

How to Retrain Your Appetite

CHANGE
YOUR DIET
FOR LIFE

Lose weight permanently
eating all your favourite foods

THE APPETITE DOCTOR
Dr Helen McCarthy

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This is a self-help book and does not constitute specific psychological or medical advice. If you are unsure about anything to do with your own weight-loss plan, please consult your doctor or otherwise seek professional, medical advice.

If you are suffering from an eating disorder, please use this programme in collaboration with your therapist or doctor. If you are diabetic, please use this programme in collaboration with your diabetic nurse or doctor.

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COLLINS & BROWN

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CHAPTER 1



A New Approach to Weight Loss

We all ate in tune with our bodies when we were very young. As a baby, food was just food. Babies cry when they feel hungry and when they are fed, they stop crying. They feed and then they stop. If you give babies food when they're not hungry, they turn away, not interested. Trying to cajole them into finishing what you intended to give them is a messy business. They aren't persuadable and they clamp their mouth shut, not caring where the food ends up – on the floor, over the wall, up their nose. They are using the self-regulating system of eating when hungry and stopping when full. Of course, if a pot of their favourite dessert appears it's a whole new ball game thanks to taste-specific satiety (more on this later).

For some people, eating stays pretty much like that as they grow into children and then adults. It doesn't mean they don't enjoy food. It just means that they use food to satisfy their appetite and then they stop and get on with their day. 'If only I was like that!' you may think. Well, you can be. By re-learning to eat in tune with your natural hunger and fullness signals, you can learn to stop eating when you've had just enough. And you can organize your eating routine to fit around your lifestyle, in such a way that you allow yourself to get hungry by each meal.

That's what this book is all about. It's a how-to guide full of information about how you can return to eating as you did as an infant. Without the mess.

What went wrong!

You gained weight when you stopped using your natural hunger and fullness signals to guide your eating. This can happen for many different reasons. How many of the following bad habits do you recognize in yourself?

- » Finishing what's on your plate regardless of whether you're full.
- » Eating what someone else has left on their plate.
- » Abandoning regular mealtimes.
- » Dealing with stress, distress or boredom by eating.
- » Eating as a way of rebelling against someone who tells you not to.
- » Using chocolate as a legal high.
- » Secretly eating foods you feel you shouldn't be eating.
- » Grazing on foods you just happen to see at home or work.
- » Eating to keep someone else happy because they're eating or because they cooked something for you.
- » Eating biscuits with coffee, or salted nuts with wine, out of habit.
- » Over-reacting to the freedom of leaving home by overeating just because you can.
- » 'Eating for two' during pregnancy.
- » Failing to change the amount you eat when your lifestyle changes, such as leaving an active job for a sedentary one.
- » Failing to adjust the amount you eat as you get older.
- » Using food as a friend.

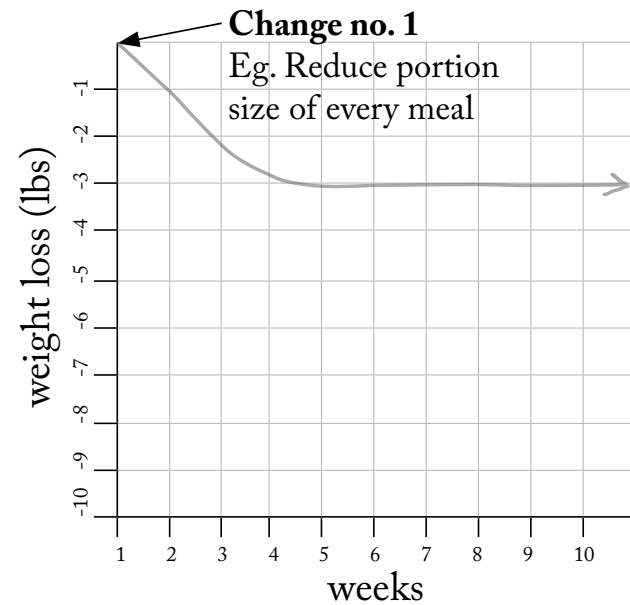
When any of these habits becomes established, we gain weight. How much we gain depends partly on how much extra food we're consuming and partly on how our bodies deal with the extra food. Because we're all different, some of us gain weight more easily and the 'bad' habits have bigger consequences for our size. Your Unhelpful Eating Habits (UEHs) are directly related to those extra pounds you want to lose.

One of my client's first step in losing weight was to stop raiding his children's sweetie cupboard every evening during the advert break of *Coronation Street*. He was surprised to find that by just making this one change he lost half a stone, most of which came off his middle. If he'd gone back to his nightly chocolate fix, the weight would have gone back on.

'The food that your body couldn't use because it didn't need gets converted into fat, leading to excess weight. Appetite Retraining helps you declutter your eating habits so you get rid of unnecessary eating and excess pounds.'

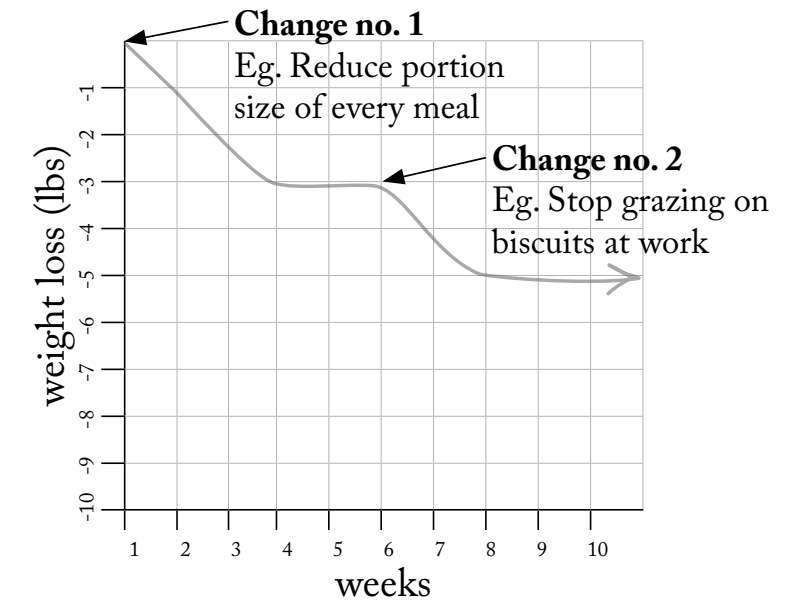
What is Appetite Retraining?

Over the years you've accumulated Unhelpful Eating Habits (UEHs) that involve eating more than your body needs. With Appetite Retraining you identify what your specific UEHs are and then you change them one at a time. Step by step you learn to eat in tune with your body. When you change one UEH, such as reducing the size of your evening meal, you see something like this:



Your weight falls as you establish the new habit. And then it plateaus. Your body has let go of the additional weight it was carrying because of this particular eating habit. The size of the drop in weight is something you discover, not something you can predict. If you then reduce the size of your meals further, you'd see an additional drop. The time to get to a plateau depends on how big a habit change you've made and on your metabolism. If you just make this one change and stick to it, your weight is likely to stay around this level. To lose more,

you choose another UEH and work on making that particular change. Here's what that might look like, using the example of changing a habit of grazing on biscuits at work.



You decide how many habit changes to make, and you'll find the right balance between making changes to how you eat and what weight loss you're comfortable with.

The role of exercise

Exercise does, of course, have a role to play in weight loss, but I probably wrote a book about changing eating habits rather than increasing your activity levels because I'm not one of life's great exercisers. However, I found that when I lost weight, I wanted to move more. I joined a gym and started walking more. Not because I thought I should, but because I wanted to. When you feel better in your body you may find the same thing – that your body wants to do more.

The role of dieting in gaining weight

You may have discovered for yourself that dieting is not all it's cracked up to be. Changing what you eat and how much you eat overnight is less a recipe for success and more a sure-fire route to stress and strain around food and eating. You were already stressed about it, and adding to this is not going to work. You probably wouldn't be reading this book if it had.

The 'what the hell' effect coined by psychologists Herman and Polivy in the 1980s refers to the way dieters tend to eat unrestrainedly once they have broken a diet rule they were following. Studies have shown that it's the idea of having broken a diet rather than the amount of 'forbidden' food they consume that makes the difference. If you recognize yourself as a 'what the hell' sort of person, dieting rules are likely to lead to you eating more rather than less, and Appetite Retraining may be just what you're looking for because the focus is on habit change, not following a set of diet rules.

One of the big selling points of diet books is the 'delicious' recipes. Well, not one recipe in any diet book I've ever seen (and I've read scores of them) is as delicious as my homemade lasagne or coq au vin using the recipes in my favourite cookery book Hopkinson and Bareham's *The Prawn Cocktail Years*. So in this book, where we're talking about eating in tune with your body for the rest of your life, you won't find any recipes. You'll eat what you already love, perhaps with some new discoveries.

When you choose what to eat, and you choose the best possible version of that food, you'll get the most enjoyment from it – whether that's following Mary Berry using butter or Delia Smith using meat with fat on. Mary and Delia have been saying this for decades, despite the low-fat hysteria that has gripped the West. Call me ahead of the curve on full-fat, but that would be flattering me. I've never chosen full-fat because I thought it was healthier than low fat; I've chosen it because reduced-fat foods don't taste that good to me.

The new enemy as you may be aware isn't fat, but carbohydrates, particularly sugar. I don't know where the low-carb movement will end up as it is still the subject of fierce debate. There are impressive findings of people who dramatically reduced their carbohydrate intake going into remission from Type 2 diabetes as well as losing weight. But the movement has its more extreme elements and I am deeply sceptical about any approach that advises you not to eat too much fresh fruit. It gives me a strong feeling of déjà vu from the 1980s' advice that avocados and nuts were to be avoided because they are high in fat. Two of our current superfoods were, merely 30 years ago, to be avoided!

If you're following a diet that requires you to eat less-than-fabulous foods, you're always going to be missing out on the most pleasurable food. Whereas if you eat all of your favourite foods, and learn to eat just as much of them as your body needs at each meal, you'll never be missing out. Except on the less-tasty foods, such as the second half of an overly large meal (see page 52).

Why is it so hard to lose weight permanently?

Trying to lose weight and keep it off for good can feel like a battle you just can't win. And you can't escape the dieting advice. There are more weight-loss experts than you could shake a stick at. In health and lifestyle sections of magazines and newspapers few things take up more column inches than weight loss. You've tried diet after diet, but nothing sticks (except the pounds.)

Why, oh why can't you lose that excess weight? Frankly, it's because most of the experts doing most of the writing know about nutrition. But they know next to nothing about psychology. And if you already know what food is good for you, what's preventing you losing weight is likely to be difficulty with *how* you eat, not *what* you eat.

Here are three good reasons for struggling to lose weight, all of which are dealt with in this book.

1. Because you ignore what your body is telling you

If you've followed the rules of a diet that seems to work for other people, or exercised until you're blue (or red) in the face, and still the weight refuses to stay off, consider how much you've been listening to your body as you've tried to shift those pounds.

» Have you noticed when you're hungry?

» Have you thought what to eat for breakfast on the basis of how many hours it will be before lunch?

No?

Then let me introduce you to your greatest friend and advisor for your weight-loss journey: your gut. More specifically, the connections between your gut and your brain. This book is all about using the signals from your gut to guide your eating.

When you engage your mind and tune into your gut when you are eating and whenever you think of eating, you'll have a reliable guide to when and how much to eat. Appetite Retraining shows you how to do this so that you can forget diet sheets and calorie counting and reach the weight you're comfortable with and stay there easily. Freedom around food, forever!

2. Because you try to change too much at once

- » To lose weight you need to change your eating habits.
- » To lose weight permanently you need to change your eating habits permanently.
- » Changing habits is best done one step at a time.

This is why it is so ridiculously hard to lose weight following a conventional diet. Changing established habits takes effort and energy and is best done one step at a time. Conventional diets, on the other hand, require you to overhaul your eating habits overnight, which is near impossible to keep to.

But if you follow some simple steps to identify exactly what you need to change about your eating habits, and what you don't, you can achieve permanent weight loss without the Herculean effort of an athlete training for a marathon.

By choosing your favourite foods and learning how to eat in tune with your body, eating will be actually pleasurable while you lose the pounds.

And because you'll have established new eating habits, keeping the weight off will be easy.

'By setting yourself one manageable change at a time, you'll achieve success and boost your confidence.'

3. Because of mental blocks (saboteurs)

Self-sabotage doesn't happen for everyone. For some people, a clear plan of how to lose weight is enough. But if you've lost weight before, only to regain it and don't understand why, self-sabotage may be to blame. If you think this may be you, read on....

In the past, you've made a decision to lose weight and chosen what approach you're going to use. You start well. The enthusiasm of a fresh start with an approach that makes sense boosts your confidence and you're feeling optimistic.

But somehow, inexplicably, frustratingly and depressingly, a few weeks in, you find yourself doing exactly what you didn't want to do. Snacking when you didn't mean to, piling enough food onto your plate for two, or going back for seconds.

It feels as if you are two different people: the disciplined one who can keep on track and the devil-may-care one who can't be bothered with all the effort. And unfortunately the disciplined one seems to have quit.

The Appetite Retraining Programme helps you to identify your potential saboteurs or mental blocks. You'll understand how self-sabotage has derailed your weight loss efforts in the past and we'll tackle this head-on so that you don't have a repeat of the same old pattern.

Other factors that affect weight loss

Remember, we're all different. Even if you and a friend go on the same diet, or make the same single habit change using Appetite Retraining, your bodies will react differently. Your physical make-up, including your metabolism, how sensitive you are to insulin and other gut hormones, whether you have a medical condition such as an underactive thyroid, the composition of your gut biome (the billions of bacteria living in your gut) and whether you take medication, all affect how your body deals with the food you eat. If you're on medication and want to know whether what you're taking may make weight loss more difficult, speak to a pharmacist who can advise you whether to raise the issue with your doctor, or speak to your doctor in your next consultation.

Measuring your results

Even when you lose weight, be aware that it may not come off in the way you expect it to. When I started losing weight, the first three inches all came off my hip measurement and only when those three inches had been let go from my hips did I lose weight anywhere else. The habit change that produced the three-inch shrinkage was reducing my evening meal size. So, in my case, my body was holding on to three inches worth of fat on my hips because my dinner was too big.

Taking your starting chest, waist, hip and thigh measurements may be helpful in addition to weighing yourself, so that you can see what is changing. And if you want to influence your body shape as you go, you can talk to a qualified personal trainer about exercises that might help.

Weigh yourself as often as it helps. For many people this turns out to be daily, for others weekly and for some, not at all. This will depend on your experiences in the past of weighing yourself or being weighed. If being weighed has come to be associated with feeling publicly shamed, the scales may be associated with dread, and may not be a motivating influence at all. If, on the other hand, your competitive streak extends to competing with yourself, jumping on the scales may fire your commitment and focus. We're all different and nothing works for everyone.

Tracking your progress

On the next page is a blank graph for you to track your progress if you'd like to (you may prefer not to and that's fine too). There's a downloadable version of this graph on the Appetite Doctor website – www.theappetitedoctor.co.uk.

In the left-hand column, write your current weight at the top of the 'Weight loss' column, next to the '0' and then go down in steps of a pound so that at the bottom the amount is 1 stone less than you weigh now.

Choose a particular day of the week to record your weight. If your chosen day is Friday, each Friday record your weight by placing a dot on the graph. It may help to write the actual dates of the Fridays along the bottom of the graph. Do the same on the Friday of week 2, 3, etc.

Joining the dots will give you a clear visual picture of how your weight loss is progressing. There are 14 weeks on the graph to give room for losing a pound a week on average, but if you get to a stone lighter sooner than 14 weeks, just start another graph with your new current weight at the top.

'You learned your current eating habits over a whole lifetime. You only need to change those that are causing the trouble, so don't clear out your pantry or fridge. This journey is about starting where you are now, and changing one unhelpful eating habit at a time.'

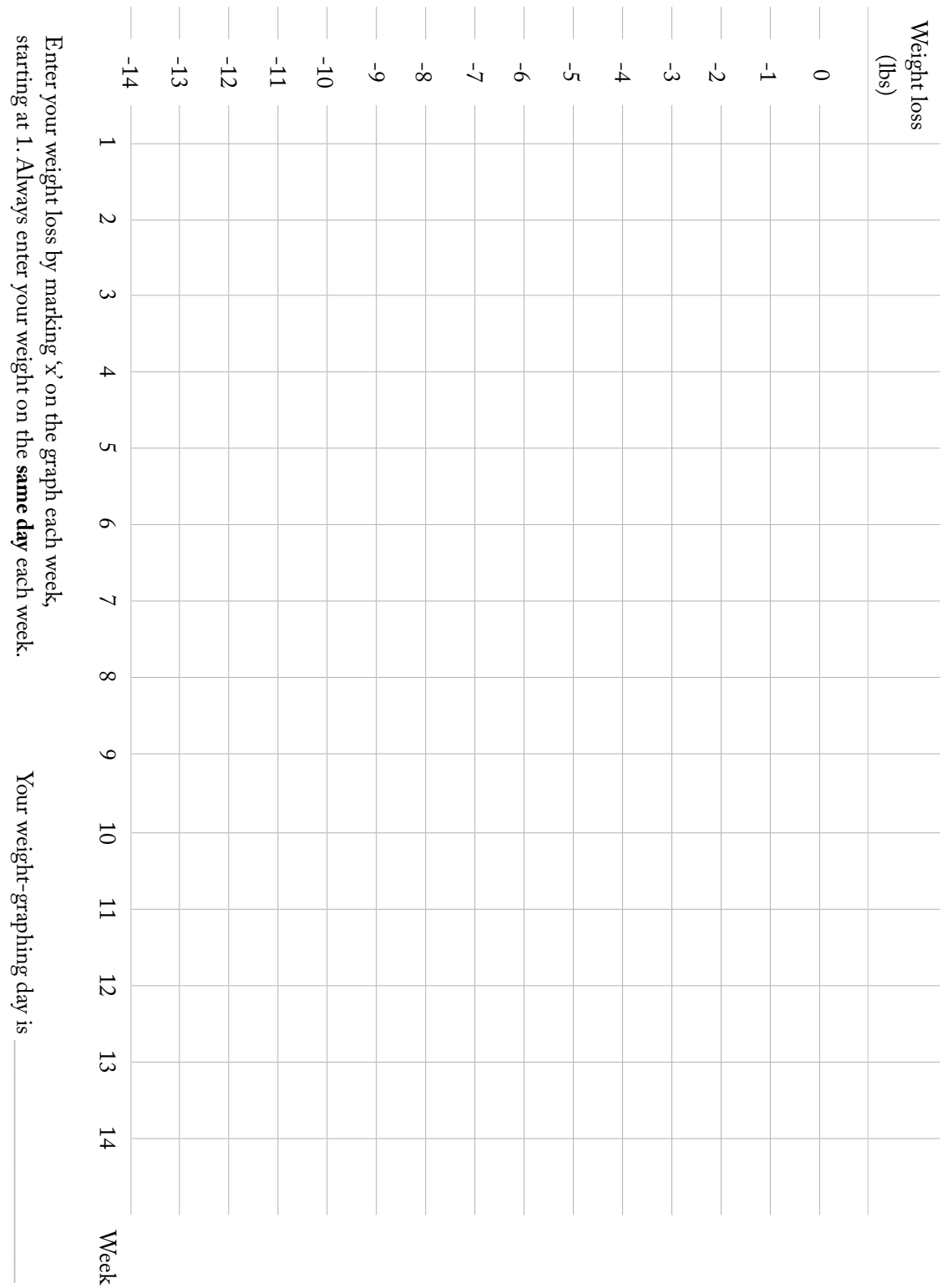
Why maximizing pleasure matters

When it comes to weight loss and changing eating habits permanently, getting the most pleasure you can from eating is absolutely key. Because if we replace our old habit with something that is more delicious than before, it will be much easier to stick to.

Because of the way our brains evolved, we are hard-wired to move towards pleasure. We'll seek out foods that produce more pleasure. It's just part of our basic biology and psychology – an evolutionary thing.

And when we eat really delicious food when we're hungry, the feelings of hunger go away and we feel satisfied. What we've eaten really hits the spot. Eating like this (feel hungry, eat fabulous food, feel satisfied, stop eating) is a self-regulating system. But if you don't allow yourself to get hungry before eating, ordinary real food won't taste as good (because your taste buds weren't ready – see page 51). Instead you're more likely to ferret out something that has much higher levels of taste-bud stimulation.

How you eat has developed over the course of your whole lifetime. Your food likes and dislikes are the result of your genes, the foods your mother ate when you were in the womb, what she ate while breastfeeding you, your cultural background, your specific family food choices, and your own individual experiences of eating and the associations you've



formed with particular foods. Maximizing pleasure involves keeping all of those foods you've come to love in your diet and probably discovering some new delicious ones.

Enhancing pleasure from food comes also from what we eat off. Professor Charles Spence, author of *Gastrophysics*, has studied how the crockery and cutlery we use influences how we taste food, and how satisfying the food is. Using heavier cutlery and crockery is a simple way to enhance our enjoyment of food.

The other way to increase your enjoyment of your food is to focus your attention on it as you eat. Mindfulness is hugely popular now, and eating each meal mindfully rather than distractedly makes a huge difference. Noticing the taste and texture of each mouthful, and the changing tastes you get from the food as you chew, allows you to get much more pleasure than if you eat quickly while doing something else.

‘There’s a certain amount of calories and pleasure available in every bite of food. You get the calories anyway when you eat, but you only get all the pleasure if you really focus on the taste.’

Outsmarting the experts

Food technologists have studied our pleasure responses to food to design ever-more delicious foods, but these ‘hyper-palatable’ foods come at a cost. Because the technologists have done such a thorough job researching our pleasure responses, they’ve created some we can’t stop eating, such as Pringles.

If you weren’t hungry when you started eating, you won’t be able to use reducing hunger to gauge when to stop. Also, these engineered foods stimulate parts of the brain that cause you to keep eating, to a compulsive or addictive pattern instead of to the self-regulating system you used as a baby.

Appetite Retraining is the most delicious diet in the world because you eat the foods you have always loved and you may discover that you really love some new foods. And because you learn to wait to eat until you are definitely hungry, your taste buds are at their most sensitive.

There are no recipes in this book because you’ll be cooking and eating the ones you’ve always loved. Appetite Retraining works whatever your culinary heritage. There’s no need to look for obscure ingredients or clear out your pantry. There’s no need for a huge blow-out meal before you start. With Appetite Retraining, how you eat tomorrow will be only slightly different from today and you won’t make another change until that slightly different habit is easy to stick to.

Before we begin, it’s worth understanding how your body’s appetite system works. The more you tune in to it, the more you can use it to your advantage...

Tired of bland and restrictive diets that don't work?

Disillusioned with 'clean eating'?

Looking for a more instinctive, mindful approach to weight loss?

How to Retrain Your Appetite is a self-help book for people who have gained weight because they have lost touch with using natural hunger and fullness signals to guide their eating. Let the Appetite Doctor® show you how to eat in tune with your body, taking one manageable step at a time. Say goodbye to 'going on a diet' and learn to eat what you already love more mindfully.

- Appetite Retraining™ is the result of thousands of hours of reading and treating people in psychological therapy, using techniques that specifically encourage patients to return to eating in tune with their body.
- Bridging biology and psychology this book puts the focus on specific habit change, all while taking into account the natural resistance we have to making them. It teaches you how to work with, not against, your body.

www.theappetitedoctor.co.uk

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