

What Does It All Mean?

I know I've given you a lot of information in the preceding pages. If you need a little help assimilating it all, here's a cheat sheet:

- Your fat cells are not just dumb sacks of lard. They are active organs and send chemical messages that help to regulate many body functions.
- Your brain receives moment-to-moment messages from your fat cells so it is well informed about how much energy is in your fat stores.
- Your brain also receives moment-to-moment messages from your digestive tract, making it well-informed about your overall nutritional status.
- Your brain also receives signals stimulated by physical activity, emotion, sleep patterns, and other goings-on.
- Your brain assimilates this wealth of information and, in response, produces chemical messengers and nerve responses that regulate your appetite and metabolism, affecting not only when you experience hunger but also what foods appeal to you and how much food it takes to make you feel full. Although you're not aware of these chemical changes, they drive your behavior, moving you toward the table or instructing you to turn down seconds.
- Your body likes to maintain the status quo and keep your weight relatively stable; this range of stable weight is called your "setpoint."
- Your body strongly protects against dipping below your setpoint, though most people's bodies are relatively less aggressive at preventing them from rising above their setpoint. In other words, weight gain is relatively easy at the same time that weight loss may not be possible.
- When you lose weight and threaten this system, your body may react by raising your setpoint, protecting against future threat.

The Final Result?

Your body maintains whatever it perceives as an adequate amount of fat storage to protect itself. How much fat protection your body requires (your setpoint) is the result of a complex interplay of genetics and the lifestyle choices made today as well as in the past—and is intimately linked to your current weight.

This, in turn, leads to the catch-22: Your body wants to maintain the status quo and is stubbornly resistant to change. When you lose body fat, the very loss of fat triggers processes to reclaim it. So losing weight in and of itself is counterproductive to maintaining weight loss. We shouldn't be too surprised that weight loss is so rarely maintained.

What's My Setpoint?

Unfortunately, there's no magic formula or laboratory test to determine your setpoint. Nor is there any objective way to figure out how tightly yours is regulated. (Scientists estimate that the average person has a setpoint range of about ten to twenty pounds, meaning at any given time, there is a ten-to-twenty-pound range at which your body will be comfortable and not resist attempts to change. So losing/gaining small amounts of weight may not be difficult and won't be met by compensatory actions, if you are within your setpoint range.²)

But you *can* find your own setpoint. How? By listening to your body and eating normally. You'll learn more about how to do that throughout this book.

Are You Above Your Setpoint?

Wondering if you're above your own setpoint? Then answer these questions:

- Do you have difficulty recognizing when you're hungry and when you've had enough?
- Do you routinely eat beyond a comfortable level of fullness and feel lethargic, stuffed, and uncomfortable after meals?

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- Do you go through periods where you eat out of control, anticipating that you will soon start to diet?
- Do you skip meals in an effort to lose weight, then overeat because you are so hungry?
- Do you skip meals to “save up” for a big feast?
- Do you often eat as a coping mechanism? For example, when you’re tired, angry, or nervous? How about killing time when you’re bored?
- Do you often feel guilty about some of the foods or the amount of food you eat?
- If you overeat, do you figure you’ve blown your “diet” and end up eating even more?
- Do you often eat quickly without taking the time to focus on the taste of your food or to savor and enjoy it?
- Do you fluctuate between periods of sensible, nutritious eating and then eating out of control?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are likely above your setpoint. Don’t feel bad! Most people aren’t at their setpoint. This book will help you find it.

Warning: Many of these conditions may also be symptomatic of an eating disorder or other concerns. Be sure to discuss these symptoms with a trusted health professional.

Are You Below Your Setpoint?

Some people are chronically below their setpoint. You’ll know this is you if:

- You’re often cold.
- You feel like you’re constantly preoccupied with food and often feel desperately hungry.
- You wake up with an overwhelming urge to eat.
- You have difficulty sleeping because of gnawing hunger.
- You have a very low sex drive.
- For females, you have infrequent periods or skip them entirely.

- You suffer from any of the following: apathy, fatigue, irritability, and/or depression.

If you are below your setpoint, learning how to respond to your body's signals will help you to normalize your eating habits and feel better. It may result in a slight weight gain, but this is a good thing, I assure you!

Warning: Many of these conditions may also be symptomatic of an eating disorder, a thyroid dysfunction, or other concerns. Be sure to discuss these symptoms with a trusted health professional.

Achieve Your Setpoint!

This book is going to help you get to your natural setpoint, the weight that is healthiest for you. By the end of the book, you'll be answering "yes" to these questions:

- Do you eat naturally in response to signals of hunger, fullness, and appetite without fixating on your weight or food habits?
- Is eating effortless and enjoyable?

Soon, your body will be guiding you in making nutritious, pleasurable choices. No more counting calories, totaling fat grams, or weighing broiled skinless chicken breasts!