



STOP
yo-yo dieting

If you're good at losing weight, but terrible at keeping it off, there are ways to beat the vicious circle and control your eating patterns

FOREVER!

There are many of us who spend our lives dipping in and out of diets, and for some, this can be a particularly difficult time of year.

There's the pressure of wanting to look toned and trim for all those Christmas parties, but combined with the abundance of seasonal temptations, staying on track can feel like an uphill struggle. It's also hard to ignore the sudden influx of miraculous-sounding weight-loss plans that promise to banish the excess pounds for good. But, ask any seasoned slimmer about the latest crash-diet and they'll probably tell you they are not worth it. It seems that many of us find it difficult to keep the weight off and it's not uncommon to end up putting more back on.

So, if you can't face starting another year on a super-strict, post-Christmas detox when, let's face it, you know that you'll fall off the wagon by the end of the month, follow these tips and make positive changes that you can stick to for life.

THE CAUSES

Drastic weight-loss can be triggered by many things, such as a wedding, seeing a picture of a super-svelte celebrity, or even starting a new relationship. But, what many of us don't realise is that regular fluctuations in your weight can lead to short and long-term health risks. "Yo-yoing can place incredible stress on vital organs," says Ki Performance's dietician, Linia Patel (kiperformance.co.uk). "The heart, kidneys, liver and brain cannot get enough energy on most low calorie plans, and as a consequence, the body begins to burn the tissue that makes up those organs. It's also worth considering the psychological effects. This type of dieting can cause extreme food cravings, irritability, lethargy, weakness, dizziness, and in some cases, hair loss."

Plus, the long-term effects on your waistline can be even more damaging. "Yo-yoing can play havoc with your metabolism and long-term fat cell memory triggers," reveals food scientist, Kumud Gandhi (thecookingacademy.co.uk). "You are likely to gain weight and keep gaining it in later life as your metabolic memory imprints your history of starvation and feasting."

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Whether you're new to the ups and downs of crash diets, or if your weight-loss battle has been going on for years, it's encouraging to know that it is possible to break your bad habits. Former yo-yo dieter and lecturer, Suzan Clements (eternalspring.org.uk) recommends starting off by banishing the word diet. "You don't have to exclude or deny yourself anything," she explains. "Once you stop the deprivation you'll find the cravings will start to fade too. Resolve to make achievable lifestyle changes that you can live with in the long-term. Eat lots of different foods, and try grazing on three

balanced meals everyday. Not only will this even out your energy levels, it will also help to add routine and discipline to your mealtimes."

It's certainly possible to lose weight without feeling hungry, and many successful slimmers will probably credit their success to eating nutritious, filling meals. "It's important not to starve yourself, or you're likely to suffer with blood-sugar fluctuations," says Patrick Holford, author of *The Low GL Diet Bible* (£14.99, Piatkus). "I've found that if you reduce the amount of refined carbohydrates you consume, your cravings will stop, but you won't suffer from hunger pangs."

ARE YOU A YO-YO DIETER?

Dr Jacque Lavin, head of nutrition at Slimming World (bodyoptimise.com), reveals how to tell if you're a yo-yo slimmer: "Ask yourself the following questions, and if you answer 'yes' to three or more, then you could do with addressing your eating patterns."

DO YOU:

- Associate dieting with looking great but feeling lousy?
- Look forward to seeing what celeb diet is popular this week so you can copy it?
- Love the satisfaction of dropping a dress size because it means you can relax and eat and drink what you want again?
- Ever congratulate yourself on your willpower if you go to bed feeling hungry?
- Go on a binge after having a 'bad diet day'?
- Have an all-or-nothing attitude to food; starving yourself one week, but then bingeing the next?
- Think that the key to losing weight is making drastic changes?
- Keep hold of your bigger sized clothes because experience tells you you'll be back in them before long?

TAKING ACTION

Aiming for sensible weight-loss (around 2lbs a week) is considered the best way to go. "It's hard on your body and emotional wellbeing to endure the harsh effects of drastic slimming plans," says Linia Patel. "This is why so many people find it difficult to sustain these programmes. The only way to shed pounds is to take on board a lifestyle that is easy to maintain in the long-term."

Many fad dieting plans have made a fortune by telling would-be slimmers that the secret to dropping excess pounds is to completely ban certain types of food. But, this will only fuel your yo-yoing behaviour and it can have some undesirable side-effects. "Starvation can make you feel sluggish and less mentally alert," says Patrick Holford. "And it can slow down your metabolic rate. So, once you resume eating your normal quantity you'll rapidly regain the weight you've lost."

Case Study



Barbara now

Barbara, 40, tried every fad diet going until she discovered that she could drop the pounds all by herself!

"To say that I was a chronic yo-yo dieter is probably a bit of an understatement! My weight has been up and down since my early twenties, and the first time I went on a crash diet I thought, 'Never again!' But as soon as the next miraculous fat-burning fad came along, I got sucked right in. I think I knew deep down that the only way to change my shape was with a sensible healthy eating plan, and exercise, but I seemed to have the mindset that dieting had to be drastic to be effective. Plus the lure of the quick-fix always seemed so much more appealing. At this point I had no idea of the damage I was doing to my body – and self confidence.

"After years of having a fluctuating waistline, I noticed that it wasn't just my body that was starting to suffer; my skin, hair and nails looked lifeless and unhealthy, too. Also, my 40th birthday was looming and the thought of being fat, forty and miserable stirred something inside me. I couldn't stand the idea of another decade of yo-yoing.

"I followed lots of advice from the internet and read numerous books on nutrition and, after a while, I started to learn about how the digestive system works, and what types of food I needed to eat. I also gave up meat and dairy, and starting walking every day. It was quite an odyssey for me to discover lots of delicious new foods, such as nuts, seeds and tofu.

"I was concerned about keeping up the motivation – after all this had always been a huge problem for me in the past – but once I started to see, and feel, the effects, it was easy to stay on track. Within six months, I dropped 3st, and even though my new shape is wonderful, the best thing about this whole process is that I have found a healthy eating programme that I can stick to. I don't feel like I'm on a diet, and I can't remember the last time I felt hungry – this is just a new way of life for me now!"



Barbara before