

Sandra Kumskov's

How To
Love Your Body

**Getting off the
Diet Roundabout**



www.HowToLoveYourBody.com

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Dieting is Endless....

Yes it is. And we're constantly bombarded with the idea that dieting is *normal*, being thin equals being healthy, and if you're not either dieting or maintaining your weight with a restrictive eating plan, then you're somehow failing.

Magazines, radio, billboards, newspapers, movies, TV, even our favorite websites to tell us though that diets don't work. Then they tell us we're in the midst of an obesity epidemic that's the most dangerous thing our culture has ever faced. Next they parade a string of ultra-thin celebrities touted as the epitome of beauty. Except for those who are too thin of course; those are lambasted with cruel language and unflattering photographs and suggestions they've slipped into disordered eating and are too thin!

Are you confused too by all the relentless and very mixed messages?

Frustrated that no matter how hard you try, you're probably further away than ever from enjoying and appreciating your body? Maybe you're feeling desperate because there seems no solution? And you still want real information to actually help you feel happy in your own skin so you can get on with life.

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Yep, me too.

And I've been researching these issues, and experimenting on myself, for years. As a professional counselor I specialize in helping women who are also dealing with these issues to move past them into a whole new way of being.

I was aware as a really young girl that almost all the girls and women around me were obsessed by the size and shape of every part of their bodies. They talked about the size of their butts, wished they had enough money for a boob job, swapped details of the latest crazy diets, and jealously searched for greater imperfections in others than they could see in themselves. There were 'normal' behavior and thought patterns.

As an adult woman, I started researching the story of our culture's body obsessions, and I came to understand that it might be *usual* for modern western women to be obsessed with the size and shape of our bodies, but it surely isn't *normal*.

Unhealthy Obsession

I wanted to know why our culture is so obsessed with body image and with weight. In this report I've tried to piece it together, cut through the hype and hopefully get closer to

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some real truth about weight and health. Mostly what emerged in my years of research is: **it's complicated**. But I have summarized my findings into these few pages – of course there's *plenty* more information but I want to get some clarity here, not add to the noise.

Be warned, some of the information in this report will challenge your long-held beliefs about what is true. I don't look at how those beliefs were formed, but I hope you'd be willing to consider that much of what you know about how women should be is very media-driven, and therefore very dollar-driven.

Hopefully this report will also give you some reasons to reconsider some of your beliefs around these issues, and open the door of possibility that you may gain some glimmers of hope that there is a solution.

Documented Side-Effects of Dieting

This part of my journey began with a passing reference in a book on the emotional and psychological side-effects of dieting. At the time I was trying to get some clear information on “emotional eating” to help myself and some clients.

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The reference was to the Minnesota Starvation Study. “Someone’s studied starvation?” I thought. “How did they do that? Why would they?”

In 1944, Nazi-occupied Europe was close to being liberated by the Allied military. Much of occupied Europe’s population was living in semi-starvation conditions. In looking for a solution to help the European people return to good health quickly, so they could rebuild their communities, governments realized there was no scientifically-verified information on how to best re-feed a starving person, in a way that their body could cope with the new food supply and return to good health in as short a time as possible.

A team of scientists, led by Ancel Keys at the University of Minnesota, was commissioned to find the answer. To create a population of starving people to study, a cruel experiment which has never been repeated, they needed volunteers. They connected with a group of young, healthy, strong, well-educated, idealistic, peace-loving young men – all conscientious objectors to the war, who none-the-less wanted to support rebuilding after the war.

Over 100 men volunteered for the study, and just 36 were selected after a lengthy testing process. These 36 men were in optimal physical, mental and emotional health, regarded by the researchers as “superior” to the general population.

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Four Phases

The men were moved onto the campus of Minnesota University where they would live and study and be studied for the next 15 months. The study was divided into **four distinct phases:**

1. 3 months of normal exercise and eating patterns
2. 6 months of semi-starvation
3. 3 months of re-feeding
4. 3 months of follow up

At each phase of the study, every thought, feeling, and physical symptom was closely monitored by Dr Keys and his team. At the end of the first three month phase, there was very little about these young men that the scientists didn't know.

In phase two, the men's food was restricted to semi-starvation levels. Their daily calorie intake was set at equivalent to the estimated calorie intake of starving Europeans: 1570 calories per day.

At this point I did a double-take. What? 1570 calories was regarded as *semi-starvation*? All those diets I'd followed over the years where 800, 900, 1200 calories was the maximum you could eat each day were about *starvation*? I thought it was only about losing weight, and that it was

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healthy and okay to do! While I often felt so hungry that I'd say words like, "I'm starving" it honestly never occurred to me that it was literal starvation. Well I've never claimed to be overly quick 😊

Back to the study...

First: Physical symptoms

Very soon after their calorie intake was reduced, the men in the study started to show a whole range of symptoms, exactly the information the researchers set out to find.

- Skin changes – rough, dry, scaly, inelastic, and some odd brown pigmentation. Sores and ulcers were common.
- Hair changes – hair became drier, thinner, and even fell out.
- Hearing – many reported their hearing sharpened, sometimes to the point of being uncomfortable. Some also had ringing in their ears.
- Temperature regulation – they often felt cold, as their bodies slowed their metabolic rate
- Vision – the men complained about seeing spots, not being able to focus, and aching eyes

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- Physical strength – as their body weight dwindled, the men lost their endurance, especially when climbing stairs, lifting and carrying, walking long distances, and standing for long periods. Understandable, considering their muscles were wasting away and their heart volume also shrank in equal proportion to their body weight. Their muscles frequently cramped, felt sore or ‘went to sleep’, or otherwise tingled and prickled.
- Sleep disturbances – they needed less sleep, and when they did sleep it was poorly. When they got up they were giddy and had momentary blackouts.
- Digestive problems – alternating constipation and diarrhea
- Heart problems – irregular heartbeat and arrhythmia, as their hearts lost at least 20% of their muscle and capacity
- Sexual function – their testicles became smaller
- Premature ageing – with all those physical changes going on, it’s no surprise that the men not only looked older, but felt as if they were older.

Double Take Two – what the? I could at one time and another have ticked all those boxes. It was self-inflicted???

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Second: Emotional Side-effects

The men, chosen for their psychological superiority, started to suffer mood swings, previously outside their experience.

As the study progressed the men became irritable most of the time, and many suffered from depression. One man became so desolate he asked to be released from study; when he was not released he went to extraordinary lengths to injure himself so he would be able to go to hospital.

Long periods of irritability and low mood that could, in hindsight, have been depression – good grief, I ticked these boxes too!

Third: Obsessive Thinking About Food

The Minnesota men became intensely interested in and preoccupied with food, at the same time as their other interests almost disappeared. Their main conversation topics quickly shifted to:

1. Their hunger
2. Their weight loss
3. Food

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They developed a new interest in recipe books, began swapping recipes for all kinds of simple and exotic foods, and even replaced pictures of loved ones with pictures of food.

They started collecting cooking implements and menus and reading about food production, things that had never previously interested them.

Woah! That's me - on a diet, I dreamed about food, my stomach never stopped nagging! Every ad about food seemed brighter and more interesting, even smell more tantalizing, every sound amped up!

If you've ever dieted, you probably recognize yourself in this thinking as well. Why does it happen?

The Threat of Starvation

Starvation has *always* been the greatest threat to human survival, more so than war, disease, or natural disaster. Over many millennia our bodies have adapted powerful survival mechanisms. When the food supply drops away, every single one of your trillions of cells suddenly goes into high alert to find food. Your body doesn't know the difference between you choosing to restrict your food intake so you can change the size and shape of your body, and a real life-threatening famine.

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How can your brain, just one part of your body, resist the intense obsessive desperate drive of every other cell in the body to find food?

Looking at that picture, it seems to me that willpower just doesn't have a chance, no matter how virtuously-formed your character is.

Fourth: Obsessive Behavior About Food

Once food was restricted, the Minnesota men were observed to change their eating patterns. Before the study they may have taken 10 minutes to eat a meal - now they stretched meal times out up to two hours.

They would cut their food into very small pieces, and eat it slowly.

They experimented with herbs and spices, sometimes bizarrely, to try to make it seem more satisfying.

At one point in the study the researchers had to limit the availability of tea, coffee, and chewing gum, because the men had huge quantities of all the substances to try to make themselves feel full.

The men spent hours planning, preparing and eating food, to the last crumb, even licking their plates.

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They hoarded food from meals to eat in privacy in their rooms, reported feeling pleasure from watching other people eat, and became angry if they saw any food being wasted.

One man began poking around in garbage bins to try to find food; another lost control at his part-time job and binged on cookies, popcorn and fruit before he was able to regain control of his eating.

Fifth: Lost interest in relationships

One man had a girlfriend who visited him on campus. In the semi-starvation phase of the study he reported that it felt like too much trouble to see her. When they went to the movies on a date, he was mostly only interested in the scenes where people were eating.

The outgoing friendly young men became loners, completely losing any interest in group activities. They lost their idealism and many of them said they wanted to work with food after the study. Four of them actually did take up careers as chefs.

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Sixth: Sex or Food?

By now you know that under semi-starvation conditions, the men's testicles became smaller, and their attention and interest was on food rather than anything else. I find it hard to believe too, that any man would think more about food than about sex, nonetheless the results were very clear.

When we lose the adult desire to have sex, the lack of sexual activity damages our relationships, contributes to our self-esteem decline and frankly, affects nearly every part of our lives.

Now I'm not saying sex is the be-all-and-end-all of life, but I am saying a normal healthy sex drive that's well tended, contributes to our emotional well-being as men and women. And robust emotional well-being affects everything else in our lives.

Primary Drive

Studies across decades and many countries have confirmed that for men, sex is a primary driving force fueled by testosterone.

The men in the study stopped writing to their girlfriends, stopped looking at women on the campus, stopped flirting, and even replaced the pictures of their girlfriends and other women, with food photos.

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That a man in the 1940s, the era of the pinup girl, would replace a picture of a pin-up girl like Betty Grable with a picture of a plate of food says to me that the need for food is an absolute, irresistible force that is even *greater* than the drive for sex.

So - if you're a man and your woman really doesn't want to have sex, and your relationship is otherwise good, think about what she eats.

Is she thin and "hot" looking with a healthy libido?

Or is she trying to be thinner than she should be, and starving herself to achieve it? If she is limiting her food intake then **she probably has no libido.**

Is having a "hot" woman obsessed about her food and her weight, worth having a cold love life? Read on for some suggestions about turning this around.

Phase 3: The Rebound Effect

The last big finding of the Minnesota Starvation study is related to the bingeing that we dieters have all experienced. You deprive yourself for days and days, thinking all the time about food food food. Eventually you lift the food restriction. And you can't stop eating.

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That's 100% predictable.

It's what your body wants, needs, will overwhelm you with desire to satisfy!

And it's not a character failure on your part. Do you restrict your air flow, or decide that you don't need to eliminate wastes, when it's what your body wants to do? Try holding your breath for more than a couple of minutes – you know your body and it's desire to survive, always wins ☺

In phase three of the study, the re-feeding phase, the men's calorie allowances were increased in stages over 3 months.

They started to binge-eat as soon as they had access to more food, and all wanted more food than they were allowed. They found it impossible to stop eating even when they felt 'full to bursting'. In the 13th week after the starvation phase ended, all calorie restrictions were removed and the men could eat whatever they wanted to.

And they did, up to 10,000 calories per day on weekends. They spent nearly all their time eating and sleeping, and their table manners became even worse as they gorged themselves. By the 15th week they had stopped licking their plates and eating every crumb of food, but a quarter of the men were still gobbling their food.

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The Final Results

After the starvation phase of the study ended, the men's moods sank even lower and they were even more irritable for about six weeks.

It was not until about **15 weeks after the starvation phase** ended that their social behavior started to return, and they began to feel hopeful about the future again.

It took a full five months of unrestricted eating before the men began to report that they felt like themselves again.

Eight months after the study, 14 of the men – nearly half of them - were still overeating.

All the men quickly gained fat tissue, and soon weighed about 10% more than they had at the start of the study; all fat tissue. Their lean body tissue recovered much more slowly over the following months. By about nine months after the starvation phase ended, all except two were back to their normal eating patterns and normal size and weight.

Are you feeling cranky right about now?

I certainly was when I first read the results of this study. And I want to just say one other thing here: the study was

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done on men, who are biologically and neurologically very different creatures to women. Women are designed for their body weight to fluctuate in tune with their normal hormonal cycles. Every second of every day, a woman's normal hormone cycles are different to what they were the previous second. Those fluctuations control how much fluid she stores, how many calories she needs, how she thinks and feels. We cannot simply take the results of a study conducted on males, and assume that the results are the same for females.

Consider for a moment that when a woman is severely restricting her food intake, her periods stop. That tells me her hormones are haywire; much more severely out of balance than the hormones of males, which are a steady stream that gradually decline as they age.

So I find myself wondering how long it would take for a woman to really "feel like herself again" after a diet? If it takes a man, which has relatively uncomplicated hormone patterns nearly four months, I'd be willing to bet it takes at least that long for a woman, if not longer.

Have you ever gone more than 4 months without restricting your food? Restricting your food is very different to wisely choosing food that really nourishes your body – but that's a whole other discussion! 😊 If you've gone more than four months, consider how you felt towards the end of that time

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frame. Was it as you started to feel more like yourself again that you thought it was time to take off some weight, again? Interesting question, right?

No diet book I had ever read said that my body would fight for its life when I started to restrict my calorie intake. They did all feed my food-obsessed thinking with instructions like keep a food diary, eat from a small plate to trick myself into thinking I'd had more to eat, cut my food into smaller pieces and 'eat mindfully' to savor the flavor and again trick myself into feeling full.

None of those strategies ever worked for me, no matter how 'good' or dedicated (read: obsessive) I was. And I always felt like I was deficient somehow, not strong enough, just needed to try a little harder, be more focused, more committed.

And every single one of my body-image clients have the same ideas about themselves and their character.

Shame on the diet industry!!

This scientifically-sourced information has been around for more than SIXTY years!! And STILL they give us the same 'try harder or you're weak' lie.

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So what to do?

Well, as I said earlier, it's complicated. You can choose to make it simple though, and the following steps might help.

First of all, ask yourself how many of the symptoms discussed above actually apply to you and your life right now. If you're honest you'll probably see yourself in many of the side-effects the Minnesota men experienced.

Next, thank your body for surviving your very best efforts to starve it. I know, that seems contradictory. But what I also know is that when you start to tell yourself the truth about what's been going on, you will begin to get back in touch with your body, with what it wants and needs, and you'll start to love and appreciate your body and yourself, and your life can transform in amazing ways.

With perseverance – remember it took the Minnesota men **nine months of unrestricted eating** to return to their robust pre-study physical and emotional health – you will start to know what your body actually wants and needs, and you will make food and activity choices to nourish and nurture your body.

Your emotions will stabilize, your weight will find its balance, and your life will change.

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If you're a man:

The main reason women say they go into this endless downward spiral of dieting and feeling bad about themselves and dieting and feeling bad about themselves – is she doesn't feel attractive enough for you.

Now I know you probably are saying – are you crazy? She's gorgeous, I love every bit of her body, I can't get enough of her!

Perhaps there's a clue about women's thinking in this true comment from my colleague Mary, a strong and fit physical therapist with a truly peachy bottom, the envy of all the women in our centre:

“I used to hate my butt, I thought it was so big and out of proportion. But Richard loves it, and he tells me that all the time. Now I think it's one of my best features.”

I'm not suggesting you're completely responsible for the way your partner feels about her body, those feelings were probably there long before you met her. However you can help and support her now as she begins a new way of living in her skin.

She will resist your compliments, because the voice in her head is so persistent that she won't be able to hear you at

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first. She faces **thousands** of images and messages **every day** telling her she is not thin enough, not pretty enough, not hot enough. That is a lot of pressure to overcome, for you and for her. Your advantage is that she loves you (hopefully 😊) and your words mean more.

You don't need to be flowery and over-the-top with your compliments. If you love the way her breasts feel to you (or whatever else), tell her. With love. Persist. Go gently. Persist. Be patient. Persist. Every time she looks good to you, tell her – she will blossom! And when she's happier, you will probably also be happier.

If you're a woman:

Learn to love your body.

Now that *is* complicated, especially if like most western women, you've spent most of your life being disappointed with your body, and trying to starve or exercise it into today's version of perfect. And you've seen the women you care about doing the same thing.

You've probably lost track, or maybe you've never felt the joy, of believing your body is 'normal'. There are a few good solutions to this, one being to look around at your female relatives, the ones who seem happy with

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themselves. What size are they now? What size were they when they were your age? Were they happy with their bodies? Talk with them about it.

If there are no relatives like this, look to your friends or other women you admire for their confidence and poise and achievements, and speak with them about their bodies and their attitudes, until you find one that matches your own health aspirations.

Another great solution is to use an energy therapy tool like EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique), to begin clearing out all the negative feelings and beliefs you've had about your body over the years. EFT is a powerfully effective therapy that can release you from the prison of your own self-criticism and create an inner landscape that gives you the freedom to love your body. [Click here](#) to get a quick-start guide from my website.

One of my favourite tools are flower essences, which are vibrational healing essences that subtly powerfully balance your body's energy fields so your emotions balance out as well. My favourite essences are the Spirit of Woman Australian Wild Flower Essences, and the [Body Love](#) blend is awesome while you're on this journey.

Also, I offer free teleconferences each month discussing body image issues. If you'd like more information or an

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invitation to a teleconference, please register for my newsletter at www.HowToLoveYourBody.com. I also have resources on my blog to support you in resisting the relentless media pressure to be today's version of perfect, and moving towards loving your body just as it is.

If you want to go it alone, the [EFT manual is free](http://www.emofree.com) from the EFT website at www.emofree.com.

Because when you love your body, you're also open to feeling passion and connection with your life partner, and that will make you both feel great! 😊

Good luck with making this scary change in the way you think and feel about your body! Please know that it is possible, and that you are your own best friend in this journey.

Above all – it's your body, it's your choice.

Very warmest wishes for your success...

Sandy Kumskov

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