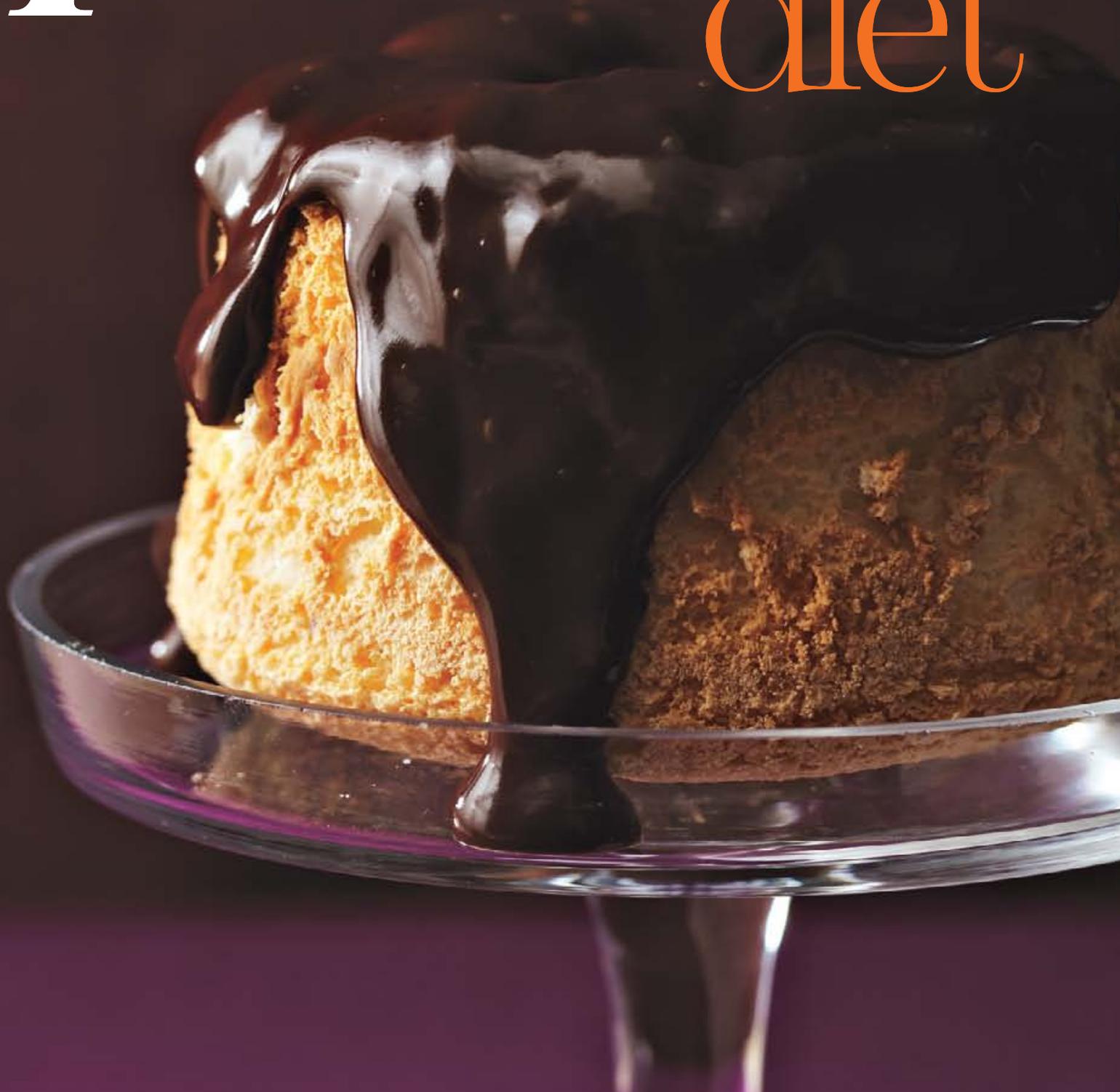


the
pleasure
diet



Believe it or not, it is possible to *lose weight* with no deprivation, no self-flagellation and *plenty of chocolate*, wine and [insert your favorite food here]. I know, because *I did it*. Want to stop having lettuce for lunch, obsessing over every bite and being a slave to the scale? This is how.

By Paula Derrow Photographs by Anna Williams

my name is Paula, and I'm a shameless seeker of pleasure. (Well, as shameless as a nice Jewish girl raised with a healthy dose of guilt and possessed of limited funds can be.) My sheets have a thread count somewhere north of 650, and I like sex, well, *a lot*. I also like wine, chocolate and ice cream, sometimes all at the same time.

Given my pleasure-loving ways, it's not too shocking that I've struggled with my weight over the years. Dieting, after all, is about saying no. Most human beings don't like to say no. We can do it for only so long before we snap, then start saying yes, yes, yes! to fettuccine Alfredo and curly fries, margaritas and milk shakes. All that yessing leads—or at least it led *me*—to extra pounds, self-recrimination and fruitless dieting.

Confession: I have a long history of bingeing and yo-yo dieting. From age 14 to my mid-20s, I shot up to 167 pounds on my 5-foot-3 frame, got down to 129 (for about five minutes) and repeated the cycle again. And again. Then, when I was 24, at a doctor's urging, I joined a gym and discovered that I liked exercising. Eventually, I dropped about 35 pounds, ending up at a weight of 135 just shy of my 30th birthday. Yet, as the years passed (I'm now 47), I put nearly all of those pounds back on, and early last year made a discovery that shocked me. One morning, when my boyfriend, Randy, stepped on the bathroom scale, I peeked at the number: 146. My weight: 159! "I can't believe you weigh less than me," I wailed. My honey professed to love my curves, but I wanted to feel dainty, not as if I would crush him if I hugged him too hard. I was tired of being chubby, tired of having a tough time finding cute clothes in my size (14) and, most of all, tired of feeling guilty about food. I

needed a weight loss plan for pleasure junkies, one that not only allowed but *encouraged* desserts and dinners out. I needed a plan that was all about what I *could* eat, not what I couldn't.

except there was no plan like that to be found. In fact, the words *pleasure* and *diet* didn't even seem to exist in the same sentence. But as the articles director at SELF, I knew I had resources. I told my colleagues in our nutrition department that I needed to work with a few experts who wouldn't stress me out, force me to meticulously track calories or give me long lists of foods to avoid. With these pros' help, I would create a new kind of eating plan, one that didn't feel like deprivation but like a happy life, rich in delicious food, friendships and pleasurable experiences.

I already had one expert in my "entourage." After my scale humiliation with Randy, I had hired an adorable trainer, Rusty Ede. Being coached by a 27-year-old with big blue eyes and a sleepy smile was pure pleasure. I started exercising four or five times a week, more consistently than I had in years. Soon, I could do 15 push-ups at a pop and trot rather than trudge up the subway stairs. I dropped 7 pounds—though not without also suffering through a few bouts of starvation (not pleasurable!).

Yet after that, the scale stayed stuck at 152—classified as overweight on the body-mass index chart. To achieve a healthy BMI, I needed to get down to 135. That required more help than a trainer (no matter how cute) could provide. Enter Marissa Lippert, R.D., author of the enticingly named *The Cheater's Diet*. She asked me to keep a food diary for a few weeks, so she could assess my patterns. Lippert also promised to help me make better choices at the supermarket. (You can find the

Wow! Look at me now



2010	YEAR	2011
159	WEIGHT	142
14	DRESS SIZE	10

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF SUBJECT, BILL DIODATO; STYLING, LIDA MOORE MUSSO; HAIR, JENNIFER BRENT FOR TRESEMME; MAKEUP, JOY FENNEL FOR DIOR BEAUTY; OPPOSITE PAGE: FOOD STYLING, LIZA JERNOW; PROP STYLING, PAUL LOWE.

shopping list Lippert gave me at Self.com.) An Italophile like me, Lippert said, “I want you to think about how you eat when you’re vacationing in Rome and try to do that in your regular life. That means treating yourself to great meals but with fresh produce as the centerpiece.” Just the mention of Italy put me in a happy state of mind—crucial, Lippert emphasized, to weight loss success. “If you feel negative about the process of changing the way you eat, you won’t see any progress on the scale.”

So: regular exercise, check. A doable eating plan (with wine!), coming up. But I also needed help tackling my emotional issues with food. SELF’s nutrition team recommended Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Indiana State University at Terre Haute and a mindful-eating expert. “Traditional diets keep people stuck in a battle mentality,” Kristeller said when I called her. “Willpower is like a slap on the wrist—don’t you *dare* have that pint of ice cream. But if there was no way you’d gain weight, you’d eat the pint in a second, right?” she asked. Yes! Especially if it was Ben & Jerry’s Peanut Butter Cup. “Mindful eating is about self-regulation, not self-control,” she said. “When you’re self-regulating, you’re not saying, ‘I can’t have the pint,’ you’re saying, ‘I don’t want it.’”

Kristeller started my mindfulness lessons with a raisin. Feeling a bit foolish, I observed the wrinkled thing closely, sniffed it, then popped it into my mouth to experience the texture and flavor. What I discovered: When you eat one raisin at a time, rather than tossing 20 in your mouth while you’re typing on your laptop, you appreciate how much flavor a single raisin contains. After eating three mindfully, I stopped without feeling deprived.

“Ultimately, you want to eat less but experience more satisfaction,” Kristeller says. OK, but that was a raisin. Would mindfulness work with more tempting foods? Over the next few weeks, Kristeller had me mindfully eat cheese and crackers, candy and a brownie, staying aware of how hungry I was and savoring every bite. The process felt almost effortless and surprisingly natural. Even better, it worked: I ate quite a bit less than I normally would have and appreciated the food all the more.

Stopping the shovel-it-in effect

1 NOTICE HOW HUNGRY YOU ARE Take a few deep breaths and tune in to your body. Assess your hunger on a 10-point scale, 1 being not at all hungry, 10 being ravenous. Ideally, you don’t want to be at a 9 or 10 before eating. Checking in with your hunger periodically and assigning it a number will also help you eat only when you’re truly hungry, not just because the food is there.

2 START EATING (See? These steps are easy!) Pause periodically to check in with how full you are getting, this time assigning it a number on a new scale that rates your fullness from 1 (not at all full) to 10 (stuffed to the gills). Remember that your body will take a while to react to what you’ve eaten, Kristeller says. So if you’re aiming to end up at a comfortable fullness level of 7, the goal is to push your plate away at 6.

3 TUNE IN TO THE TASTE OF EVERY BITE Pay attention to—and enjoy!—the texture, smell and taste of your food. At some point, you’ll find that the bite you’re taking isn’t as satisfying as the one before. That’s a good time to put down your fork. “When you pause frequently, you can really think about what you want, instead of going into reactive mode,” Kristeller says.

I still indulged!

Yep, this is diet food. Other delicious foods on my menu: lots of goat cheese, plenty of wine and ice cream!



While I was mastering mindfulness, Kristeller also advised that I take up daily meditation. I was skeptical. I’d tried meditating before and ended up feeling tense. “It’s easier to ‘listen’ to your body and tune in to your natural signals if you develop a sense of balance and calm awareness through meditation,” she promised. In fact, meditation helps turn off the lower regions of the brain that react primitively to food (I want it! But I shouldn’t!) and develops the prefrontal cortex, an area that “sees” the bigger picture—enabling you to make more measured decisions about what to eat. In a study Kristeller and her colleagues did with chronic bingers, those who meditated for 10 to 20 minutes a day for six weeks binged significantly less often—once or twice a week compared with four or five times a week previously. And in a study that the National Institutes of Health funded, people who went through Kristeller’s mindful-eating program, which includes learning to meditate, lost an average of 6 pounds after 10 weeks, compared with a loss of less than half a pound for the control group.

I decided I would meditate in my office every afternoon, right around the time I’d usually beg for chocolate from our nutrition editors. I’d close my door, set my phone to beep after 10 minutes and start breathing deeply. When I opened my eyes, I almost always felt more focused and ready to tackle not only my food issues but whatever was on my desk. Not a bad outcome for 10 minutes a day. (For an easy way to meditate, see page 94.)

Of course, pleasure aside, meditation aside, I knew that at some point, I’d simply have to eat less if I wanted to lose weight. The trouble is, when I’d come up with the whole idea of dieting pleasurably, I hadn’t considered counting calories, never mind *cutting* them. But now that I had experts in place and was starting

to adopt some helpful mental techniques, I wondered if I might find something valuable in keeping track of my calories. Kristeller agreed that the practice could give me a feeling of control. “You wouldn’t shop in a store that didn’t put price tags on things. It’s the same with calories. Knowing how many you can spend in a day, whether 1,500 or 2,500, makes it easier to choose foods you like but that won’t blow your budget.”

I began writing down everything I put into my mouth in the little green food diary Lippert had given me. Pleasurable? Not even close. But Lippert assured me that I would have to do it for only a few weeks. As it turned out, after only a few short *days*, it was easy to see where I was going astray. Usually, I’d start off with a relatively healthy breakfast (wheat toast with peanut butter, honey, sliced banana and coffee). For lunch, I’d head down to the company cafeteria to try to find something reasonably healthy (stir-fry, sushi, sometimes a salad). So far, so good. The trouble began at night, when I inevitably went out for dinner. (I stubbornly refuse to learn to cook.) Faced with an array of yummy options, I was a goner. At my favorite neighborhood tapas bar, for instance, I might start a meal with bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with goat cheese, then move on to lamb sliders with a side of spicy potato chips. All with a glass or two of Spanish red. I always tried to leave a few chips, and I would eat the lamb burgers sans buns, but even I knew this kind of indulgence couldn’t continue if I wanted to weigh less than my boyfriend.

Lippert, with a New Yorker’s passion for eating out, was understanding. Together, we scanned the online menu at my tapas place, and she helped me pick healthier choices that I’d still enjoy. She was also full of suggestions for controlling portion sizes at other restaurants, including my go-to neighborhood Italian spot known for having the best pasta in town.

Navigating a night out at a restaurant

1 START EVERY MEAL WITH A SALAD or a soup—preferably one that’s vegetarian or bean-based. “That way, you’ll get your fiber and vegetables in and also fill up,” Lippert explains. “For the most satisfying salad, go with options that are in season—local greens, fresh tomatoes—for maximum flavor.”

2 THINK IN HALVES If the entrée you order is the typical enormous restaurant portion, eat half and have the rest packed to go. (And here’s a happy thought: You’ve now left room for dessert!) Make a point of filling half your plate with salad or veggies, then divide the other half evenly between protein and carbs, Lippert says. “You’re flipping the focus of your meal.”

3 OPT FOR AN APPETIZER as your entrée, especially if you’re dining out frequently. “I love sharing three or four appetizers with a friend, so I get the variety *and* the taste without the massive portions,” Lippert told me. A few of my own favorite pleasure-diet appetizers, approved by Lippert for healthfulness and (relatively) low calorie count: oysters on the half shell, tuna tartare and even linguine with razorback clams, so long as it’s a starter-sized portion.

i kept Lippert’s restaurant advice in mind when, a week or so later, I found myself at a barbecue, facing a table heavy with ribs, burgers and all manner of fresh-baked treats. I didn’t know many of the guests, and normally, to assuage my shyness, I might have downed a few glasses of wine and eaten my way from

one end of the spread to the other. This time, I took a deep breath and checked in with my hunger. (I was at about a 7—hungry but not starving.) Next, I thought about what foods I would most enjoy: a piece of barbecued chicken, a scoop of German potato salad and, mindful of Lippert’s “flip your focus” advice, a healthy serving of greens. Plate full but not overflowing, I made my way to a table, took a few deep breaths and ate slowly, checking in with my fullness level and savoring every bite. When my satiety was at about a 7, I stopped, took a little break, then went back for dessert. I enjoyed a piece of brownie and a chocolate chip cookie, then got up and mingled, no more picking necessary. When I proudly relayed my achievement to Kristeller a few days later, she confirmed, “Instead of eating on automatic, you put yourself in touch with your ability to make a choice.”

but was I losing weight? Yes! The first week on the pleasure diet, I lost a pound; the second week, another two. I found that by trimming certain at-home meals here and there and by having a healthy snack in the afternoon, so I didn’t get too hungry, I was able to go out and enjoy restaurant dinners (appetizers only, accompanied by a glass or two of good wine!) without feeling as if I were on a diet. For instance, Lippert suggested that instead of having two pieces of toast with peanut butter and banana for breakfast, I try having one slice. “You might find that’s enough for you. Right off the bat, you’ll be cutting out 150 calories or so.”

By the end of the third week, I was down to 148.3. By the end of the following week, I hit a low of 147.8. Nearly 4 pounds down! I was nearing my boyfriend’s weight! Except the following Monday I was back up to 149.2, and the next day, 150.2. When I saw that I’d tipped back over 150, I practically cried, but I suspected the culprit: I hadn’t yet tackled my biggest diet bugaboo.

“How much wine do you drink?” Lippert had asked me early on. (Uh-oh. I knew that was coming.) “Well, I never drink at home, but I always have a glass or two when I’m out with friends, and I go out maybe five or six times a week. That’s, um, at least 12 glasses of wine a week.” Wow. More than two bottles of wine a week! How could that be? “Why don’t you try to keep wine to a glass a night during the week, and aim for two dry nights?” she suggested. “You can have more leeway on the weekends.”

That sounded reasonable, but it turned out not to be so easy. Limiting my wine felt punishing, especially when I was done with my glass of Sauvignon Blanc and my friends were starting on another. Isn’t this diet supposed to be about pleasure? I’d think grumpily. When I griped to Kristeller, she gave me an unexpected answer: “If you’re not willing to give up that second glass of wine on occasion, then it may not make sense to do that now. Instead of beating yourself up, enjoy it, then think about how you’ll subtract those 120 calories elsewhere.”

She then introduced me to what she calls the 500-calorie challenge: “Instead of counting the calories of every morsel, reflect on how you can subtract 500 calories during the day. In seven days, you’ll have subtracted 3,500, which (continues on page 124)

click!

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- ✓ How to short-circuit a binge
- ✓ Inspiration on the Pleasure Diet blog

Go to Self.com/go/pleasurediet.

The pleasure diet

(continued from page 103) means dropping a pound for the average person.” What made the pleasure diet different, I realized, is that instead of adhering to a rigid regimen, I could choose what I wanted. So I had my wine and shaved some calories off of lunches (less bread, more veggies). By not depriving myself, staying aware of how hungry (or full) I was and truly enjoying my food, I was able to stop once I’d had a reasonable amount.

Still, as much as I was learning, the annoying weight disparity between my boyfriend and me remained. Until, one wonderful morning, progress: I stepped on the scale and the display read 144. I asked Randy to step on next. His weight: 146. I pumped my fist in the air—woo hoo!—and high-fived him.

I was on a roll. But old habits die hard, and one night a few weeks later, I slipped back into my old behavior. The trouble started after I’d gotten home from a nice meal at the tapas place, tried to call Randy and discovered he’d already gone to sleep. Bummer! So I headed to the kitchen and downed two heaping bowls of granola in succession, knowing full well I’d regret this behavior in the morning.

I did, and when I called Kristeller to moan about the incident, she suggested I think back on the evening and write down any emotional triggers that may have jump-started my mini-binge. I realized the first trigger was simply that I’d let myself get too hungry. I’d worked out before dinner and had eaten lightly at the tapas bar, so when I got home, I was still craving food. Second, I’d had a stressful day at work, and I needed soothing. Third, I was lonely. I’m in a long-distance relationship, and it’s tough when we’re apart.

When I reported these triggers to Kristeller, she explained that they had started a chain reaction. Emotional triggers are typically followed by thoughts (e.g., I’m lonely, so I deserve a treat). Those thoughts lead to yet more emotions and thoughts—I shouldn’t eat, but what does it matter anyway?—which lead to action: pouring cereal into a bowl and eating it. “By being more aware of this chain of events, you can short-circuit it,” Kristeller told me. “Maybe you could have called a friend instead of going for the cereal. Or maybe you’ll still choose to eat, but you’ll opt for an amount of food that feels enjoyable rather than an amount

that leaves you feeling bad about yourself.” (To see a slide show of how a binge happens and what to do to head it off, go to Self.com/go/pleasurediet.)

Most important, Kristeller told me to let myself off the hook. Many people comfort themselves with food when they’re stressed, she pointed out. “We found that even people with no weight or eating issues tended to eat more when they felt anxious. The difference is they didn’t then feel as if they’d blown it, so they didn’t keep on eating.” This “I’ve screwed up, so I might as well keep going” reaction is common among chronic dieters; it even has an official name: the abstinence violation effect.

That term must have stuck with me, because the next week, I almost succumbed to it, then managed to stop a potential binge in its tracks.

Here’s what happened: I met a friend for dinner at a barbecue joint—not too many healthy choices on *that* menu. Still, I didn’t go wild. Channeling Kristeller, I took a few deep breaths and paid attention to how hungry I was (about a 6—not too bad). Then I chose exactly what I craved—a pulled pork sandwich—and ate half of it, minus the bread. I made sure to order a side of collard greens (gotta get those vegetables). I also had a bite of my friend’s crab cake appetizer. But I couldn’t help but finish an entire biscuit because it was so unbelievably good, especially with strawberry butter.

When I got home later that night, I felt bad about my unhealthy meal and thought, Well, I’ve already blown it, so I may as well have dessert. I opened the freezer, looked at my emergency pack of Skinny Cow chocolate-peanut butter ice cream sandwiches and, suddenly, a little bell went off in my brain—*ping!* Abstinence violation effect! Maybe it was awareness born of my meditation habit, but I paused and thought, You know, I’m still full from dinner. With that, I closed the freezer and headed to bed with a book.

Slipping between my high-thread-count sheets was supremely pleasurable, but not as pleasurable as knowing I’d avoided a binge and the familiar aftermath of shame and regret. Instead, I’d savored my dinner *and* a night out with a good friend. There was no reason to beat myself up for any of it.

Now, five months in, I’ve lost 10 pounds the pleasurable way (and kept off that first 7 I lost with the help of my trainer and no shortage of hunger pangs). At 142 pounds, I have 7 more to go to reach my goal weight of 135. The pleasure diet, it turns out, isn’t a fast way to lose weight, but it’s one I can stick to without bingeing or feeling even a little bit deprived. I’m still exercising regularly, still eating out most nights of the week and still enjoying dessert—and wine—when I want to (the former, about four times a week; the latter, well, most nights. Pleasure rules). I’ve dropped two dress sizes (going from 14 to 10), and my toned biceps and calves garner admiring glances. And the true success: I feel more relaxed about food and my weight than I ever have. I listen to my body, eat what I want and stop when I’m starting to get full. *That’s* what I call progress—the kind that can’t be measured by a scale.

A day of pleasure dieting

Breakfast 1 slice raisin toast (Rudy’s organic bread) • honey, natural peanut butter • coffee • skim milk

WHY IT WORKS Whole-grain breads (and crackers) fill you up and are rich in fiber; honey satisfies a sweet tooth; peanut butter provides protein for energy, and coffee...well, that speaks for itself.

Midmorning snack 1 banana •

a handful of smoked almonds and raisins

WHY IT WORKS Planned snacks are key to not getting too hungry. This combo gives me energy and satisfies my craving for something sweet *and* salty.

Lunch Niçoise salad with tuna, hard-boiled egg, tomato, lettuce and olives

WHY IT WORKS Salad = healthy and filling; tuna = same; and the whole fancy Niçoise thing makes it feel pleasurable, not as if I’m eating diet food.

Afternoon snack 1 serving goat cheese (quarter of a log) • grapes

WHY IT WORKS Goat cheese is one of the leanest cheeses, according to Lippert. And to me, grapes are almost like candy.

Dinner (Greek restaurant)

Appetizer-sized portion of ravioli with eggplant, lamb and yogurt sauce • 1 slice pita bread • Greek salad • 1 glass wine • ½ glass Prosecco • ½ piece baklava

WHY IT WORKS I get my pasta (but a scaled-down portion), a salad, wine and dessert. Can you say *pleasure*? ■