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The Biggest Loser Diet

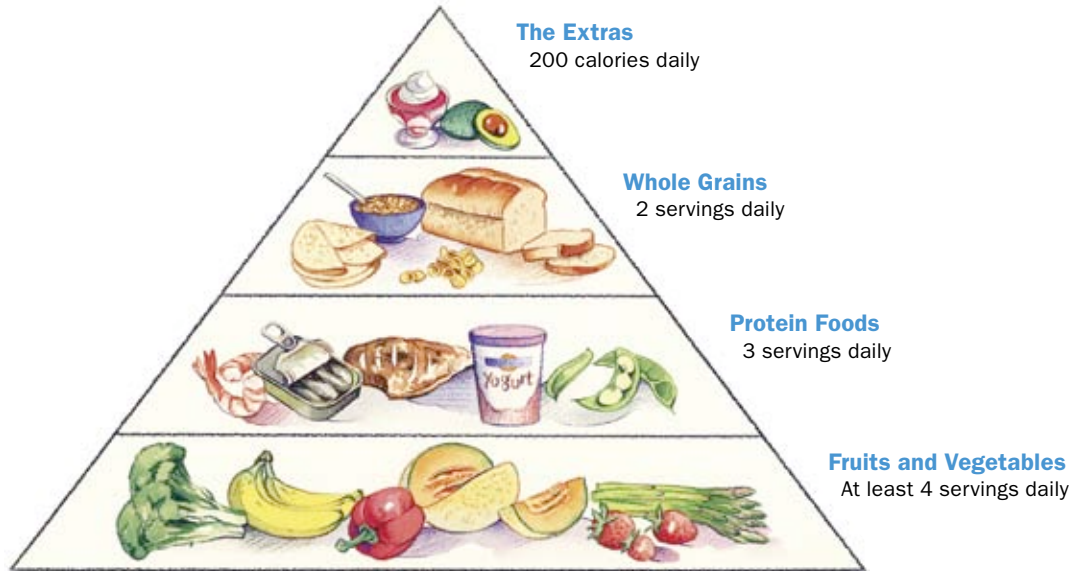
If you're reading this book, chances are that you're looking to change your diet. Perhaps you've tried every wacky diet on the planet—the grapefruit diet, the cabbage soup diet, the brown rice diet—only to come to the realization that while most of them work in the short term, none of these diets work for the long haul. That's because wacky, extreme diets cannot be maintained—they're either unhealthy, too limiting, too boring, too depressing, or all of the above.

So if you're ready for a plan that works, you're ready for the Biggest Loser diet. It's sensible, healthy, and flexible and can be maintained for the rest of your life. It's a diet that at a certain point won't feel like a diet anymore—a diet that becomes so integrated into your life and your being that it becomes your lifestyle.

Here's what you need to know about the Biggest Loser diet: It's calorie-controlled, carbohydrate-modified, fat-reduced, and high in lean protein (which controls hunger). Let's get specific. You'll get to eat three meals and two snacks each day, so you will never be hungry or feel deprived. You can choose from an amazing, colorful variety of foods, as long as most of



THE 4-3-2-1 BIGGEST LOSER PYRAMID



those foods are natural and not processed. Natural foods contribute greatly to weight loss, as they are generally lower in calories, have more fiber, and are more satisfying than processed foods.

Calories Really Do Count

A calorie is the measurement of how much energy a food gives your body after you eat it. You need calories to live, and if they're the right kind of calories, you live better. But if you take in more calo-

ries than you burn through daily activity and exercise, you'll gain weight—regardless of whether those calories come from “good” natural foods or “bad” processed meals. It's that simple. The formula for losing weight is even simpler: Eat less, exercise more. But how do you know how many calories you need?

Here's the easy-to-work equation we've put together to help you: If you weigh between 150 and 300 pounds, multiply your present weight by 7. That number is your caloric goal for each day on the Biggest Loser diet. If you weigh more than 300

pounds, use 300 pounds as your starting “weight” for this formula. Likewise, if you weigh less than 150 pounds, use 150 as your starting “weight.”

What Should You Eat?

In order to give the Biggest Losers an easy template to build their daily menus, we designed the 4-3-2-1 Biggest Loser Pyramid. The bottom, or widest tier, represents the fruits and vegetables in your diet. You should eat at least 4 servings daily. The next tier up represents protein foods, of which you should have 3 servings daily. The next tier is for whole grains, of which you should have 2 servings daily; and the top tier is extras, of which you can have 200 calories daily. A serving equals 8 ounces (or 1 cup), which comes out to be about the size of your hand.

Fabulous Fruits and Vegetables

On the Biggest Loser diet, fruits and vegetables are your best friends. Because these wonder foods supply the most nutrients for the fewest calories, you get to eat more of them than anything else. At least half of your 4 daily servings should be from vegetables; the other half from fruits. You may eat more than 4 daily servings if you wish, as long as you don't consume more fruit servings than vegetable

servings. Almost the entire produce world is open for you to explore, but keep the following in mind:

- It's thumbs down to the white potato. Though nutritious (it's filled with potassium), it sends your blood sugar soaring, which can increase cravings for more food.
- Don't eat more than a few servings a week of starchy vegetables such as pumpkin, winter squash, sweet potatoes, and yams. While these foods offer healthy vitamins and phytonutrients, they are high in calories and carbohydrates.
- Stay away from dried fruits. They are not as filling as raw fruits, are overly concentrated in calories and fruit sugar, and are often treated with additives.
- Choose whole fruits over fruit juices. Whole fruits offer more fiber and are more filling than juices.

Powerful Protein Foods

No matter how many calories you consume each day, you must eat three 8-ounce portions of protein foods. Protein sources include animal (meat, seafood, poultry), vegetable (beans, legumes, soy), and low-fat dairy (milk, yogurt, cottage cheese). You can divide your protein however you'd like throughout the day; just make sure you eat some at each meal and that you reach your total of 24 ounces each day.

- Select a variety of proteins to consume throughout the day. That way you'll cover the nutritional spectrum and won't get bored.
- Limit red meat servings to twice a week as this protein source tends to be higher in unhealthy saturated fat.
- Avoid processed meats as they are usually high in fat and sodium nitrites.

Wonderful Whole Grains

On the Biggest Loser diet, you'll be eating two 1-cup servings of whole-grain foods each day. A whole grain is one that has undergone very little processing so that it retains its nutrients. Examples include barley, brown rice, bulgur, corn grits, couscous, cream of rice, cream of wheat, millet, oat bran, quinoa, rolled oats, whole-wheat cereal, whole-wheat pasta, and wild rice. Try to avoid processed or refined carbohydrates, including most ready-to-eat breakfast cereals which can be loaded with sugar. When choosing bread, look for "whole wheat" in the ingredient list. One bread serving is equal to 2 slices of whole-wheat bread (preferably "light"), 1 whole-wheat bun or roll, 1 whole-wheat flour tortilla, or 2 light Wasa crispbreads.

Extraordinary Extras

According to the Biggest Loser 4-3-2-1 Pyramid, you will be eating no more than 200 calories of

extras each day. Now, 200 calories sounds like a lot, but it's not as much food as you would think—so don't blow it on appetite-stimulating foods like white bread, white pasta, white potatoes, pastries, candy, and fried snacks.

Instead, use your calorie budget wisely and spend it on healthy choices that will make your meals taste great. Extras can include oils such as olive, canola, flaxseed, and walnut; condiments such as mustard, horseradish, salsa, Tabasco, low-calorie ketchup, and low-calorie barbecue sauce; and splurges such as avocado, nuts and seeds, olives, and unsweetened pickles.

Reduced-fat, sugar-free, fat-free, and low-carb products, as tempting as they might be, should be eaten sparingly—as should artificial sweeteners—because you're aiming for meals that are as natural and nutritious as possible. Try using calorie-free extras like garlic, herbs, spices, and vinegar to perk up your meals.

What Should You Drink?

The best and easiest beverage choice is water. You should drink 6 to 8 cups each day. If you find plain old water boring, add herb sprigs, slices of cucumber, or citrus fruits.

Other beverages you can enjoy in moderation include no-calorie flavored water, coffee, tea (caffeinated or decaffeinated), and herbal teas (hot or

iced). If you're one of those dieters who chugs diet sodas, it's time to go cold turkey—well, almost: You should cut back to one or two a day. Non-diet soda is off limits on the Biggest Loser diet; a 20-ounce bottle of regular soda can contain 17 teaspoons of sugar and 250 empty calories!

Alcohol, while limited, is not forbidden. You may choose to spend your daily 200 extra calories on a glass of wine, beer, or spirits. Wine, especially red, is the preferred alcohol choice as it has been proven to be heart-healthy and full of antioxidants. There are a few things to keep in mind about alcohol: It supplies calories but few nutrients; it may interfere with your body's ability to burn fat; and because it lowers inhibitions and stimulates appetite, it may cause you to engage in some unwise food choices.

What Do You Do If You Hit a Plateau?

As you lose weight, your calorie requirements will drop. For every 1 pound of weight you lose,

you decrease the number of calories you expend each day by about 10. So if you want to continue losing weight, you have to eat fewer calories, exercise more, or both. When the time comes for you to cut calories to continue dropping pounds—and that time will come—you have a number of options. We suggest that you cut calories from your extras, replace whole-grain servings with vegetables, choose lower-calorie protein foods, or replace fruit servings with vegetable servings.

And When You Feel Like Giving Up?

If you eat something you shouldn't, if you indulge on a special occasion, if you give yourself a break while on vacation, it's normal. Don't beat yourself up, and whatever you do, don't give up. Get back on track as soon as you can.