

The Key to Dieting Success: Learn How to Cheat

By Jennifer Wake

In the past century, quick access to meals of many varieties has become the norm, and food temptations have become embedded into our culture. The bombardment of messages about food hits potential dieters from all directions – television, radio, billboards, bus stops – making the idea of waging war against the scale seem daunting.

While many dieters have found success by counting carbs, limiting fat, or joining a gym, these same dieters often see the pounds return – often bringing some friends – when their diet plan stops. If you really want long-term diet success, says Orinda resident and psychiatrist Dr. Harvey Widroe, you first need to learn how to cheat.

For more than 40 years, as Dr. Widroe has treated his patients for their various psychological issues, the topic of weight would often arise. “I saw my patients diet for a while and be successful and then they’d start to cheat. The cheating brought on negative feelings,” he said. “If we accept that cheating is part of normal life and not a character defect, we can stop burning up so much emotional energy criticizing ourselves.”

With the desire to help his patients and other discouraged dieters, Widroe wrote “The Smart Dieter’s Cheating Guide,” (Outskirts Press, 2007), which offers a way for dieters to cheat as part of a life plan, offering unique tips to help them lose weight.

The main principle Widroe underscores in his book is that calories are the same whether you choose to eat a doughnut or a large salad with blue cheese dressing. “There are no good or bad calories,” he says. “It’s simply a measurement of energy. In real life you can’t always be thinking about calories. If you want to lose weight, you just need to reduce the total calorie intake. We have stresses – husbands, wives, family – and we can’t always keep track.”

The Cheating Guide allows dieters the flexibility to choose foods that they love and to incorporate them into their eating plan. Strict calorie counting is out. Rounding up calories to the nearest hundred and lumping foods into low, medium, or high calorie content is in. By categorizing foods this way, dieters – whether at the grocery or out to dinner – develop a better understanding of which foods have the largest impact on their waistline. This allows them to more easily substitute lower calorie foods for higher ones.

“Effective cheating,” writes Widroe, “means eating in such a way that we reduce our overall daily calorie consumption. To pull it off successfully, we have to do some planning.”

First, plans should not be too drastic. “They must have the look of our normal eating behavior,” he said. “Substituting calorie-loaded food items from our cheating list, a few major eating behavior changes, and a cheating sequence taken together will help us eat a good deal less.”

One dieter highlighted in Widroe’s book was determined to cheat. Drawn to a local Burger King, he could envision the burger, fries and shake with startling clarity.

Instead of taking the normal course of action – the drive thru – he made a “major eating behavior change” and parked in the lot. The change shifted the automatic response and the dieter was able to stop and think. Understanding the substitution rule, he opted for a medium sized Snicker bar at the corner drug store instead of the burger meal, saving more than 1,000 calories.

“He still cheated,” explained Widroe, “but the negative feelings about cheating were gone. Everyone cheats. The trick is finding ways to be a better cheater.”

As weight begins to come off, Dr. Widroe reminds dieters it does not happen in a linear fashion. “The course of our weight loss will look just like a staircase, not a slide,” he explained. “As fat cells lose fat, they absorb water. At a certain state of cellular water retention, our hypothalamus signals the pituitary gland to stop producing antidiuretic hormone. With the absence of the hormone, dieters get rid of lots of water – and excess weight.”

Other tips include daily weigh-ins on a digital scale, and setting small 7 lb. achievable goals.

The key? “There’s always a response to the stopping point of a diet, but there doesn’t have to be a stop to this,” Widroe said. “If you can memorize ten different ideas that you can use in real life, you never have to stop and you will lose weight.”



Harvey J Widroe

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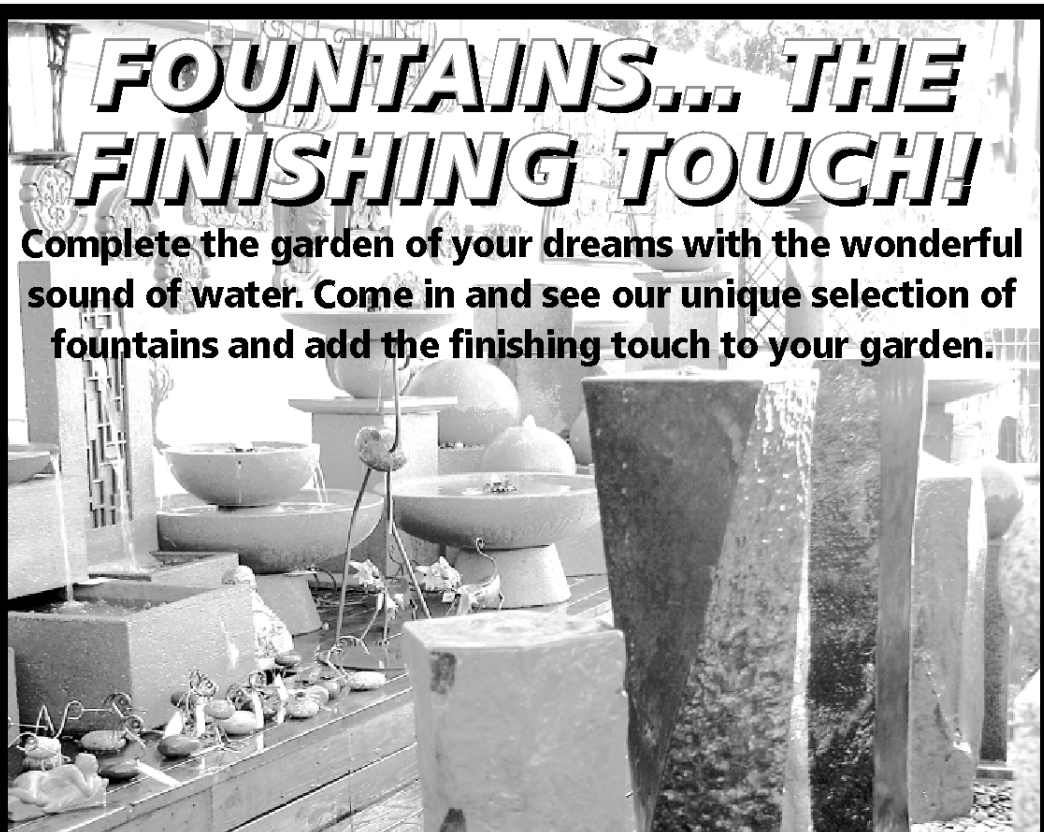
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