

Breakfast isn't the problem

A short book about starting a new diet every few weeks
and blaming yourself when it ends

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, and the habit isn't eating. It's starting. Every few weeks you begin a new plan for what you'll eat, with rules and a first day, and for a while it goes well, and then it doesn't, and it ends, and the ending feels like your fault. A few weeks later there's another one. You've done this more times than you could count without a pen, and each time the blame has landed in the same place, which is on you.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the fresh start makes sense from the inside. It brings clarity and hope, the scale moves, and for a fortnight you feel in charge. The second is that the diet ended the same way every time not because you were weak but because that's how diets end. Restriction sets up the conditions for its own collapse. Merely planning one raises eating in people who diet. The hunger that arrives after weight loss is a hormonal state that lasts at least a year and isn't a lapse of character. And the moment the diet actually ends is not the biscuit. It's the sentence you say after the biscuit, and that sentence can be dropped. The third is practical. You stop starting diets. You eat three ordinary meals a day and don't skip, and when you've eaten more than you meant to, the next meal is an ordinary meal. Chapters 19 to 22 cover how.

This book takes no position on whether you should lose weight. That's between you, your body and, if you want one, your GP. What it argues is that the cycle you're in doesn't get you there and costs you a good deal on the way, and that the way out isn't a better plan.

Four cautions, and please read them.

If your eating involves large amounts with a feeling of losing control, or making yourself sick, or going long stretches without food on purpose, or if food and your body take up most of your thinking most of the day, that's not the habit this book is about. It may be an eating disorder, which is an illness with good treatment. The charity Beat and your GP are the places to start, and they're used to being asked.

If a clinician has put you on a diet, or you take medication for weight, follow them. Nothing here overrides advice from someone who knows your health.

If your weight is high and you have a health condition that goes with it, or you've been told to lose weight for a medical reason, this book still applies to the cycle, and the NHS route for losing weight is in chapter 16. In England you can refer yourself to NHS weight management services without seeing a GP first.

And if you're pregnant, or under eighteen, this book isn't written for you. Talk to your midwife or your GP.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Monday, again

It's Sunday night. You've had a weekend that went the way weekends go, and now you're sitting on the sofa with your phone, and you've downloaded the app, or found the plan, or written the list. Tomorrow starts it. No bread, or no sugar, or nothing after seven, or points, or a shake at lunch. You feel something close to relief. The last few weeks have been a mess and this puts a shape on the next ones.

Monday is good. Tuesday is good. Wednesday you're hungry by four but you hold. Thursday there's a box of biscuits on the desk at work, opened, and at half past three you have one. It's a biscuit. Then, because you've had one, the day has gone, so you have three more, and at home there's the thing you'd said you wouldn't have, and you have it, because Thursday is finished anyway. Friday is a takeaway and the word "Monday". Saturday and Sunday are what they'd have been without the diet, plus a feeling. Monday you don't start. You've lost the will. A fortnight later, on a Sunday night, there's a new app.

This is an invented fortnight, but I'd guess it's close. Now count. How many of these have there been? Most readers who stop to count find it's in the dozens over a few years, and that they'd never added them up, because each one felt like a separate event with its own separate failure. They aren't separate. They're one thing that happens over and over, and it has a shape, and the shape is the subject of this book.

Some words. I'll call the new plan and its first day **the fresh start**. Whatever the plan forbids and requires, I'll call **the rules**. The first time a rule gets broken, the Thursday biscuit, is **the first break**. What you say to yourself after the first break, that the day's ruined or the week's gone, I'll call **the write-off**. The verdict you pass on yourself afterwards, greedy, weak, hopeless, is **the blame**. And the whole thing, fresh start, rules, first break, write-off, blame, fresh start, I'll call **the cycle**. The alternative to the cycle, which is the second half of the book, I'll call **the ordinary week**, and the meal after a slip, in the ordinary week, is **an ordinary meal**.

Before you go on, do one thing. On the back of an envelope, list every diet you can remember starting in the last three years. Next to each, roughly how long it lasted, and how it ended. Not why. How. The biscuit, the birthday, the holiday, the bad week. Keep the list. It's the most useful document in this book, and it's already written. You just haven't looked at it in one place.

Why the fresh start feels right

Before I take the fresh start apart, I want to say what it does for you, because it isn't nothing and you're not a fool for reaching for it.

It works at first. The first week of nearly any diet goes well. The scale drops, often by several pounds, and it doesn't matter for the feeling that most of that is water. You feel lighter and you feel in charge.

It brings clarity. A week with rules in it is a week where you know what to do at every meal. No deciding, no negotiating with yourself. Just the plan.

It brings hope. Sunday night is the best night of the cycle. Everything is ahead of you and none of it has gone wrong yet.

It brings control. The weeks before the fresh start felt like drift, and the fresh start is the opposite of drift. It says that you decide what goes in, and that's a good feeling after a fortnight of feeling that you didn't.

Last time was the wrong plan. That's the thought that makes this time different. The shakes were unrealistic. The points were fiddly. The fasting made you dizzy. This one is sensible, and that's why it'll hold.

Everyone does it. January is a month of fresh starts. The office has a diet going. Your sister's on one. It would be odd not to.

And underneath it all, you'd like something about your body or your eating to be different, and a plan is the only tool you've been offered. Nobody handed you another one. The magazines, the apps, the January adverts and the office all offer the same thing, which is a fresh start with rules in it, and when the only tool on the table is a diet, picking it up isn't a failure of imagination. It's what's there.

There are needs under all of this. A need to feel in charge of what you eat. A need for structure. A need for hope after a bad patch. A need to be doing something about a thing that bothers you. Those needs are real and the ordinary week, later in the book, is built to meet them. What I'll show is that the fresh start meets them for a fortnight and then hands you the write-off and the blame, and that the blame is what makes the next fresh start feel necessary, and that this is the whole engine of the cycle.

"I just need more discipline"

Here's the belief the cycle runs on. The diets ended because you didn't hold. Other people hold. You have a biscuit on Thursday and it's over, and what that shows is a lack of discipline, and next time you'll have more.

Look at the envelope. How did each one end? I'd expect a list that reads like a single story. A biscuit, a birthday, a bad day, a meal out, a weekend. Different rules, different lengths, the same shape of ending. If discipline were the variable, you'd expect variety. Some would have ended from weakness and some from bad luck and some would still be going. Instead they all ended the same way, at roughly the same point, and that's the signature of a design rather than a character.

There's a body of research on this that goes back fifty years. Peter Herman and Janet Polivy, in a paper from 1985 called "Dieting and binging", set out the case that dieting causes the overeating it's meant to prevent. The founding experiment was earlier, in 1975, by Herman and Deborah Mack. They gave people a preload, a milkshake or two, and then a taste test in which they could eat as much as they liked. People who weren't dieters ate less after the bigger preload, which is what you'd expect. People who scored high on what the researchers called restraint, the habit of dieting and watching what they eat, ate more after the bigger preload. Having already broken their rule, they went on. The word for what they were doing in the researchers' account is the one you'd use for Thursday afternoon. Might as well.

I'm reusing a study that an earlier book in this series also leans on, and I'll say why. It's the finding that this whole book rests on.

Restrained eaters, meaning people who diet, respond to a break in the rules by eating more, not less. The rule doesn't just fail to stop the eating. It's the reason the eating goes past the biscuit. A person who wasn't dieting eats the biscuit and stops, because a biscuit is a biscuit. A person on a diet eats the biscuit and it becomes a write-off, because the biscuit broke something.

A bridge built for a load it can't carry is a fair comparison for two sentences. When it goes, nobody says the traffic lacked discipline.

So the discipline you'd need next time is the discipline to never once break a rule, for the rest of your life, in a world with biscuits in it. Nobody has that, and the diet was designed on the assumption that you would, and that's not a design you failed. It's one that fails.

"Planning it makes me stronger"

The Sunday night is the part of the cycle you'd defend most. The planning, the shopping, the clear fridge. It feels like getting ready, and getting ready is what sensible people do.

Dax Urbaszat, Herman and Polivy tested this in 2002 with an experiment I find hard to forget. They told some participants that they'd be dieting for the coming week, and told others nothing. Then, right away, everyone did a taste test, before any diet had started. Among people who weren't habitual dieters, the news made no difference. They ate the same either way. Among restrained eaters, the ones who'd been told a diet was coming ate significantly more than the ones who hadn't, and more than either group of non-dieters. Merely planning to diet made them eat.

Look at your own Sunday. The plan is made, the fresh start is tomorrow, and tonight is what? For most readers of this book, tonight is a last supper. The takeaway, the rest of the wine, the thing you won't be allowed from tomorrow, eaten because it won't be allowed. The Sunday night eating isn't a lapse before the diet. It's the diet's first effect, arriving a day early, exactly as it did in the laboratory.

That's why I'd put the fresh start inside the cycle rather than at the front of it. It's not the moment the cycle is broken. It's the moment the cycle starts its next lap, and it starts with eating. A person who never planned a diet wouldn't have had the Sunday night, and a

person who's planned dozens has had dozens of them, and each one was recorded, when it was recorded at all, as the last night of the bad weeks rather than the first night of the diet.

None of this means planning is bad. Planning meals for the week is a fine thing to do, and the ordinary week, later, has a shopping list in it. What it means is that planning restriction has an effect before the restriction begins, and that effect runs the wrong way, and you've felt it on every Sunday night on the envelope.

"This time it's the right diet"

Every fresh start comes with a story about the last one. The shakes were unrealistic. The fasting didn't suit you. The points were fiddly and the app was annoying. This time it's the sensible one, low sugar, or no bread after lunch, or a plate method, and the sensible one will hold because the problem was the plan.

Look at the envelope again. The rules on it are all different. The endings are all the same. If the rules were the problem, changing them would change the ending, and it hasn't, across a dozen or more tries. What that suggests is that the problem isn't which rules. It's rules. A diet, whatever it forbids, is a set of things you're not allowed, and the research in chapter 3 is about what not-allowed does to people who diet, regardless of what's on the list.

There's a review that looked at where diets end up. Traci Mann and colleagues, in 2007, went through the long-term studies of calorie-restricting diets to see whether dieting works as a treatment for obesity. Their conclusion was that it doesn't. Across the studies, between a third and two-thirds of dieters ended up weighing more than they had before the diet, and the authors argued that the true figure is probably worse, because the studies had methodological problems that all pushed in the direction of making diets look better. People who'd regained dropped out and weren't counted. Weights were self-reported. Follow-ups were short. The review also found no consistent evidence that dieting improved health, whatever happened to weight.

That's a review with a position, written by researchers who set out to answer a policy question, and I'd read it as such. But the direction of the finding is not in dispute among people who study this. Most diets, followed for long enough, end with the weight back and often with more. Not because the dieters chose the wrong one. Because that's what diets do, across all the rules that were tried.

So when the new plan says it's different, ask what it forbids. If it forbids anything, it's a diet, and it's on the envelope already under another name.

"It worked, I lost a stone"

Here's the objection from your own experience, and I want to take it seriously, because it's true. You've lost weight on diets. A stone, once. Two, another time. The plan worked. It's the keeping it off that didn't.

Two things about that. The first is that losing the weight was never the hard part, and the envelope proves it. You've lost weight a dozen times. If losing weight were the goal, you'd have reached it a dozen times and the book would be over. The goal was to have lost it, permanently, and on that measure the same envelope shows a dozen results.

The second is what "worked" comes to over time, and here I'd like to be fair to the diets. James Anderson and colleagues, in 2001, pooled twenty-nine American studies of structured weight-loss programmes that had followed people for at least two years. Five years after finishing, the average participant was still about three kilograms lighter than when they started, a little over three per cent of their starting weight. Very low energy diets, the ones with shakes and under a thousand calories, kept more off than balanced diets did. So diets aren't a total failure. The average person keeps a few pounds off at five years. But a few pounds isn't the stone, and it isn't what the fresh start promised, and the average includes people who kept it all off and people who put on more than they lost, which is Mann's third to two-thirds.

I should add a caution the authors gave themselves. Only fifty-five to eighty per cent of participants were still being followed at five years, and the ones who drop out of weight-loss follow-up are not, as a rule, the ones who are doing well. The three kilograms may flatter the diets.

So "it worked" means this. You lost the weight, as almost everyone does, and then you went through the part where almost everyone puts it back, and you called the first part success and the second part your failure. I'd call them both the diet. The loss and the regain are one process with two halves, and the next chapter is about why the second half isn't weakness.

"I need to lose it fast for the wedding"

Some fresh starts have a date on them. The wedding in six weeks. The holiday. The reunion. The diet isn't a way of life, you'd say, it's a sprint to an event, and a sprint is different.

It's different in one way, which is that it's honest about ending. Every other diet on the envelope pretended to be permanent. The wedding diet admits from the start that it stops on the day, and what happens after the day is what happens after every diet, only faster, because the restriction was harder. The photos are taken, the rules are off, and the fortnight after the wedding is the fortnight after any diet, with the same eating in it and the same feeling.

What the sprint gets you in six weeks is mostly the first week's water and then a few pounds of the rest, and what it gets you on the day is a person who's been hungry for six weeks at a party with a buffet. I've watched people spend their own wedding reception eating with an intensity that had nothing to do with the food, and the reason was the six weeks before it. The NHS's short list says don't lose weight suddenly with diets, and it says so because sudden loss is the kind that comes back, and because the state a person is in at the end of it is the state chapters 3 to 8 describe.

There's a quieter thing under the wedding diet, and it's that the event has become a deadline for your body. Everyone in the room will be looking, and the diet is the answer to being looked at. I'd say only that nobody at a wedding is looking at anyone's weight except the person who dieted for it, and that the person who dieted

for it is the one who won't remember the day, because they spent it hungry and then spent the evening in the write-off. If you want to look well at the wedding, sleep, and wear something you like, and eat breakfast.

The ordinary week doesn't have a date on it, and that's the point. A wedding in six weeks is six weeks of three meals a day and what you'd feed a friend, and on the day you're a person who isn't hungry at a buffet, which is the only person at a buffet who eats normally. Chapter 16 is about what to do if you'd like your weight to move, and it's slow, and slow is the one speed that survives the reception.

"Once I've lost it, I'll keep it off"

The fresh start assumes that the hard part is losing, and that keeping it off is a matter of not being silly afterwards. Eat sensibly, stay careful, and the new weight holds.

Priya Sumithran and colleagues, in 2011, put fifty overweight or obese people on a ten-week very low energy diet, and they lost about thirteen and a half kilograms each, which is over two stone. Then the researchers measured a panel of hormones that regulate appetite, and asked people how hungry they were, at the start, at ten weeks, and a year later. At ten weeks the hormones had shifted in the direction you'd expect. The ones that signal fullness had fallen, the one that signals hunger had risen, and people reported feeling hungrier. The question was whether that would settle. At sixty-two weeks, most of the hormones were still shifted from where they'd started, and so was hunger. A year after losing the weight, the body was still, measurably, asking for it back.

The most extreme version of this comes from a television programme. Erin Fothergill and colleagues followed fourteen contestants from an American weight-loss show for six years after they'd lost, on average, fifty-eight kilograms. Six years on they'd regained about forty-one of it. But their resting metabolic rate, the energy the body burns doing nothing, was about seven hundred calories a day below where it had started, and about five hundred below what you'd predict from their body size. Their bodies were running slower than they should have been for their weight, years later, and the contestants who'd kept off the most weight showed the most slowing. That's an extreme case, from an extreme

intervention, and I wouldn't extend the numbers to an ordinary diet. But the direction is the same as Sumithran's, and it answers the belief in this chapter. The body isn't neutral about lost weight. It defends it, with hunger and with a slower burn, and it goes on defending it long after the diet has ended.

None of this means weight can't be lost and kept. Some people do it, and Anderson's average shows a little is kept by most. What it means is that the regain isn't you being silly afterwards. It's a body doing what bodies do after a diet, and a person who's been through that a dozen times and blamed themselves a dozen times has been blaming themselves for having a body.

"The hunger is just in my head"

Every diet tells you, in one way or another, that the hunger isn't real. It's habit, or boredom, or emotional, or your body lying to you. Drink some water. Wait twenty minutes. The hunger on a diet is a thing to be seen through.

Sumithran's finding in the last chapter was that hunger rose after weight loss and stayed risen for a year, and that the rise went with measured changes in the hormones that produce it. That isn't hunger in your head. It's hunger in your blood, and it was put there by the weight loss, and telling yourself it isn't real is telling yourself something false about your own body.

There's a study of what the rules themselves do, apart from the weight. Janet Tomiyama, Traci Mann and colleagues, in 2010, took a hundred and twenty-one women and assigned them for three weeks to one of four conditions. Some restricted their calories to twelve hundred a day and tracked them. Some tracked but ate normally. Some ate twelve hundred calories from food provided, without tracking. Some did neither. Restricting calories raised the body's output of cortisol, a stress hormone. Tracking calories raised how stressed people said they felt. So the two halves of an ordinary diet, eating less and keeping count, each produced a form of stress on its own, in three weeks, in women who weren't otherwise unwell.

Put those together and the diet looks like this. It raises hunger through the weight it takes off, and it raises stress through the rules it imposes, and then it tells you the hunger is imaginary and

the stress is weakness. A person in that state on a Thursday afternoon with a box of biscuits open on the desk isn't failing a test of character. They're a hungry, stressed person who's been told their hunger doesn't count, meeting a biscuit.

I'd like you to try trusting the hunger, in a specific way. Not obeying every impulse, which isn't what hunger is. Treating the plain feeling of an empty stomach as information about your body rather than as an enemy. The ordinary week in chapter 19 is built on eating when you're hungry at meals and not skipping them, and it's built that way because the NHS says skipping meals leads to snacking, and because the alternative, which is fighting a real signal all day, is what the envelope records the results of.

"If I don't diet I'll just keep gaining"

This is the fear that keeps the cycle going, and it deserves a straight answer. If the diets go, what's left? Nothing between you and the biscuits. The weight goes up and never comes down, and at least the diets slow it.

The evidence points the other way, and I want to be careful with it, because it's observational and it can be read more than one way.

Kirsi Pietiläinen and colleagues studied over four thousand Finnish twins, following their weight from sixteen to twenty-five and asking how many times they'd deliberately lost more than five kilograms. People who'd dieted once were more likely to be overweight at twenty-five than people who hadn't, and people who'd dieted twice or more, more likely still. The obvious objection is that people who diet are people who were going to gain anyway, and dieting is a marker rather than a cause. So the researchers looked at identical twins where one had dieted and one hadn't. The dieting twin was heavier at twenty-five, by a small amount, with no difference between them at the start. Same genes, same upbringing, one difference, and the one who dieted gained more. The authors' reading was that dieting mostly reflects a tendency to gain weight, and that on top of that, dieting itself may add a little.

Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues followed two and a half thousand American teenagers for five years. Those who'd been using unhealthy ways of controlling their weight at the start had gained about one unit of body mass index more than those who hadn't, were around three times as likely to be overweight, and

were about six times as likely to be binge eating with a sense of losing control. Those were teenagers and the weight-control methods included some severe ones, so I wouldn't carry the figures over to an adult's low-carb fortnight. But the direction is the same as the twins, and the same as Mann's review. Dieting, followed forward in time, goes with more weight, not less.

So the fear has it backwards. The diets aren't the brake. On the evidence, they're part of the acceleration, through the mechanism in chapters 3 to 9. Restriction, hunger, break, write-off, regain, and a fresh start that begins with a last supper.

What's left when they go isn't nothing. It's the ordinary week, and I'll describe it properly in chapter 19. For now I'd only say that "if I don't diet I'll keep gaining" has been tested on you a dozen times, in the sense that you've dieted a dozen times, and you can look at the envelope and ask whether the dieting years were years of losing.

"One slip and the day's ruined"

Now the Thursday biscuit, because this is where the diet actually ends, and it isn't where you think.

The biscuit isn't the end. It's a biscuit. Eighty or so calories, gone in a minute, and if that were all that happened on Thursday the diet would still be going on Friday. What ends the diet is the sentence after the biscuit. "Well, that's today gone." The write-off. And the write-off is what turns one biscuit into four, and the four into the thing at home, and Thursday into Friday's takeaway and the word "Monday".

Herman and Mack's restrained eaters, in chapter 3, did exactly this in a laboratory. Having had the preload, they ate more, where non-dieters ate less. The researchers' account was that the preload had broken the diet for the day, and a broken diet has nothing left to protect. Might as well. That's the write-off, observed in 1975, and it's the single mechanism by which a small break becomes a large one.

Notice what the write-off assumes. It assumes that the day is the unit. That a day with a biscuit in it is spoiled, the way a day with one drop of ink in a glass of water is spoiled, and the only thing to do is throw the day away and start a fresh one. But a day isn't a glass of water. It's a series of meals, and a biscuit at half past three has no bearing on dinner at seven unless you decide it has. A person who isn't dieting knows this without being told. They have a biscuit, and then they have dinner, and the two things don't touch.

So the belief in this chapter is false in a precise way. One slip doesn't ruin the day. One slip plus the write-off does, and you supply the write-off, and you can stop supplying it. That's most of chapter 20, and it's the most important practical thing in the book, so I'll give it here in one line. After the biscuit, the next meal is an ordinary meal. Not smaller to make up. Not skipped. Not a fresh start. Ordinary.

If you take that one habit and nothing else from this book, the cycle can't run, because the cycle needs the write-off to get from the first break to the blame.

"I know what to eat, I just don't do it"

A lot of readers will say they don't need to be told what to eat. They know. Vegetables, protein, not too much, not too many biscuits. The problem is doing it, and rules are how you make yourself do it.

I'd separate knowing from rules, because they're different things and the diet has fused them. Knowing is what you'd feed a friend who came to stay for a week. You'd make them breakfast, lunch and dinner, mostly ordinary food, some vegetables, a pudding now and then, and you wouldn't weigh anything or count anything or forbid anything. You'd feed them well and they'd eat well, and nobody would call it a diet. That knowledge is real and you have it.

Rules are something else. Rules are "no bread", "nothing after seven", "twelve hundred a day". They don't come from what you know about feeding a friend. They come from the plan, and they're designed to produce weight loss fast, and chapter 3 is about what they produce along the way. When you say you know what to eat but don't do it, I'd ask which you're not doing. If it's the friend's meals, that's worth looking at, and chapter 19 is about it. If it's the rules, then not doing them is what everyone does with rules, and it isn't a failure of knowledge or of will.

The NHS's advice on eating for weight, if you want to see how little it asks, fits on one page. Don't lose weight suddenly with diets. Don't skip meals, because you'll snack more. Don't finish your plate if you're full. Aim for half a kilogram to a kilogram a week if you're trying to lose. Get your five a day. Swap sugary drinks for water.

Share your plan with someone. That's it. There's no forbidden food on the list and no number to count, and it reads like what you'd do for a friend.

So the belief in this chapter is half right. You do know what to eat. What you've been trying to do instead is follow rules, and rules aren't knowledge, they're restriction with a name, and the envelope is the record of what restriction does to you.

"I can't trust myself without rules"

Under the last chapter there's a fear, and it's worth its own space. Without rules, you'd eat everything. The rules are the only thing standing between you and a free-for-all, and you know this because whenever a diet ends, that's what happens.

Look at when the free-for-all happens. It happens after the diet ends. It's the Friday takeaway after the Thursday write-off, and the fortnight of eating before the next fresh start. In other words it happens as part of the cycle, in the half of it that follows restriction. You've never seen what your eating looks like when there's been no restriction for a month, because there's never been a month without a diet or the aftermath of one. The free-for-all isn't what you're like without rules. It's what you're like after rules, and those aren't the same thing.

In my experience of people who stop the cycle, and this is observation rather than a finding, the first two or three weeks off diets are uneven. Some meals are larger than they need to be, because the body has been through a lot of fortnights and hasn't yet believed that food isn't about to be taken away again. Then it settles. Meals become meals. The biscuit becomes a biscuit. The eating that felt like a flood turns out to have been the eating of a person who'd been restricted, and once the restriction stops being threatened, it stops.

What holds it together isn't rules. It's structure, and they're different. Three meals a day at roughly regular times is structure. It says when, not what, and it doesn't forbid anything. The NHS puts

"don't skip meals" on its short list because skipping is what produces the snacking, and regular meals are the opposite of skipping. You can trust yourself with structure, because structure doesn't set up the write-off. There's nothing to break.

A reader will ask about the cupboard. If nothing's banned, what stops the biscuits in the cupboard from going in an evening? Two things, and neither is a rule. The first is that you've had dinner, at seven, of a size that satisfied you, and a person who's eaten dinner wants a biscuit or two and not a packet. The second is that the biscuits aren't going anywhere. They'll be there tomorrow, and the day after, and nobody's about to take them away, and a biscuit that isn't about to be forbidden is a biscuit you can leave. What empties a packet isn't the absence of a rule. It's the presence of one, about to be enforced from Monday.

So the belief is right about one thing. You need something. It's wrong about what. The something isn't a wall around the biscuits. It's a meal at one o'clock and another at seven, every day, with nothing forbidden in between.

"Everyone's on one in January"

Some of the fresh starts aren't yours. The office starts one after Christmas and the kitchen fills with people comparing apps. Your sister rings with the name of a plan. January is a national fresh start, and to sit it out is to be the one who's given up.

I'd separate the company from the rules, as chapter 13 separated structure from rules. The office diet is company. People talking about food and their bodies and their weeks, checking in, cheering each other on. That's a good thing, and you don't have to give it up. What you'd be declining is the rules, and it's possible to have the first without the second. You can eat lunch with the people on the plan, hear how it's going, be pleased for them, and eat an ordinary lunch, and nobody will mind after the first day.

There's a version of this where the group is what makes the diet feel possible, and the group's ending is what makes the diet end. That's worth noticing on the envelope. If the office diets ended when the office lost interest, in the third week of January, then the group was the diet and the rules were along for the ride.

The other thing to say is that everyone being on one in January is the strongest evidence there is that they don't work. If January's diet held, there'd be no need for next January's, and the office wouldn't be doing it again. The fact that it's an annual event is the cycle at the scale of a country.

There's a version of the office diet that's a pact. You and a colleague start together, on the same Monday, and check in. The pact feels like support, and for a fortnight it is. Then one of you has the Thursday biscuit and the other one is now on a diet alone, and the pact becomes the reason both of you stop, because a diet for two was never a diet for one. If you want the company, keep the checking in and drop the rules. Two people eating ordinary lunches together and talking about their week is company that doesn't end on a Thursday.

Declining the rules doesn't need a speech. "I'm not doing one this year" is a full sentence, and if someone asks why, "I've done enough of them" is another. Nobody at the office diet is as interested in your plan as you fear. They're interested in theirs.

"I'm just greedy"

After the write-off comes the blame, and the blame has a vocabulary. Greedy. Weak. No willpower. Hopeless. You've said these to yourself on more Fridays than you could count, and the fact that you've said them so often feels like evidence that they're true.

I'd like to put the blame next to the mechanism. Chapters 3 to 9 describe what happens to a person on a diet. Restraint makes a break lead to more eating. Planning the diet makes them eat on Sunday. Weight loss raises hunger and keeps it raised for a year. Restriction raises cortisol and counting raises stress. Then a biscuit arrives. A person in that state who eats the biscuit and then four more is not displaying greed. They're displaying the effects of a diet, in the order the research predicts, and greed is the name the diet gives to its own consequences so that you'll start another one.

That last part is the important one. The blame isn't just unpleasant. It's functional. It's what makes the fresh start feel necessary. If Thursday was your fault, then the answer is to try harder, and trying harder means a new plan, and the new plan is Sunday night's relief. A person who understood that Thursday was the diet's fault wouldn't need a new diet. They'd need to stop having diets. So the blame is the part of the cycle that closes the loop, and dropping it isn't self-indulgence. It's the thing that stops the loop closing.

The vocabulary usually has a history. Greedy is a word that was said to you, or about you, or about someone at a table you sat at as a child, and it arrived with a look. It's worth knowing that, because a word with a history in it does more damage than a word without one, and because the diet didn't invent the blame. It found it already there and gave it a Friday to be said on. The blame will be quieter when the Fridays stop, and it'll be quieter still when you notice whose voice it was in.

There's a whole book in this series about talking to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend, and it's named in the notes. Here I'd only ask you to run the friend test once. A friend tells you they were on a diet, had a biscuit on Thursday, and ate the rest of the box. Would you call them greedy? You'd say something about the diet. Say it to yourself.

"The weight is the problem"

Some readers will feel that this book has been avoiding the point. The reason for the diets is the weight. Whatever the cycle costs, the weight costs more, and a book about eating that won't talk about weight is dodging.

I'll say plainly where I stand. This book takes no position on whether you should weigh less. That's between you and your body and, if you want one, your GP, and I don't know your health. What the book argues is narrower. The cycle doesn't get you there. On the evidence in chapters 5 to 10, a dozen diets leave most people no lighter and many heavier, and each one costs a fortnight of hunger and a Friday of blame. Whatever you want your weight to be, the cycle is not the route.

If you do want to lose weight, the NHS route is short and it's the opposite of a fresh start. Aim to lose half a kilogram to a kilogram a week, not more. Don't lose weight suddenly with diets. Don't skip meals. Get active for a hundred and fifty minutes a week, in short sessions if you like. Swap sugary drinks for water. Share what you're doing with someone you trust, so there's a person to talk to on a bad day rather than a write-off. And if you'd like help, you can refer yourself to NHS weight management services in England without seeing a GP, or ask at your surgery. The NHS's own page says that if you've struggled with weight loss before, you're not alone, and offers an app and a plan. Those are all slow, structural, and unsudden, which is to say they're the ordinary week with a direction.

And if your weight is high enough to be a medical question, or it goes with diabetes, joint problems, breathlessness or anything else you've been told about, then the GP is the right first conversation, not a plan off the internet, and nothing in this book replaces that conversation.

What I'd ask you to notice is that the weight and the cycle are different problems, and that you've been treating the second as the solution to the first. It isn't. It's a third problem that the first one produced. Solve the cycle and the weight question becomes an ordinary one, to be answered slowly, with help if you want it, and without a Sunday night.

What the cycle costs you

I've argued mechanism. This chapter is the bill, and most of it doesn't show up on the scales.

The blame. A dozen Fridays a year of calling yourself greedy and weak, for a decade. That's a hundred and twenty verdicts, all of them unfair, and a person can't hear that many verdicts about themselves without some of it sticking to how they think they are.

The stress. Tomiyama's women had raised cortisol from three weeks of restriction and raised stress from three weeks of counting. You've done that in fortnights, repeatedly, for years, and then had the aftermath on top.

The weight, if it's a concern of yours. The twins and the teenagers and Mann's review all point the same way. The years of dieting were, on the evidence, years in which dieting made things a little worse.

The food thoughts. A person on a diet thinks about food most of the day, because forbidden things take up room. A person in the write-off thinks about it too. There's very little of the cycle in which food is just food, and that's a lot of attention spent on something that ought to be a small part of a day.

The money. Apps, plans, shakes, the special foods that go off in the fridge after the second week, the second shop when the diet ends.

The meals not enjoyed. A diet meal is a compliance event, and a write-off meal is eaten fast with a feeling. Neither is dinner. Over a decade of the cycle, a fair number of the meals you've eaten were one or the other, and that's a loss that nobody counts.

And the people watching. A partner who's learned to ask whether this is a diet week before suggesting a restaurant. A child who's watched a parent forbid themselves food, break, and call themselves names, and is learning what eating is. The cycle runs in families the way most habits do, by being demonstrated, and a daughter at the table on Friday is learning it now.

None of this is the cost of one diet. It's the cost of the cycle, and the cycle only stops when the fresh start does.

What it does to your eating

There's a cost that lands on the eating itself, and it explains why the cycle feels harder each time round.

A person who's never dieted eats by appetite. They're hungry, they eat, they're satisfied, they stop, and they don't think much about it. It's not a skill. It's the default, and most people have it until something overrides it. A diet overrides it. It replaces appetite with rules. You eat when the plan says, what the plan says, and the question of whether you're hungry or satisfied stops being the question, because the plan has answered it in advance.

Then the plan ends, and here's the problem. The appetite doesn't come straight back, because it's been overridden, and what fills the gap is the absence of rules. You eat because there's no rule against it, which is a different thing from eating because you're hungry, and it produces the fortnight after the diet, which is the free-for-all in chapter 13. Then a new plan arrives to fix the free-for-all, and appetite gets overridden again. A person who's been round this loop for years has eaten by rules or by their absence for most of that time, and by appetite hardly at all, and they'll tell you they don't know when they're hungry. They're not wrong. The signal has been talked over for a decade.

The good news is that appetite is a default, not a skill, and defaults come back when what was overriding them stops. The ordinary week in the next chapter works by giving the appetite a structure to return inside, three meals at regular times, and then letting it do its job within them. It takes a few weeks. The first ones are uneven.

Then, for most people, the plain feeling of hungry and the plain feeling of enough start showing up again at meals, and eating becomes something that happens three times a day rather than something you think about all day.

That's what the diets cost your eating. Not the weight. The knowing. And it's the one thing on the bill that comes back on its own once the cycle stops.

The ordinary week

The next three chapters are the method, and the method is small, because most of the work has been done by stopping the fresh start. This chapter is what you eat instead of a diet.

Three meals. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, at roughly the same times each day. Not because three is magic, but because regular meals are the structure that appetite comes back inside, and because the NHS puts "don't skip meals" on its short list for the plain reason that skipping leads to snacking. If you're not hungry at breakfast, have something small. But have something.

What you'd feed a friend. That's the whole of the content. Mostly ordinary food, some vegetables, enough to be satisfied, a pudding when you'd give a friend one. You know how to do this. Chapter 12 said so. The knowledge was there the whole time, underneath the rules.

Nothing banned. No food is forbidden in the ordinary week, because a forbidden food is a rule, and a rule is what sets up the write-off. Biscuits exist in the ordinary week. They're eaten sometimes, as biscuits, and then dinner happens.

Don't finish the plate if you're full. The NHS line, and the only thing in this chapter that asks you to notice anything during a meal. Hungry at the start, enough at the end, and the plate is not the judge of either. Save the rest for tomorrow.

One list. Do the week's shopping from a list written when you're not hungry, with the three meals on it. This is the good half of Sunday night, the planning of food, without the bad half, which is the planning of restriction.

What it isn't. It isn't a diet with a friendlier name. There's no target, no count, no weigh-in, no day of the week. It isn't a licence to eat anything at any time, because the structure is three meals and the meals are what you'd feed a friend. And it isn't a weight-loss plan, though if you want to lose weight, the NHS route in chapter 16 is the ordinary week with a slow direction on it.

Expect three uneven weeks. Chapter 13 said why. The body has been restricted a dozen times and hasn't yet believed it won't be again. Some meals will be big. Let them be, and have the next one at the usual time. By the fourth week most people find the meals have found their size.

The next meal is ordinary

This is the chapter that breaks the cycle, because it takes away the write-off, and without the write-off there's nothing to blame and no fresh start to need.

The slip will happen. A biscuit at half past three, or four, or the whole packet. A meal out that went long. A bad day with a takeaway in it. These aren't failures of the ordinary week. They're what weeks contain, for everyone, dieters and not. The ordinary week doesn't have a rule against them, so nothing has been broken.

No write-off. This is the one thing to hold onto. After the biscuit, the day is not gone. The day is a series of meals and one of them is coming at seven. "Well, that's today ruined" is a sentence, and you don't have to say it, and if you catch yourself saying it, the answer is "it's a biscuit".

No fresh start. Don't plan tomorrow. Tomorrow is an ordinary day with three meals in it, exactly like today was going to be, and it needs no planning. The urge to plan a fresh start is the cycle asking to run, and the answer is that there's nothing to start because nothing stopped.

No compensating. Don't skip dinner because of the biscuits, and don't make it small. A skipped or shrunken meal is a restriction, and restriction is the thing that turns a biscuit into a box. Have the dinner you'd have had. That's what ordinary means.

The sentence to say. If it helps to have words, these are the ones. "That was a biscuit. Dinner's at seven." Two sentences, and the second is the whole method.

The big slip. Sometimes it's not a biscuit. It's an evening, or a weekend, with a lot in it. The response is the same and it matters more. The next meal is ordinary. Not smaller, not skipped, not a Monday. Breakfast at the usual time, the usual size. The body has done this before, and what it learned last time was that a big weekend leads to a restriction, so it ate ahead. This time it learns that a big weekend leads to breakfast, and that's the lesson that ends the free-for-all.

Why this works. Herman and Mack's restrained eaters ate more after a break because the break had broken something. In the ordinary week, there's nothing to break. A biscuit doesn't violate a rule, so it doesn't trigger the might-as-well, so it stays a biscuit. The mechanism that drove every ending on the envelope has nothing to run on.

Measuring the cycle, not the weight

The scales have been the measure of the cycle, and they're the wrong instrument, because they measure the thing the cycle can't deliver and they ignore the thing it can.

Count fresh starts. The measure that matters is how many diets you've started this month. Last year that number was probably one or two a month. The goal is zero, and it's a goal you control completely, which the number on the scales never was. Put a mark on the envelope for each fresh start you don't have, if that helps, or simply notice that the envelope has stopped growing.

Scales, if at all, once a fortnight. Weight moves by a couple of pounds a day for reasons that have nothing to do with fat, water, salt, the time of the month, what's in your gut. A daily weigh-in is a daily verdict drawn from noise, and it's been part of the cycle, because a bad number on Thursday morning is a reason for the biscuit at half past three to become a write-off. If you want to know your weight, once a fortnight is enough to see a trend, and never is a respectable choice.

Other measures. How many meals this week did you eat as meals, sitting down, without a rule and without a feeling? How many days did food take up less of your thinking? How many biscuits were biscuits? Did you eat breakfast the morning after the big weekend? Those are the measures of whether the cycle has stopped, and they're all things you can see without an instrument.

The Sunday night count. The other measure worth keeping for a month is how many Sunday nights had a plan in them. Not whether you acted on it, but whether the feeling came, the urge to download something and start tomorrow. It'll come for a while. Counting it turns it from a temptation into a symptom, and a symptom you're counting is one you're watching rather than obeying.

Clothes, if you want a slow measure. A pair of trousers that fit tells you more than the scales do, over months rather than mornings, and it can't be read at six in the morning as a verdict on the day ahead. If you need to know something about your size, let the trousers tell you, once a season.

The list stops growing. The envelope from chapter 1 is your record. If it has no new entry for three months, the habit this book is about has stopped, whatever the scales say. That's the success this book is aiming at, and it's the one the fresh start never offered.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to be one sentence.

I don't start diets. I eat three ordinary meals a day and I don't skip. When I've eaten more than I meant to, the next meal is an ordinary meal.

Three parts.

The first is the end of fresh starts. No plan, no Monday, no app, no rules. When the Sunday night feeling comes, and it will, you notice it and don't act on it. Chapter 4 says what it is.

The second is the ordinary week. Three meals, what you'd feed a friend, nothing banned, don't finish the plate if you're full, one list.

The third is the ordinary meal. After any slip, of any size, the next meal is the one you'd have had. No write-off, no compensating, no fresh start.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When I feel the pull to plan a new diet, I'll write down what I'm going to eat for the next three meals and nothing else.

When I've eaten something I hadn't meant to, I'll say "that was a biscuit, dinner's at seven" and have dinner at seven.

When I've had a big weekend, I'll eat breakfast on Monday at the usual time and the usual size.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first Sunday night without a plan will feel like doing nothing about something, and the feeling is uncomfortable and passes by Tuesday. The first two or three weeks of meals will be uneven, some large, and you'll have the thought that this is the free-for-all you feared. It isn't. It's the aftermath of the last diet, and it settles when no new one arrives. Around week three, a biscuit will happen and you'll say the sentence and have dinner and notice on Friday that there was no Friday. By week six, most people say that food takes up less of their day, that meals have a size, and that hungry and enough have started to show up as feelings again. The scales will do what they do. If you've been dieting for years, they may hold, or they may drift down slowly, or they may not, and the book has made no promise about them. What it promised was that the envelope would stop growing, and by three months it has.

Weight loss, medical diets, eating disorders, teenagers and partners

The rule holds for everyone it's written for. A few readers need a paragraph.

Wanting to lose weight. Chapter 16 said it and I'll repeat the route. Half a kilogram to a kilogram a week, not more. Don't skip meals. Move for a hundred and fifty minutes a week, in pieces. Swap the sugary drinks. Tell someone. Refer yourself to NHS weight management if you'd like help, which in England you can do without a GP. All of that is the ordinary week with a slow direction on it, and none of it is a fresh start. The cycle is the thing to stop first, and the direction can come after.

A diet from a clinician. If a doctor, dietitian or nurse has given you an eating plan for a medical reason, follow it, and take the parts of this book that apply. A plan from someone who knows your health, with follow-up, isn't the cycle. The cycle is a plan from a website, alone, with a Monday.

Weight-loss medication. The same. If you're prescribed it, take it as prescribed and talk to the prescriber about eating. Don't stop on the strength of a book.

Eating disorders. I said it in the preface and it bears repeating, because the cycle and an eating disorder can look alike from inside. If your eating includes large amounts with loss of control, making yourself sick, going long stretches without eating on purpose, or if food and your body are most of what you think

about, please talk to a GP or to Beat. The ordinary week may be part of recovery, but it needs to be part of a recovery that someone qualified is helping with.

Teenagers. Neumark-Sztainer's teenagers who dieted were heavier and far more likely to be binge eating five years on. If there's a teenager in your house talking about a fresh start, the most useful thing you can do is model the ordinary week and not the cycle, and talk to the GP if what you're seeing looks like the paragraph above. This book isn't written for them to read. It's written for the adult they're watching.

Partners. If you live with someone in the cycle, you can't stop their fresh starts. What you can do is not join them, keep three meals happening in the house, and be the person who says "it's a biscuit" and means it. The most useful thing a partner does is eat ordinary meals in front of someone who's forgotten what they look like.

Pregnancy. Talk to your midwife about eating. The ordinary week is close to what they'll say, but they'll say it for your circumstances.

Snacking from the packet. Some readers' first break is always the same, the crisps or the sweets, eaten to the bottom of the bag. That's a habit with its own book in this series, and the ordinary meal still applies after it.

When you've started another one

It'll happen. A bad fortnight, a photo, a remark, a January, and you'll find yourself on day three of a plan with an app on your phone, and you'll realise, and the thought will come that the book didn't take.

It took. What happened is that the cycle has run for years and it ran once more, and you noticed on day three, which is earlier than you've ever noticed before. The noticing is the change. Last year day three was a good day on a diet. This year it's the moment you see the envelope.

Stop the plan, not yourself. Delete the app, or close the notebook, and have lunch. Not a special lunch, not a last supper, not a smaller one to be safe. The lunch you'd feed a friend. The diet ends now, in the middle of a Wednesday, with no write-off and no Monday, and that's a new kind of ending for it. Every diet on the envelope ended with a break and a blame. This one ends with a sandwich.

And notice what you did on day one and two. You probably had a last supper on the Sunday, and you probably ate less than you wanted on the Monday, and you probably felt in charge, and all of that is the cycle doing exactly what chapter 4 said it would, on schedule. Seeing it run, from inside, and recognising each part as it arrives, is worth more than any number of chapters, because now you've watched it, and a thing you've watched is a thing you can stop.

Work out what set it off. A number on the scales? Then the scales go away for a month. A remark? Then chapter 15 is the one to reread. A fortnight of uneven eating that felt like a flood? Then chapter 13, and the reminder that the flood follows restriction, and you'd been restricting.

No streaks. Don't count diet-free months as a run that a fresh start breaks. Count meals that were meals, and let day three of a plan be three meals in a long row that were mostly ordinary. The envelope gets one more line, and the line says "ended Wednesday lunchtime, with lunch", and that's a different envelope from the one you started with.

Tuesday

It's a Tuesday, some months on. There was no Sunday night. There hasn't been one for a while, and you noticed that a few weeks ago and then stopped noticing it, which is how it should be. Breakfast was breakfast. Lunch was a sandwich and an apple and the second half of a conversation. At half past three there's a box of biscuits open on the desk at work, and you have one, and it's a biscuit, and then you go back to the thing you were doing. At seven there's dinner, the usual size, with the family, and afterwards a bit of the chocolate that's been in the cupboard for a week, because you fancied some, and there's some left.

The envelope is in the kitchen drawer. The last line on it is from February, and it says "day three, ended Wednesday, had lunch". Nothing since. You haven't weighed yourself in a month, and when you did, the number was what it was, and you noticed you didn't have a Thursday about it.

Your sister rang last week with the name of a plan. You listened, and were glad for her, and said you weren't doing one, and she asked why, and you said you'd done enough of them, and she laughed, and that was the conversation. At the office the January diet came and went, and you ate lunch with the people on it, and nobody minded.

None of this is a transformation. There was a weekend in March with a great deal in it, and you had breakfast on the Monday, and it was strange to, and you did. Food takes up less of the day than it did. Meals have a size. Hungry and enough turn up when they

should, mostly. The blame hasn't been heard for a while, because there's been nothing to say it about, and you've noticed that a person who isn't called greedy every Friday thinks about themselves a little differently by the spring.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. The next time you eat something you hadn't meant to, say "that was a biscuit" and have the next meal at the usual time and the usual size. That's the whole method. Everything else is detail.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't medical or dietary advice, and it's no substitute for a GP, a dietitian or an eating disorder service that knows you. The NHS guidance I mention is for England as I found it in September 2026. The book takes no position on what you should weigh.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24 and 25. The Sunday night, the Thursday biscuit, the office diet and the sister are invented.

Before you start. The signs of an eating disorder are put in plain words and aren't a diagnostic list. Beat is the UK eating disorder charity. The NHS page "Tips to help you lose weight" gives the self-referral route for weight management services.

Chapter 3. Polivy and Herman, "Dieting and binging: a causal analysis", *American Psychologist* 40, 1985, pages 193 to 201, for the theory, and no specific finding is attributed to it. Herman and Mack, "Restrained and unrestrained eating", *Journal of Personality* 43, 1975, pages 647 to 660. The "might as well" reading is the

standard account and I've presented it as such. An earlier book in this series, *Eat when you're hungry*, and another, on eating past full, also use this study.

Chapter 4. Urbaszat, Herman and Polivy, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we diet: effects of anticipated deprivation on food intake in restrained and unrestrained eaters", *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 111, 2002, pages 396 to 401. A single laboratory study with a taste test. The reading of Sunday night as the diet's first effect is mine.

Chapter 5. Mann, Tomiyama, Westling, Lew, Samuels and Chatman, "Medicare's search for effective obesity treatments: diets are not the answer", *American Psychologist* 62, 2007, pages 220 to 233. A review written to answer a policy question, and it argues a position. The one-third to two-thirds figure is theirs. The claim that the problem is rules rather than which rules is mine.

Chapter 6. Anderson, Konz, Frederich and Wood, "Long-term weight-loss maintenance: a meta-analysis of US studies", *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 74, 2001, pages 579 to 584. Twenty-nine studies. The average maintained loss at five years was a little over 3 kilograms and 3 per cent of starting weight. Follow-up rates at four to five years were 55 to 80 per cent, and the authors note the concern about dropouts that the chapter repeats.

Chapter 7. The NHS page "Tips to help you lose weight", for not losing weight suddenly. The rest is mine.

Chapter 8. Sumithran, Prendergast, Delbridge, Purcell, Shulkes, Kriketos and Proietto, "Long-term persistence of hormonal adaptations to weight loss", *New England Journal of Medicine* 365, 2011, pages 1597 to 1604. Fifty patients, a ten-week very low energy diet, measurements at 62 weeks. Fothergill and colleagues, "Persistent metabolic adaptation 6 years after 'The Biggest Loser' competition", *Obesity* 24, 2016, pages 1612 to 1619. Fourteen people after an extreme intervention, which the chapter says.

Chapter 9. Sumithran and colleagues as above. Tomiyama, Mann, Vinas, Hunger, Dejager and Taylor, "Low calorie dieting increases cortisol", *Psychosomatic Medicine* 72, 2010, pages 357 to 364. One hundred and twenty-one women, three weeks. The NHS page as above, for skipping meals.

Chapter 10. Pietiläinen, Saarni, Kaprio and Rissanen, "Does dieting make you fat? A twin study", *International Journal of Obesity* 36, 2012, pages 456 to 464. Over four thousand Finnish twins. The discordant identical twin difference was 0.4 BMI units. Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Guo, Story, Haines and Eisenberg, "Obesity, disordered eating, and eating disorders in a longitudinal study of adolescents: how do dieters fare 5 years later?", *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106, 2006, pages 559 to 568. American adolescents, and the weight-control behaviours included severe ones, which the chapter says.

Chapter 11. Herman and Mack as above. The account of the write-off as the moment the diet ends is mine.

Chapter 16. The NHS pages "Tips to help you lose weight" and NHS Better Health "Lose weight", for the rate of loss, not losing suddenly, not skipping, activity, drinks, sharing the plan, the app and self-referral.

Chapter 17. Tomiyama and colleagues, Pietiläinen and colleagues, Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues and Mann and colleagues as above. The rest is mine.

Chapter 22. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule hasn't been tested as a package, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 23. The NHS pages as above. Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues as above, for teenagers. The book on self-blame in this series is *You wouldn't say it to a friend*. The book on eating as a remedy for feelings is *The feeling will pass without help*. The book on snacking from the packet is a later one in the series.