

THE DIET TRAP SOLUTION

Train Your Brain
to Lose Weight

and Keep It Off
for Good

DR. JUDITH S. BECK
& DEBORAH BECK BUSIS



Works
with
ANY
DIET!

The Diet Trap Solution

*Train Your Brain to Lose Weight
and Keep It Off for Good*

Judith S. Beck, Ph.D., and Deborah Beck Busis, LCSW

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Contents

PART ONE: Escape Your Diet Traps

Chapter 1: Are You Trapped?

Chapter 2: Foundation Strategies to Escape Your Traps

PART TWO: Internal Traps: How I Trap Myself

Chapter 3: Stress Traps

Chapter 4: Emotional Eating Traps

PART THREE: Interpersonal Traps: How Others Trap Me

Chapter 5: Food Pusher Traps

Chapter 6: Family Traps

PART FOUR: External Traps: How Special Circumstances Trap Me

Chapter 7: Travel and Eating Out Traps

Chapter 8: Holiday Traps

PART FIVE: Universal Traps: How We All Get Trapped

Chapter 9: Psychological Traps

Chapter 10: Getting Off Track Traps

Conclusion: Stay Free of Traps—for Life

Connect with Us

Appendix: Template for Escape Plan

Acknowledgments

Notes

Index

Also by Judith S. Beck, Ph.D.

Back Ads

Copyright

About the Publisher

PART ONE

Escape Your Diet Traps

Chapter 1

Are You Trapped?

Diet books, diet plans, diet programs. They all want you to believe they have the magic formula. Eat what they say, and losing weight will be easy and quick.

If that's true, why are two-thirds of Americans overweight? Why do most people who lose weight gain it back? And not just once but over and over again?

We're going to tell you the truth: Losing weight can be easy at first, but continuing to lose weight after the first few weeks or months, and then keeping off the weight you lose, can be very difficult. That is, unless you've learned how to identify the problems—the traps—that you're certain to encounter, and figured out how to develop escape plans for each one.

We all face plenty of traps. Stress, family problems, and food pushers are some of the negatives of life. But there are also vacations, celebrations, holidays—the positives of life. All these situations can create traps when your goal is to lose weight.

Without special plans to address these real-life situations, keeping weight off can be a constant and draining battle, and studies show that most people fail in the long run. Why? Because having an eating plan is not enough. Using an app or a website isn't enough. Even having someone else prepare your food and deliver it to your doorstep isn't enough.

You need something more—something you'll never be able to whip up in a blender or buy in a store. You need to learn *how* to lose weight. *How* to motivate yourself every day. *How* to change sabotaging thinking (“It’s okay to eat the last piece of birthday cake because otherwise it will just go to waste!”). *How* to get yourself back on track whenever you make a mistake.

In this book, you will learn how to create your own personal escape plans to help you get out of your stickiest traps. You'll acquire the tools you need to prevent or escape from the traps all around you—the traps you create, traps that other people create, traps that life circumstances create, and even certain universal traps that we all encounter.

To be successful, you *do* need an eating plan. But your success will not be determined exclusively by protein or carbs or fiber. You will experience success when you learn *how* to stick to your plan even *when you don't feel like it*—when you're stressed or upset, when people push food on you, when you're eating out at your favorite restaurant, even when you're traveling, attending a special event, celebrating your birthday. The escape plans you create will contain the solutions you need when temptation strikes. They will detail exactly what you need to say to yourself and what strategies you need to use when a trap threatens to throw you off course.

This approach has helped thousands of dieters stick to their plans and lose weight, even when confronted with challenge after challenge. Take Jessica, for example. Jessica came to see me after almost fifteen years of struggling with her weight. Since college, she had gained and lost the same

forty pounds several times. Now struggling to balance her personal health goals with her hectic care as an HR manager, Jessica felt disheartened, ready to give up.

Jessica knew all about sound nutrition, and she could recite the pros and cons of just about every popular weight-loss program. She knew the facts cold—but those facts were no help when she was upset. She desperately wanted to learn how to stop eating when she wasn't hungry, especially when she needed to soothe herself. She knew her favorite chocolate-covered pretzels, caramel popcorn, and mini-doughnuts weren't healthy, but that was what she craved when she had a fight with her partner or was anxious about missing a deadline at work.

"I do okay a lot of the time," she told me, "but when I'm upset, I go right for the sweets. I know I shouldn't. I know every time I do, it sets me back." She sighed. "I can't help it. I'm just so weak. Food is the only thing that calms me down."

Jessica's difficulties are a prime example of the emotional eating trap. She didn't realize that her biggest challenge wasn't feeling distressed; it was what she was *telling herself* about feeling distressed. She had convinced herself that she simply couldn't cope without eating.

No wonder she was trapped. She had completely bought into the idea that food was the only solution when she was upset. An important aspect of Jessica's ultimate success in losing weight was proving to herself that this simply wasn't true. Being human, Jessica will always experience negative emotions. She just had to learn how to cope with them differently.

Here's the cold, hard truth: the headaches of life don't care that you want to lose weight. Difficulties with work, with relationships, with finances or health—these things never go away. No matter how unjust it may feel, life will never stop presenting you with challenging moments and situations—and in each of those moments and situations, temptations to eat. Those temptations are easier to resist when you're feeling strong and committed. But when you feel weak or impulsive, they can seem unavoidable, inescapable, completely unfair.

They can feel like traps—with a capital *T*.

How These Things Usually Go

If you've tried to lose weight before, chances are your experience went something like this:

- 1 **You find a diet plan that implies you won't need willpower and discipline.** You believe the hype that the plan will "automatically" make dieting (and then maintenance) painless. "Just follow the plan and the pounds will melt off," they promise. And you feel certain: Yes. Finally. This is *the One*.
- 2 **You want to believe in the magic.** (Who doesn't?) You buy into the fantasy that dieting will be easy. You believe that this new diet will eliminate your hunger so you can lose all the weight you want in a short time.
- 3 **With your plan in hand, you . . . don't start right away.** Instead, you have one last blowout, eating everything you want in whatever quantity you want. You think, "This is my last chance—I'm going to enjoy it!" You may even put on a few extra pounds as you overeat pasta, pizza, cupcakes, french fries, chips, cookies—foods that aren't on your new diet plan. You tell yourself that

doesn't matter because "I'll start my diet on Monday!"

- 4 **You stock up on whatever magical formula your plan prescribes.** Maybe it's grapefruit or quinoa, maybe certain brands of low-fat frozen meals or Greek yogurt. Maybe you stuff your veggie drawer until it's overflowing with kale and beets. You toss the chocolate and the ice cream. You start to measure your food, eat at prescribed intervals, drink eight glasses of water, and step up your exercise. Like a soldier on a mission, you're focused and determined. You've got this.
- 5 **And—here's the kicker—it works! Temporarily.** You lose a lot of weight (okay, true, most of it is water weight) the first week, and you feel excited and optimistic. You find it pretty easy because your motivation is high. (Why else would you be starting a diet right now?) The pounds seem to melt away. No sweat!
- 6 **You expect that every week will go as smoothly as the first few.** You think, "At this rate, I'm sure to get to my goal in no time." And then you fool yourself into thinking you'll be able to stop dieting and go back to eating your favorite foods, and the pounds will stay off. Finally. You think you've really figured it out this time.
- 7 **But then . . .** your best friend or your mother or your daughter-in-law makes a special dinner for the two of you. Caesar salad, lasagna, and homemade garlic bread with lots of butter. And—how nice—she made brownies with crushed nuts, just the way you like them.

Well, you might reason, just this once. She worked so hard. You really want her to know how touched you are. You'll just eat part of the salad. But it tastes so good! And you don't want to hurt her feelings by not finishing it. She serves you a really big portion of lasagna. It'll be okay. Just this once. The bread—hard to stop at just one piece. And you can't pass up the brownies.

Oh well, this is a special occasion. You can start again tomorrow.

But tomorrow you give yourself one more day of eating whatever you feel like. And maybe another day after that, and another day after that. . . .

No wonder you fell off the wagon. You never really learned how to handle this type of situation. No one ever taught you how to prepare yourself for tempting situations, how to keep your eye on your long-term goal, or how to stick to your plan even when you don't feel like it. It isn't your fault. You just didn't know how.

The Traps Are Set and Waiting

Even if dieting starts out easy, the moment inevitably comes when it shifts into hard work. Your willpower, which seemed strong at the beginning, eventually starts to flag. The chocolate fudge ice cream tucked way back in the freezer begins loudly calling your name. The doughnuts at work make your mouth water. You feel resentful of everything your friends and family are eating. You are annoyed by how unfair it is that your coworkers eat pepperoni pizza or smothered burritos for lunch and you can't. (Or at least not in the quantity they do.)

Everyone faces these traps—situations in which you are tempted to eat or drink in a way that

you'll later regret. The circumstances that blind you for those seconds between "I really *shouldn't* eat that" and "Damn it, I really *shouldn't have* eaten that." Your own particular vulnerabilities. You're dieting Achilles's heels.

Well, no more. We are here to tell you that there is a solution. Your traps don't have to ensnare you any longer. You can learn precisely what to do to avoid your traps—and if you fall into one, how to get out immediately and put yourself back on track.

How to successfully lose weight isn't intuitively obvious—but the skills you need can be learned. Like Jessica, you'll need to craft your own personal escape plans, based on understanding why you make particular mistakes, so you'll know exactly what to do and what to say to yourself the next time you face a challenging situation.

For example, to overcome her emotional eating trap, Jessica needed to question the idea that the only way she could calm down was by eating. She was able to recall a number of times when she experienced negative emotions, even high levels of emotion, but was able to calm down without food. With her changed thinking, she was able to do some problem solving, opening her mind to other activities she could do when she was distressed. She discovered she really *could* feel soothed by a nice, hot soak in the tub for fifteen minutes with *People* magazine. And if a bath didn't do the trick, she had a list of other activities to try, none of which were followed by guilt and recrimination—no weight gain.

But identifying alternative behaviors wasn't enough. Jessica needed to learn skills to *motivate* herself to try these new behaviors. And she needed a system to remind herself, every time, that she didn't need food to calm down. That she could just accept her negative emotions without trying to change them. Or that she could refocus her attention. In short, that she absolutely *could* cope without eating. Jessica's escape plan helped change her whole orientation toward food and distress.

Once Jessica learned that she didn't need food to cope, she evened out her eating. She lost twenty pounds without much difficulty. How did she do it? With a reasonable eating and exercise program combined with an escape plan designed specifically to address her difficulties. For the first time she could remember, Jessica felt in control of her craving for sweets, even during times of strong emotion. It wasn't that the cravings never occurred; rather she knew exactly how to handle them. She felt confident that she would be able to use the techniques in *The Diet Trap Solution* to continue losing weight and then keep it off. She felt like a changed person.

As you practice the strategies in these pages, you will become more and more skilled. You'll see your own traps more clearly and be able to avoid them or overcome them more easily. Eventually your new ways of thinking and eating will become second nature.

The Beck Team Approach

We (Judith Beck, Ph.D., and Deborah Beck Busis, LCSW, my daughter, coauthor, and diet program coordinator at the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Philadelphia) developed this program for our diet clients over the course of many years. My first book, *The Beck Diet Solution: Train Your Brain to Think Like a Thin Person*, and a workbook were based on this program. The book didn't include a diet; instead it taught dieters a series of skills to lose weight, many of which you'll read about in the next chapter.

Since that book's release, we've been blown away by the success of thousands of dieters who have

followed our program. We've gotten feedback from readers on almost every continent, as the book has been translated into twenty languages. We've heard from men and women, people of all ages, socioeconomic groups, and ethnic backgrounds. They have e-mailed us, tweeted us, written posts on Facebook, or participated in our workshops or in online support groups on various websites. Through our interactions with them, we began to realize that while the book was helpful, many of these dieters needed more specific help and suggestions to deal with everyday challenges that kept tripping them up. To achieve full success, they needed to learn how to work their way through challenges and view traps as opportunities for positive change. Please note, our books are designed for dieters. People with eating disorders need a fuller cognitive behavioral approach.

Through our work with these dieters and patients over the past thirty years, we've realized that sometimes you don't see a trap until you're standing in the middle of it. Sometimes the trap is so long standing that it feels impossible to evade. But regardless of how trapped you feel, there are always solutions. Remembering to stop, refocus on your goal, and use the strategies you've learned is a reflection that can be developed. As with every other new skill or habit, the secret is *practice, practice, practice*.

We are not going to mislead you. Losing weight will never be effortless. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling you a bill of goods. Losing weight takes determination and endurance. But once you learn to escape your traps, dieting generally becomes progressively easier, with only intermittent occasions when things get more difficult.

Most importantly, *The Diet Trap Solution* will help you respond to sabotaging thinking that makes dieting hard. You'll learn how to anticipate traps, change your sabotaging thoughts, marshal your problem-solving abilities, and develop escape plans so you become your own best ally. And you'll learn how to recover right away if you do get caught in a trap. No more waiting until tomorrow to start over. Learning to recognize and overcome diet traps is the only way you will ever win the weight-loss battle.

The Power of Your Mind

One of the most common misconceptions about weight loss is that, to succeed, you just have to focus on *what you eat*.

Not true. An equally decisive factor in successful weight loss is changing *what you think*. To get yourself to consistently *eat* differently, you must learn to *think* differently.

You may not even be aware, or fully aware, of how your thinking influences how you eat. For example, maybe you've had thoughts like these:

- "It's okay to have extra pizza because I had a bad day."
- "It's unfair that I can't eat like everyone else."
- "I know I shouldn't eat this whole sub sandwich, but I can't resist."

If you've had these kinds of thoughts, chances are you didn't know how to counter them. You probably took them at face value, as simple truths—and ended up eating more than you had planned. Then you may have had another sabotaging thought:

- “I’ve already messed up, so I might as well eat whatever I want for the rest of the day and start again tomorrow.”
-

If you did continue on that path, you may also have had another kind of sabotaging thought, one that undermines your sense of self-control:

- “I’m so weak.”
- “I can’t believe I cheated on my diet!”
- “I did it again. I’ll never be able to lose weight.”

Sound familiar? This kind of thinking is Kryptonite for your self-confidence. When these thoughts go unanswered, they set you up for failure. They demoralize you and make it all the more difficult to get back on track. They also erode your willpower, so you continue to make one eating mistake after another.

The only way to lose weight and keep it off for the long term is to learn how to challenge the unhelpful ideas. Because really, that’s all they are: ideas. Not truths. When these unhelpful thoughts arise, you need a powerful way to respond, to remind yourself *why* you want to stick to your plan and exactly how you can do it, no matter what trap you are circling at the time.

Learning to identify—and respond effectively to—unhelpful, unrealistic thinking and to develop concrete solutions to problems are key features of Cognitive Behavior Therapy, also known as CBT. (*Cognition* is another word for “thinking.”) CBT is a form of talk therapy that has been demonstrated in over a thousand clinical trials to be effective for a wide range of psychological and behavioral problems. Aaron T. Beck, MD (our father and grandfather, respectively), is known throughout the world for developing this modality of treatment in the 1960s and refining it ever since.

In recent times, CBT has become the standard of care among many psychologists who help people control their eating. In a survey of over 1,300 licensed psychologists conducted by the American Psychological Association in conjunction with *Consumer Reports*,¹ seven of ten psychologists selected the techniques of CBT as among the most effective strategies they use with patients who are facing diet and weight-loss challenges. CBT has been shown to help everyone from people with just a few pounds to lose all the way to those who struggle with chronic obesity and binge-eating disorder.²

We have used CBT with great success in our Philadelphia clinic. Both of us travel the world teaching CBT for weight loss and maintenance to health and mental health professionals, to doctors and nurses, and to coaches, trainers, and dietitians. We consult with researchers and weight-loss programs and write about dieting and maintenance for a variety of media. Over and over again, professionals and consumers tell us, “What you say makes so much sense. Why doesn’t every weight-loss program include CBT?” We have been so gratified to see this approach literally change lives.

The heart of CBT is awareness and change. CBT teaches you how to identify thoughts and feelings that trigger unhelpful behavior. By becoming more aware of your sabotaging thinking, you can slow down and question your assumptions. This moment of conscious reflection gives you the chance to make a different choice. Instead of immediately reaching for an extra slice of pizza, you learn how to stop and make a different decision.

Imagine what might happen the next time you see a plate of delicious cookies you hadn’t planned to eat. In the past, you might have simply accepted sabotaging thoughts like these:

- “I can’t resist.”
- “It’s okay if I only have one.”
- “Just this one time won’t matter. I’ll make up for it later.”

But imagine what could happen if you had prepared for this moment by regularly and repeatedly reading these “reminder cards” to change your thinking:

I’m absolutely not eating this because it’s unplanned extra food. If I do give in, I’ll get a few moments of pleasure but then feel bad afterward—for so much longer. And I’ll put myself at risk for eating off plan for the rest of the day. It’s not worth it!

Since I want to lose weight for good, I have to take every opportunity to resist unplanned food. In a few minutes, I’m going to feel so proud of myself for not giving in.

Eating unplanned food only strengthens my “giving-in muscle,” making it more likely that the next time I want to eat something unplanned, I’ll give in then, too. Every time I don’t give in, I’m strengthening my “resistance muscle,” making it easier to stay strong next time.

Once you learn how to firmly respond to your sabotaging thinking, losing weight will become progressively easier. You’ll remember to say to yourself, “Eating this extra food *matters!* Every time it matters!” And you’ll build up your confidence that you can resist traps and succeed in following your plan. By changing how you think, you can also change how you feel and what you do. You have the power to change your thoughts—and changing those thoughts truly can change your life.

Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Brain

Even if you’ve been thinking in unhelpful ways for many years, you will practice your new ways of thinking and behaving until they become almost automatic. The approach is straightforward and powerful.

Recent research in neuroscience has demonstrated the changes that CBT brings about in your brain. When you think in a certain way for a long time, your brain becomes more and more efficient at thinking that way. You can drive your car, catch the subway or bus, or brush your teeth practically on autopilot, right? You may not even be aware of the automatic thoughts preceding behaviors that seem

to just happen without any intentional action from you.

The reason these activities *seem* automatic is that you have trained your brain: you have allowed these thoughts and behaviors to entrench themselves over many years of doing or thinking the same thing. You no longer have to consciously think about what to do, in which order, when you slide behind the driver's seat in your car. The alternatives have been selectively "pruned out" of your brain; their neural pathways withered away from disuse. Your current patterns of thinking and behavior are woven into the networks in your brain, where they repeat over and over and over.

But this is key: if you wanted to, you *could* change these thoughts and behaviors at any time. You could look in your rearview mirror only *after* you pulled the car out into the street. You could turn on your turn signal only after you had made a turn. You could speed up when you approach a red light—or slam on the brakes as you approach a green. Those choices *are* possible. We have power of choice, and therefore we also have the power to change.

While scientists once believed our brains to be static and immutable past a certain age, we know now that our brains are "plastic"—they continue to learn from the moment we're born, and they never stop changing. CBT provides a system for changing your thinking, deliberately and methodically, so you can change your behavior.

Now, it won't happen overnight. You may have had years (or decades) of giving in to sabotaging thoughts. But practicing new ways of thinking—every day—will help you change your responses to the traps you'll encounter. In fact, studies have shown that CBT can actually produce physical changes in your brain.

Using sophisticated magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment, researchers have traced changes in the brains of people who received CBT for chronic pain and entrenched addictions, severe phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and major depression.³ Using some of the techniques we share in this book, these patients were able to harness the power of their minds to change their mood and behavior and overcome serious problems, in some cases more effectively than with medication—and without side effects. Decades of research demonstrate it really works.

By using these techniques over and over, by learning how to challenge your sabotaging thoughts and consciously choose an alternate behavior, not only do you change your habits but you can also change your brain structure. You *can* change the way you think. You *can* succeed at weight loss.

How a Trap Forms

Eating is obviously necessary to sustain life. We are driven to eat when we're hungry. But we also eat for other reasons: to satisfy a craving, to experience pleasure, to be social, to soothe, to celebrate, to suppress negative emotions, to cope with stress. Many of our cultural and religious traditions and holidays include food and drink. Birthday cakes, happy hour, holiday dinners—almost every social gathering incorporates food or drink, and the sustenance and pleasure that come from food can bring people together in a positive shared experience. Much like another pleasurable biological function—procreation!—we are hardwired on an evolutionary level to enjoy eating for a simple reason: it keeps the human race alive.

But the attitude that you should be able to eat whatever you want, whenever you want, is problematic. You may develop unhelpful eating patterns that can be difficult to change. You know intellectually that you'd be much better off eating more healthily, but at the moment of temptation

your sabotaging thinking leads you straight into a trap.

Once you learn to use the strategies of CBT, you'll be able to make choices, in the moment, that move you toward your goal of lasting weight loss. You will start to resist traps. Even when you do fall into a trap, you'll have the skills to get yourself out.

Your mind is immensely powerful. Your brain has the ability to change and keep changing.

Our Many and Varied Traps

We all encounter traps. Anyone who has struggled with losing weight has fallen into traps. Each one contains a number of sabotaging thoughts. Do some of these statements ring a bell with you?

Emotional eating traps: *"If I'm upset, I deserve to eat."*

Stress traps: *"I'm too busy and overwhelmed to keep on dieting."*

Food pusher traps: *"I can't disappoint people by turning down food they're offering me."*

Family traps: *"I shouldn't ask my family to make changes just because I want to lose weight."*

Travel and eating out traps: *"It's okay to indulge when I'm away."*

Holiday traps: *"It's a special time. I should be able to eat whatever I want."*

Psychological traps: *"I have no willpower. I just can't resist."*

Getting off track traps: *"I've already blown it for the day. I might as well keep eating and get back on track tomorrow."*

Everyone has his or her personal assortment of diet traps. Maybe every time you visit your family you find yourself overindulging. Maybe you munch on crunchy snacks or candy that you hadn't planned to eat during stressful times at work. Maybe you're disciplined during the week but can't resist overindulging in those wings and nachos at happy hour on Friday. (You know you shouldn't, but just the thought of them pulls you through the last two hours of the workweek.)

You may have thought all along that it was *a situation* itself that drove you to eat more than you planned. Or perhaps you believed that eating was automatic ("I don't know what happened. Suddenly the bag of chips was empty!"). But unlike bodily functions like the beating of your heart, eating is not automatic. There's no direct unbreakable connection between a situation and an eating behavior. Eating is always influenced by what you think. For example:

Situation: *You are offered an extra piece of cake at a birthday party.*

↓

Sabotaging thought: *“It’s okay to eat it. I’ll make up for it later.”*

↓

Behavior: *You eat the cake. And later feel bad that you did.*

A different outcome occurs, however, once you learn to pause and remember that you can escape this trap with a different response.

Same trigger: *You are offered an extra piece of cake.*

↓

Same sabotaging thought: *“It’s okay to eat it. I’ll make up for it later.”*

↓

Response: *[this time you pause, reflect on your goals, and say to yourself] “No, I’m definitely not going to eat this. If I do, I’ll get a few moments of pleasure, but I’ll feel mad at myself later. Besides, I won’t enjoy it that much, because I’ll feel guilty about eating it. Making exceptions has always gotten me into trouble in the past. It’s not worth it.”*

↓

Behavior: *This time, you pass up the extra cake. And feel proud of yourself.*

Those critical few seconds of pause and response make all the difference. *The Diet Trap Solution* teaches you to anticipate high-risk situations, predict what your sabotaging thinking will be, and rehearse helpful responses before difficult circumstances arise.

The multipart quiz starting on page 19 will help you figure out which traps are most challenging for you. Then you’ll begin to master the foundation strategies that will be crucial to overcoming the traps that plague you. Finally, you’ll create personalized escape plans, integrating the foundation strategies with specific strategies designed for each trap. As you go along, you’ll discover that you can use this integrated approach not only to help you lose weight but also to achieve your goals in other challenging situations.

How You Can Learn to Escape Traps

We describe eight types of traps in this book. You’ll meet a number of dieters (real-life clients but

with names and some personal details changed) encountering their own traps. You'll see how sabotaging thinking got them in trouble, how they fell into traps, and what they did and said themselves to avoid these traps. You'll learn key cognitive and behavioral skills that will help you motivate yourself every day, challenge the inner voice that tries to sabotage your efforts, and get back on track when you falter. You'll learn a step-by-step process to combine the strategies that are most effective for you, so you can start laying down those new neural pathways. Through stories, examples, and specific tips, you'll learn important skills:

Cognitive strategies to help you change your mind-set

Motivational strategies that remind you why sticking to your plan is worthwhile, no matter the circumstances

Psychological strategies to help you manage issues such as feeling discouraged, deprived, burdened, unmotivated, or apathetic

Behavioral strategies to help you establish new habits

Problem-solving strategies to help you troubleshoot everyday challenges

In the final section of each trap chapter, you will identify the situations that are most challenging for you and craft an escape plan for each. You'll zero in on your own sabotaging thoughts and behaviors. You'll apply the strategies you've learned to address unhelpful self-talk, solve real-life problems, discipline yourself consistently, implement behavioral changes, and manage the psychological issues that throw you off track. You will *finally* be able to make changes in your eating that you can maintain for the long run.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy really is the missing link in your weight-loss journey. Using this approach, you will learn how to get out of your own way and reap the benefits of losing weight:

Being leaner and healthier

Having more energy

Increasing your self-confidence

Feeling in control and not at the mercy of food

Feeling more attractive

Providing a healthy role model for your kids

Enjoying shopping for clothes

Being more confident at work and in social situations

You don't need fancy equipment. You don't need to pay high membership fees or order special meals. You can follow whatever healthy, maintainable diet you want; we simply teach you to stay on it.

QUIZ: What Are Your Biggest Traps?

In the pages of this book, you will find the eight traps that tend to challenge dieters most. Almost every dieter who struggles to lose weight or keep it off struggles with these traps. Once you figure out which traps catch you most often, you can create escape plans so you'll know exactly what to do when you are most vulnerable.

Take this quiz to identify your own traps. After you are consistently using each foundation strategy from chapter 2 every day, turn to the chapters that correspond to your traps to craft a personalized program targeted to your specific issues.

SCORING:

For every "Not at all likely," give yourself 0 points.

For every "Slightly likely," give yourself 1 point.

For every "Moderately likely," give yourself 2 points.

For every "Very likely," give yourself 3 points.

Any trap in which you score 5 or above is an issue for you; you may need to read and reread those chapters to help you internalize those strategies. But also make sure to read any chapter for which you answered "Moderately likely," with special attention on those for which you answered "Very likely."

1. How likely are you to use food to relax after a stressful day?

- Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

2. How likely are you to turn to fast food or less-healthy, easy-access food options when you're stressed?

- Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

3. How likely are you to say to yourself, "I am too busy to diet right now"?

- Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

STRESS TOTAL _____

4. How likely are you to turn to food when you're upset?

- Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

5. How likely are you to eat more than you should when you're tired, bored, or

procrastinating?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

6. How likely are you to think, “Eating is the only thing that helps me feel better” or “If I’m upset I deserve to eat”?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

EMOTIONAL EATING TOTAL _____

7. How likely are you to say to yourself, “I have to eat it; I don’t want to be rude.”

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

8. How likely are you to cave to peer pressure when people urge you to drink or eat more than you think you should?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

9. How likely are you to feel unentitled to turn down food that isn’t on your eating plan?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

FOOD PUSHERS TOTAL _____

10. How likely are you to overeat when your family upsets you?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

11. How likely are you to go off plan during family meals or gatherings?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

12. How likely are you to keep your family happy instead of doing what you need to do to lose weight (e.g., keeping “high-risk” foods in the house, accommodating their eating schedule, putting away leftovers yourself)?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

FAMILY PROBLEMS TOTAL _____

13. How likely are you to go to a restaurant or an event without a plan for what you’re going to eat?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

14. How likely are you to say, “All diets are off!” while on vacation?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

15. How likely are you to overindulge when you’re out socially?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

TRAVEL AND EATING OUT TOTAL _____

16. How likely are you to see holiday parties as a “diet-free zone”?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

17. How likely are you to say to yourself, “I’ll start watching my eating once the holidays are over”?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

18. How likely are you to gain more than one or two pounds during the holiday season?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

HOLIDAYS TOTAL _____

19. How likely are you to feel discouraged or burdened by dieting?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

20. How likely are you to feel a sense of deprivation or unfairness when you see what other people are eating?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

21. How likely are you to say to yourself, “No wonder I can’t lose weight—I’m unmotivated” or “I have no willpower”?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES TOTAL _____

22. How likely are you to criticize yourself or skip meals after you’ve overeaten?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

23. How likely are you to say to yourself, “I’ve already blown it for the day so I might as well eat what I want today and start my diet again tomorrow”?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

24. How likely are you to have difficulty getting back on track the day after you’ve gone off track?

Not at all likely Slightly likely Moderately likely Very likely

GETTING OFF TRACK TOTAL _____

Building Your Escape Plan

Your journey begins with the ten foundation strategies in the next chapter. You will adopt them in order and then use these strategies as part of every escape plan. As you become more familiar with them, you’ll find that you can use these skills in a variety of situations, such as getting yourself consistently follow an exercise program—which is essential for good health, even if you didn’t want to lose weight!

Losing unwanted pounds may be just the first of many changes you make in your life. *The Diet Trap Solution* teaches you to tap into the power of your mind to make change happen.

Let's get started!

Chapter 2

Foundation Strategies to Escape Your Traps

Do you want this to be the *last* time you try to lose weight? We know you're probably eager to dive headfirst into dieting so you can lose weight fast. Who wouldn't be? But we want you to think about these questions: How well has rushing into changing your eating worked for you in the long run? What does history tell you? Did you quickly lose weight—but then gain it back? Our guess is you have fallen into the same traps over and over or you wouldn't be reading this now.

Instead of focusing on how much you want to lose weight at this moment, we would like you to consider taking a longer and broader view. If you're like most people, you've been searching for the perfect diet, one that would allow you to make short-term changes so you could lose weight quickly and easily. You may not have realized that:

- ❶ You need an eating plan that is not only healthy, reasonable, flexible, and maintainable but also that you'll be able to follow while you're losing weight *and for as long as you want to maintain your weight loss*.
- ❷ You need skills to get yourself to stick to this diet while you're losing weight *and for as long as you want to maintain your weight loss*, no matter what else is going on in your life or what traps are lurking around the corner.
- ❸ You need to learn these strategies *before* you start following an eating plan. Day after day, you'll increase your self-discipline as you practice these strategies. And day after day, you'll increase your confidence that you can get yourself to do what you need to do, even if you don't feel like doing it. We want you to increase your self-discipline and self-confidence on easier tasks, before you tackle the much more difficult task of making lasting changes in when and what you eat.

These ten foundation strategies, first described in *The Beck Diet Solution*, vastly increase the probability that you will lose weight and keep it off. And here is the secret of success: though you'll probably be tempted, don't try to change *what* you eat right away. Instead, wait to change what you eat until you can consistently and successfully use the first eight skills. Master each skill (not just the ones you feel like learning) one by one, in the order they are presented, and you will learn *how to diet*, not just what to eat.

These ten strategies are used throughout the book because they are essential for avoiding escaping from traps. Truthfully, if you do nothing more than use these ten universal tools consistently, you *will* lose some weight. But we also know from experience that each trap requires additional skills.

specific changes in mind-set, and relevant problem solving. Taking the quiz starting on page 19 is the first step in discovering, then conquering, your own personal traps.

You don't need much preparation to start using these foundation strategies. Just some three-by-five index cards or blank business cards, copies of the foundation strategies checklist (on page 25, downloadable at www.beckdietsolution.com), copies of the escape plan (on page 233, or downloadable at www.beckdietsolution.com), and a notebook. That's it!

Before you start, though, check out what's going through your mind. Are you already having sabotaging thoughts? You might be thinking, "This sounds like a lot of work. I have to lose weight more quickly! I can get by with just reading about the skills. I don't have to practice them."

If you're having these thoughts, we want to pose this question: What would you tell your best friend if she had struggled to lose weight and keep it off and was now asking you, "What should I do? I really want to succeed!"? Would you suggest that she not make any changes? That she continue to do what she has done in the past—even though time and again it hasn't worked in the long run?

It's time to try something different—something that will work. But if you're still not convinced, you can try an experiment. Just read the book without making any changes or use only the strategies you feel like using. Give this experiment a few weeks or months. If it works, fine! If, however, at any point you start gaining weight, we hope you'll see the necessity of instituting all these dieting skills you really want to achieve your goal of lasting weight loss.

The ten core skills you'll use to escape your traps are contained in the foundation strategies checklist. Fill out this chart every evening. For the first few days, you will focus only on Foundation Strategy #1, and you'll have only one box to check off. Make sure you've practiced this skill for a few days or a week and have *mastered* it before adding Foundation Strategy #2. Continue like this, systematically making your way through the list and mastering the foundation strategies in the order they are presented.

Foundation Strategies Checklist

Week of: _____

1. Read my advantages list	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Sat down, ate slowly, and enjoyed every bite	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Gave myself credit throughout the day	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Read my reminder cards	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Weighed myself	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Built up my resistance muscle	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Managed hunger and cravings	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Ate according to my planned schedule	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Followed my eating plan	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Created or reviewed my “worth-it memories”	Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why do you need to fill out the nightly checklist? We have found that sabotaging thoughts can really get in the way of practicing your skills. You might think, “This skill isn’t really that important. I don’t have to do it.” Or, “I don’t feel like doing it now. I’ll do it later.” The checklist keeps you accountable and helps you squarely face what you have and haven’t done. Do you *really* want to lose weight and keep it off this time? Then it’s time to make sure you’re *really* practicing your skills.

Okay, ready for the first foundation strategy?

Foundation Strategy #1: Create an advantages list to motivate yourself every day. You want to lose weight for a reason—probably many incredibly important reasons. These reasons have likely occupied space in your brain for a long time. But chances are you’re not able to consistently accept them when you need them most: when you’re tempted to eat something you shouldn’t.

Think back to the last time you ate something you really regretted. Were you thinking, “I want to eat this, but I’d much rather lose weight, have more self-confidence, feel more attractive, fit in smaller-size clothes, move around more easily,” and so on? Probably not, or you would have been able to resist. *This* time, though, you are going to practice reading the reasons you want to lose weight, over and over, so they are fresh in your mind when you encounter a trap. *This* time, you’re going to remember why it’s worth it to you to stay in control.

Make a list of all the advantages of weight loss. Maybe you’ll have ten or fifteen that are highly compelling. (On the next page you’ll see a sample advantages list that Jessica, the dieter you met in chapter 1, wrote.) If you would like, write each advantage on a separate card. Read the advantages

every morning. Pull out the list (or the cards) as needed to boost your motivation throughout the day.

~~Important: *do not* just rely on trying to remember what's on the list. You undoubtedly won't be~~ focusing on these important reasons when you get a strong craving. We've found that repeatedly reading the reasons why you want to lose weight allows you to really reflect on each one and plant them securely in your brain. Just thinking about them is not enough. So make sure you *read* them!

Jessica's Advantages List

1. I'll be more confident speaking to my boss and department heads.
2. I'll be able to wear my old clothes again, especially shorts and skirts.
3. I'll start wearing colors again, not just black, and I'll enjoy shopping for clothes like I used to.
4. I'll be able to walk up steps without getting winded.
5. I'll enjoy dancing at parties and weddings.
6. I'll do more activities, like kayaking and hiking, with Josh.
7. I'll avoid developing diabetes.
8. I'll feel proud of myself.
9. I won't be at the mercy of cravings and negative emotions.
10. I'll feel good about looking in the mirror and having photographs taken.

Here are some ideas to keep the advantages fresh: Shuffle the deck from time to time. Rearrange the deck so the ones that feel most significant to you that day are on top. Visualize, in detail, achieving each advantage and how good you'll feel. Enter the list on your personal electronic device. Set pop-ups on your computer or phone throughout the day with a different reason each time.

Creating your advantages list and repeatedly reviewing it

- **Helps you focus on the payoffs** for all the time and effort you're putting into dieting, instead of what you're "giving up."
- **Cements the reasons more firmly in your mind** for the times when you get blindsided by a craving. Every time you read the cards, you are strengthening your neural pathways and helping rewire your brain's automatic thinking.

Foundation Strategy #2: Sit down, eat slowly, and enjoy every bite. Ultimately, you will probably be taking fewer bites than you are right now, so we want you to learn how to get maximum satisfaction from each one. This skill may be a little harder than you think, if you're used to eating quickly without being aware of each bite. You may even be like a number of dieters who sometimes

try not to notice what they're eating because if they did they would feel guilty.

You simply can't pay enough attention to your food if you're not sitting down, and you rob yourself of full enjoyment. Unfortunately, when you eat standing up, you usually eat without full awareness, so you don't derive as much satisfaction. Feeling unsatisfied can then drive you to eat more. In fact, you can easily consume hundreds of extra calories a day (if not more) when you eat standing up. You may "graze" while standing in front of the refrigerator or food cabinets. Maybe you eat as you're taking food to and from the table or putting away leftovers. Perhaps you take free samples of food at markets or fairs. Somehow you fool yourself into thinking that this kind of eating "doesn't count." But of course it does! Every calorie adds up.

It's also difficult to fully pay attention to what you're eating when you're distracted, whether you're watching television or surfing the web or reading a magazine. On the other hand, engaging conversation with your dining companions can also be distracting. You don't need to eliminate these distractions, but you do need to train yourself to fully focus on your food by eating alone for a few meals, with no distractions.

Once you've mastered that step, reintroduce the distractions. A visual cue (such as a different place mat) or an auditory cue (such as a periodic tone on a smartphone timer app) can remind you to ask yourself, "Have I been paying attention to my food for the last few bites?" If not, put your utensils down, have a sip of water, and start again. Also consider taking smaller bites. You can eat a slice of apple pie in five bites, but if you eat it in fifteen bites, you get ten additional bites to enjoy.

Eating sitting down, slowly and mindfully,

- **Makes you aware of how much you're actually eating.** No longer will you find yourself mindlessly eating one chip after another.
- **Increases your enjoyment of food.** You'll be able to more fully experience the flavors and textures of what you're eating so you get a bigger bang for your buck.
- **Leads to greater psychological satisfaction.** When you see all the food you're going to eat spread out on the table in front of you, you'll feel more gratified than if you miss this visual display by eating one food after another standing up.
- **Provides greater physical satisfaction.** When you eat slowly, you give your brain a chance to register satiety before you overeat. Additionally, being aware of every bite you take helps you feel full and satisfied. We simply don't feel as satisfied, physically or psychologically, by bites we barely remember eating.

Foundation Strategy #3: Give yourself credit each time you practice a skill or make a positive food choice. To be successful, you need to increase your sense of "self-efficacy," a strong belief in your ability to do what you need to do. Take special notice and praise yourself ("That's good! You deserve credit for that!") every time you use a foundation strategy, such as reading your advantage list (and extra credit if you didn't feel like doing it but did it anyway) or resisting an extra helping of macaroni and cheese. Set up a reminder system to monitor yourself throughout the day, such as a note on your schedule, a pop-up on your computer screen, or an alarm on your phone.

This skill is critical. Some dieters believe they don't deserve credit until they actually lose weight. But then they miss out on all the surprising benefits of using this strategy. Giving yourself credit

- **Helps motivate you.** You *deserve* pats on the back every time you practice a skill and make

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