piper will avoid these foods like the plague because the *diet du jour* says she is not supposed to eat them.

For the Naturally Thin Woman, there is no struggle or emotional charge around eating, or for that matter around having fattening food in the house. There is no love-hate relationship with food, nor negotiating with it. Eating is a pleasure, a sensual joy; it is wonderfully satisfying.

Because of the Polar Bear Effect most overeaters have a short sprint of sublime adherence to a specific set of eating regimens, followed by an explosive burst of bingeing or long periods of “I don't give a shit” – stuffing themselves with whatever food bears the label “I'm-not-supposed-to-eat-this.” Their relationship with food runs the gamut from iron-willed self-control to a frenzied, all-bets-are-off tornado.

c) **A Naturally Thin Woman makes time to enjoy her meals.**

There is nothing more delicious than eating a meal when we have a genuine appetite. Our taste buds are alive; we are able to experience flavors, discern textures, and fully delight in aromas. Physical hunger has specific body signals and sensations – our mouths water at the sight of food; we can experience heightened sensations of texture in our cheeks, teeth, tongue, and upper palate; our stomach rumbles; we experience low blood-sugar levels. From these awakened body sensations, most Naturally Thin Women experience *physical hunger*, and it is then that they begin to plan what would feel good to eat.

I spoke with several Naturally Thin Women who shared how they experience the act of eating. They talk about preparing a beautiful meal; they use words like *symphony*, *velvety*, *luscious*, *silky*, *kaleidoscope*, *stimulating*, *explosion*. Eating is an enchanting love affair – unhurried, present, and explorative, even seductive. In fact, they would rather *not* eat than hurry through the experience (perhaps just grabbing a small snack to tide them over). In contrast it used to take me three minutes flat from the time the food was in front of me to the time it was gone. I ate like a piranha. Unlike Alexandra, there was no courting, no preparation, no planning, no first date; it was locate, acquire, devour.

Once we get in the habit of overeating we attempt to attain the mental spectacle that had been marinating for hours prior to the physical act. So by the time the food was in front of me, the actual experience of eating could never match the fantasy that had been indulged in my mind.

The wiring to fully experience food explains why many Naturally Thin Women “forget to eat” when

their lives are in chaos; they don't experience pleasure in hurrying through a meal, as it is inconsistent with fully enjoying it. ~~Setting time aside to enjoy a meal is a stark contrast to the three-minute "fast foods" or "eating on the run" that many of the rest of us call eating.~~ Once we understand *famine brain*, we understand why for most overeaters hunger feels like an overwhelming imperative that fuels a compulsion never experienced by Naturally Thin Women.

d) A Naturally Thin Woman can assess her body needs against her food options.

A Naturally Thin Woman trusts the messages from her body and honors its desires; if she truly wants a piece of cheesecake, or pizza, or whatever it is that those of us who stop trusting our body messages will not allow ourselves to eat, she will eat it. Most Naturally Thin Women will not eat food that does not appeal to them. What's the point? If she doesn't like her choices, her internal dialogue goes like this: "If my only options are yucky food, I'd rather have a snack until I can sit down and enjoy what I truly want." Or if she truly doesn't have the time to eat she will say to herself, "I'd rather postpone my meal; I don't enjoy rushing through the experience." Yes, genuine hunger will drive her to eat, but only if it's a positive experience; she is not driven by *famine brain* and her choices are not propelled by compulsion. Once she becomes physically hungry, Alexandra is very specific as to what she prefers to eat. With a healthy mind-body connection, unimpeded by all the fear of being FAT (where we don't trust our instincts), Alexandra has access to her hunger needs and can clearly express them:

- I am hungry.
- This doesn't appeal to me.
- That looks really yummy!
- Yuck, that doesn't taste good – I'm not eating it.
- I am thirsty, not hungry.

These body-level trusts are in huge contrast to thin women like Piper who are constantly negotiating calories, which then fuels an internal argument with her innate desires:

- That's all I'm supposed to eat, and damn it, I'm not eating any more.
- I will NOT allow myself to be FAT.
- It's only two more hours before I can eat – I will force myself to wait it out.
- I'll drink water until it's time to eat.
- I'll do something else to distract myself.

These are important distinctions; the Natural Thin Woman trusts her appetite, what sounds good to eat, and her needs to enjoy the meal. She also knows that having to rush through a meal is not pleasurable and so she would rather eat a snack and wait until she has the time to enjoy the meal. She eats with a confidence and a trust that she will not gain weight.

e) A Naturally Thin Woman dislikes the physical discomfort of being bloated or stuffed.

In fact, the word consistently used by Naturally Thin Women to describe the feeling of being stuffed was HATE. "I HATE feeling stuffed." "I don't care if I'm eating with the Queen of England at the most sumptuous gourmet feast on the planet. Once I am full, nothing will make me overeat." Someone once attempted to entice Alexandra to finish what was left on her plate, and she responded, "I don't give a shit if there is food on the plate. I'm not a garbage can; I'm FULL."

Alexandra once told me that she thinks of her stomach as being the size of a softball and she knows that filling it beyond its limits has negative consequences:

- I feel like I'm tied down – a lead balloon, uncomfortable in my clothes.
- I feel hostage to my body; it limits my ability to do so many other activities.
- My range of movement is limited, and simple activities, like walking up stairs, a

miserable.

- It compromises the quality of my life.

- If I really like the taste of something and I'm full, I can have more later... when I'm not full and I can enjoy it. Duh.

Being full was a foreign concept to me. I always ate whatever was on the plate, I always went for seconds, and I always, *always* wanted dessert, often my reward for going without bread, or for eating greens. The idea of being full occurred only when I had stuffed myself so grossly that it was physically unbearable to move. I would not stop until I reached a level of being so stuffed that I felt disgust and shame and physically could not eat anymore.

It is a gift to trust our bodies when they generate evidence of satiation: I've enjoyed the eating experience and now I'm full. That complete trust, the absence of anxiety, allows us to eat without anxiety or compulsion.

One additional, and important, distinction between the Natural Thin Woman and the Will-Powered Thin Woman is the ability to trust their body messages, to recognize once it is satiated. I once asked Alexandra how she can tell when she's full. The answer was so simple it floored me. "The food loses its taste. It doesn't taste as good as when I began eating. The taste becomes bland." Women like Alexandra can discern when they are full; they trust the signals that their bodies generate.

Once I began eating like a Naturally Thin Woman, I no longer worried about being sleepy in the afternoon because I ate too much at lunch. I am now able to enjoy much more of life because I am not recuperating from a large meal. I can go dancing or on a brisk walk right after dinner because I'm not down for the evening. Knowing and trusting the sensation of fullness has increased the quality of my life significantly.

f) A Naturally Thin Woman eats whatever she wants while considering the impact of calories.

Eating the way Naturally Thin Women eat, if I have a desire for a sub, pizza, fettuccini Alfredo, Haagen-Dazs® or chocolate, I will honor that desire and have that exact food. I don't worry about overeating because I have learned how to eat mindfully (more on this in Chapter 4), and I know that the taste of the food will not be as enticing once my body has had enough. I savor every bite, but I stop eating the moment it loses its taste. Eating the *entire carton* of ice cream no longer has an appeal.

Alexandra shared with me her internal dialogue, which goes something like this; "Yes I could have this donut because it is sitting right here in front of me, but I'd rather eat that luscious piece of chocolate that I really, truly want." Forfeiting the donut because we prefer to eat chocolate is an example of the distinction between choice and self-deprivation.

Naturally Thin Woman

"I choose"

"I prefer"

"I'd rather"

Will-Powered Thin Woman

"I will make myself"

"I can't have"

"It's not in my diet"

In a University of Houston study, psychologists Vanessa M. Patrick, Ph.D., and Henrik Hagtvad, Ph.D., demonstrated that there is a higher level of empowerment when we believe we have options. Naturally thin Women use statements such as "I won't" to indicate that they are choosing, in contrast to Will-Powered Thin Women who act out of a limited set of options so they typically use the expression "I Can't." For a Naturally Thin Woman, each calorie has to be worth it, and the brain reacts very differently to a choice than to a denial of our basic desire. Think about training a pit bull to attack

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