



W H Y
C A N ' T I
S T O P
EATING?

Recognizing, Understanding, and
Overcoming Food Addiction

A Food Plan for Life

Debbie Danowski & Pedro Lazaro, M.D.

**Why
Can't I
Stop**

EATING?

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 **HAZELDEN®**

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Editor's note

All the stories in this book are based on actual experiences.
The names and details have been changed to protect the pri-
vacy of the people involved. In some cases, composites have
been created.

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*This book is dedicated to everyone who suffers
from the disease of food addiction
and to those who tease them.
May they all find their way.*

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xiii
1. First, the Facts	3
2. The Research	15
3. What about the Pills?	31
4. Just How Dangerous Are Diet Pills?	41
5. Are YOU a Food Addict?	53
6. Who's Addicted to Food?	59
7. I'm Not Like Those People	77
8. You're Not Alone	93
9. Finding Your Trigger Foods	115
10. Abstaining: Today Is Monday	131
11. Developing Your Food Plan	149
12. Just One Bite Can't Hurt, Can It?	189
13. No Means No!	203
14. I Need More Help	215
15. You Want Me to What?	233
16. Do I Get a Day Off?	245
17. Choices and Chances	259
Notes	273
Index	279
About the Authors	291

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And finally, there are no words to express my gratitude to God for the life and work He has given me.

—Debbie Danowski

Introduction

“Why can’t I stop eating?” It was a question I had asked myself each day for the last twenty-three years as I struggled desperately to lose weight. No matter what I did, it didn’t seem to help. Overwhelming physical cravings dominated my life. I was powerless to stop eating, and I hated myself for it.

At 328 pounds, I rarely looked in the mirror below my neck for fear of seeing the massive rolls of fat that made up my enormous body. No matter how tight my clothes got or how severely my body ached, I continued to eat massive amounts of food.

In public, I constantly had a smile plastered on my face to hide the humiliation I felt. In private, my life was a constant cycle of bingeing. Filled with self-hatred, I had contemplated suicide many times. If I had to continue living like this, I no longer wanted to go on.

As my final effort, I decided to try a new program I had heard about. If this didn’t work, I planned to eat myself to death. There was no other answer for me. I was sure I would die fat and alone. . . .

It has been more than ten years since I felt like that. After discovering the program I mentioned, my life changed completely. It is no longer dominated by food cravings, and I live a happy, productive life I never dreamed possible. Today, my life is truly a miracle.

While taking a pill to lose weight or going on a crash diet may seem like the answer to all of our prayers, in reality, it's not. There is a completely natural alternative to dangerous diet drugs and starvation plans. And unlike expensive weight-loss plans, this program is available without high fees or dangerous side effects.

What, you haven't heard? While much media attention is given to diet drugs and fad weight-loss plans, little, if any, has been written about the craving-free alternative. What? You don't know? No one's told you that you can obtain the same benefits without a two-dollar-a-day pill habit or expensive packaged food? You don't know that it isn't necessary to endanger your health in order to lose weight?

Well, take heart. There is hope! You don't have to risk your life in order to be thin. It is possible, as you have read on the previous page, to live a life completely free of food cravings without taking any pills or starving yourself. You won't have to spend hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars to lose weight, and you will not be asked to purchase specially packaged food.

Your life will be your own. You won't be driven to eat everything in sight anymore. Your head will be clear and you'll have hope. Life will no longer be about eating as much food as you can stuff in your mouth before someone notices. And you will never again be chained to the refrigerator night after night, desperately searching for that one perfect food that will make you feel whole.

And if that's not enough, you will also be free of the dangerous side effects that come with introducing diet pills into your system or starving yourself. You will not be plagued with memory loss. Your heart will not race uncontrollably, and depression will not overwhelm you. Your mouth will not constantly be dry, and diarrhea will not frequently affect you. But most important of all, you will not be putting your life in danger.

With our program, you will not be exposed to any of these

dangers. Instead, you will be shown a completely natural way to obtain the benefits of weight loss and sane living. You will learn that it is possible to lose weight and keep it off without using pills. What could be better?

So, what do you have to do? What is required of you to achieve all of these benefits? Well, for right now, it's very simple. Just continue reading! In the first several chapters, you will be shown the medical evidence behind our program.

Then, after you have all of the facts, you will discover the natural alternative to the diet methods you have been using—a program that will free your body from its physical need for certain types of food. For all of this, you're only asked to keep reading! Can you handle that?

**Why
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1

First, the Facts

What causes your physical cravings for food? Why can't you seem to control them? To answer these questions, it's vital that you understand what happens in your body when you eat certain foods. The next two chapters will present an overview of your physiological system and how it causes you to physically crave food. Then, the third chapter will examine the medical research and theory behind the cravings. Read on and discover why you can't stop eating!

One of the most important facts we have learned about food over the years is that certain foods react negatively in a person's system, which causes the person to overeat. As soon as these substances enter the system, a person physically craves more and more of them, and no matter how much is eaten, it will never be enough. Just as an alcoholic physically craves alcohol, some people physically crave certain foods. (For our purposes throughout the book, we will address these people as "food addicts.")

It is this physical craving for substances that causes individuals to overeat. In the same manner that, after years of drinking, alcoholics become dependent on alcohol, food addicts desire food. This establishes the phenomenon of "craving" described by Dr. William D. Silkworth in "The Doctor's Opinion" section of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Silkworth notes that alcoholics drink "to overcome a craving beyond their mental control."¹

Those who have struggled for years to lose weight can relate this description to food. How many times have you told yourself that you weren't going to overeat only to find yourself doing just that within a matter of minutes?

There are things that happen within all of our bodies that we cannot control. When we cut ourselves, we bleed. Each night we all need a certain amount of sleep or we will become exhausted the next day. Some of us experience hormonal irregularities once a month during menstruation, while others suffer from allergies, diabetes, chronic bronchitis, cancer, or heart disease. All of these are things we cannot control, though we may take preventive measures.

Some are simply biological facts, while others are inherited illnesses, about which we have no choice. Your food problem is exactly the same. You have no choice about the physiological makeup of your body. You did not ask to be sensitive to certain foods, and until now, you did not know about these sensitivities. In other words, *it is not your fault that you are fat*, but it is your responsibility.

To put it bluntly, the time has come for you to stop blaming yourself for something you cannot change and to begin changing something you can. After you have read the facts about food sensitivities, the responsibility to act is completely yours, but the blame is not.

Physiologically Addictive Foods

Physical food cravings were recognized in the medical community as far back as 1985, when Drs. David B. Herzog and Paul M. Copeland published an article in *The New England Journal of Medicine* noting differences in the brain chemical makeup of some individuals.² They cited several studies involving animals which proved that manipulating brain chemicals reduced the animals' appetite for certain foods.

What does this have to do with you? It means that some people are physiologically predisposed to overeat. In other words, the chemical makeup of your body may cause you to eat certain foods in abundance. While your mind may be telling

you not to eat that cupcake, your body, because of its needs, is overpowering your intellect.

Intellectually, you know that eating the cupcake will cause you to gain weight, make you break out, and even make you feel guilty. Biologically, however, you are unable to resist your need to eat. You may even eat a whole dozen, while still knowing all of this. Your physiological needs have caused you to abandon all rational thinking when certain foods are involved.

Sugar

What are these foods? Many studies show that sugar is one of the most physiologically addictive substances.³ *The New York Times* best-seller *Sugar Busters!* deals with the physical addiction to sugar. Though the medical evidence outlined in this book supports the physical addiction claim, the food plan it describes, for reasons which will be discussed later, is not an effective eating method for those physically addicted to sugar. Once sugar is ingested, the physical craving to eat more and more is so intense that a person with this problem must have larger and larger amounts of sugar as time goes on.

If you are like most food addicts, you are probably telling yourself right now that you do not eat that much sugar. At first, most are sure that since they do not eat candy or other traditional “junk foods” all of the time, they don’t have a problem with sugar.

The fact is that nearly every kind of packaged food contains sugar.⁴ According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average American consumes more than 151.7 pounds of sugar per year. Additionally, U.S. sugar consumption has been rising at a rate of more than 1.7 percent per year for the last decade while the population growth rate has increased by only about .8 percent. This means, overall, Americans are eating more sugar than ever before. Do you think you are any different?

Perhaps you try to eat low-fat foods, so you think sugar isn’t a problem. But in many cases, low-fat foods contain more sugar than “regular” ones to provide enhanced flavor. Sugar is added to foods that you would normally consider to be healthy.

Did you know that canned corn and peas have sugar? Pre-packaged pasta mixes and rice dishes also contain sugar. Taco mixes, ketchup, some crackers, pasta sauces, pickles, ham, tuna mixes, baked beans, frozen breaded fish fillets, specialty coffee mixes, flavored potato chips, tartar sauce, salad dressing, barbecue sauce, steak sauce, and even some spices may contain sugar.

This is by no means a complete listing. It is only meant to show you how extensively sugar is used in food, to help you see which foods you are eating that contain hidden sugar. Keep in mind that some items listed are available in brands without sugar.

Did you recognize any of the foods listed as those you eat more frequently than others? Are there any that you cannot seem to stop eating? Do you crave several of these foods even after you are full? The reason for this is the addictive nature of sugar. Though the medical profession has yet to reach a consensus, there is sufficient evidence to support the addictive biochemical effect sugar has on the body. Sugar is even included alongside morphine and cocaine in a listing of mind-active drugs written by Dr. Andrew Weil and Winifred Rosen.⁵ They define a drug as any substance that in small amounts produces significant changes in the body, mind, or both.

However, they are not the only medical professionals to recognize sugar as an addictive substance. Wholistic and natural food advocates hold very strong beliefs about sugar. One doctor, when discussing the reasons some children are more prone to ear infections than others, stated that children are commonly addicted to sugar and that cravings for the substance can be so overwhelming that children may refuse to eat unless foods with sugar are present.⁶ He advised parents to keep their children away from sugar, regardless of their health.

In one Duke University study, it was proved that people who are trying to diet are more likely to overeat sweet foods.⁷ Think about the foods you overeat. Most food addicts rarely eat too much cottage cheese or lettuce. As well as causing you to overeat, sugar is also a depressant. It reacts similarly to alcohol

in your body. In the same way that you might feel energetic and excited when you first have a few drinks, you also feel “high” after eating sugar. But it is the same empty elation that comes with drinking alcohol. Think back to the last “big” meal you had. How did you feel afterward? Remember your last holiday dinner? What did everyone do after gorging themselves? Sleep? Even those who do not suffer from sugar sensitivities sometimes need to nap after eating large amounts of sugar. The physiological reasons for this will be discussed in the following chapter. For now, just realize that sugar is, for some people, what alcohol is to an alcoholic.

Flour

Other physiologically addictive food substances include white flour, caffeine, wheat, and refined carbohydrates.⁸ Because the additives used in processing these foods affect physical aspects of the body, these foods are categorized as mood-altering substances. And their effects are very powerful. According to Dr. Robert Lefever and Marie Shafe, refined carbohydrates and white flour are 20 percent as strong as refined sugars in mood-alteration tendencies.⁹

With statistics like this, is it any wonder that bagels, muffins, and croissants are America’s favorite breakfast foods? Think for a minute about what you like to eat for breakfast. Many people on diets start with a bagel every morning. Most addicts believe that one little bagel (especially the small frozen kind) can’t hurt them because it doesn’t contain a lot of calories. The problem is that many times they cannot stop with one bagel. In some cases, the problem food is disguised “innocently” as low calorie or wheat bread, but flour of any type is still processed and thus contains addictive additives. Additionally, some food addicts may be addicted to wheat, making this a double-edged problem.

These seemingly harmless items that were traditionally believed to be diet foods actually cause a physiological reaction that compels an addict to eat more. Let’s talk about one of the most popular flour-filled foods. How often are you able to eat

just one piece of pizza? How many times a week do you order pizza with the excuse of it being an easy meal when you really can't wait to taste the luscious treat? And how do you feel after you have "had a few"? Lethargic? Tired? Depressed?

Refined carbohydrates, such as pasta, are another substance that can be physiologically addictive. Experts agree that people who are addicted to sugar are also addicted to refined carbohydrates due to the similar chemical makeup of the two.¹⁰

Carbohydrate sensitivity is just beginning to be recognized. Prior to this, medical professionals had recommended high-carbohydrate, low-fat diets to combat obesity. For a person addicted to refined carbohydrates, this is a deadly prescription. In a way similar to sugar, when you ingest refined carbohydrates, you set up a cycle of craving. You eat carbohydrates, so you crave carbohydrates, so you eat more carbohydrates, which makes you want even more carbohydrates, so you eat more. . . . Get the picture? The more you eat, the more you crave, the more you eat.

This information makes it clear why some people can't seem to lose weight. Think about how much pasta you eat. Is one small portion ever enough? If not, refined carbohydrates are most likely a problem for you.

Caffeine

Perhaps the most well-known physiologically addictive substance is caffeine. Studies throughout the years have shown that when caffeine use is stopped, withdrawal symptoms occur.¹¹ And for those of you saying that you do not consume that much caffeine, consider that these symptoms are reported with doses as low as 100 mg per day—the equivalent of one cup of coffee, two cups of tea, or three cans of caffeinated soft drinks.¹²

This brings us to an important point: diet sodas, unless specifically stated, contain caffeine. When first told about caffeine addiction, most food addicts insist that they do not have a problem with it, especially if they hate coffee and never drink tea. Then they discover that the bottles of soda they guzzle

endlessly or the chocolates they binge on regularly are loaded with caffeine.

Furthermore, did you know that caffeine is an appetite stimulant? How many late-night binges have you had while drinking soda or coffee? Have you ever drunk only black coffee to lose weight? How long did this last?

How many mornings do you drink a cup of coffee to get you going? Or, on those late worknights, do you automatically reach for a soda or cup of tea because you need to be awake? In addition to disrupting your natural biological system, your use of caffeine is setting up a physical dependence that will cause withdrawal symptoms when you stop using it. These symptoms include headaches, mood changes, pain, stiffness, lethargy, and fatigue.

Alcohol

Alcohol is another addictive substance. Dr. Robert Lefever and Marie Shafe describe alcohol as “the ultimate refined carbohydrate.” They note that it is unsafe for those with food addictions to drink alcohol.¹³ Even if a person never had problems with alcohol, they point out, drinking it may trigger a physiological reaction in the body that will result in overeating.

While some medical professionals say wine is safer than other types of alcohol, the fact remains that for a person addicted to sugar, any type of alcohol is dangerous. Besides the possible physical cravings, alcohol use creates emotional consequences. For instance, as someone who regularly “soothes” himself or herself with food, you may find it easy to replace this emotional crutch with alcohol. In other words, someone who is an addict must always be careful not to exchange one addiction for another, and allowing yourself to have “just one” drink occasionally may, at some point, turn into a full-fledged addiction.

Fats

You have heard the medical research that excessive fat consumption is dangerous and may contribute to heart disease.

We have all been told to decrease our consumption of saturated and unsaturated fats. But what does this mean? What is the nutritional difference between the two kinds of fat, and which is better?

The answer may surprise you, considering all the media attention fats receive. According to Dr. Michael A. Schmidt, saturated fats are those that remain solid at room temperature. These are the ones we usually link to heart disease. Unsaturated fats are those that are liquid at room temperature and found in vegetable oils.¹⁴ Schmidt points out that our bodies can make all the saturated fat and most of the unsaturated fat they need except essential fatty acids, which must be obtained through our diets. Fatty acids are found in such foods as safflower and flax seed oil.

It is the nonessential fatty acids where most of the problems occur. These are the artificially created fats found commonly in doughnuts and pastries. Does Dunkin' Donuts call out your name? If so, you may have a problem with fats.

Giving Up Your Favorite Foods

At this point, you may be feeling slightly overwhelmed with the information presented. It is important to remember that no food is bad, just maybe bad for you. You may even be feeling angry about the prospect of having to give up your favorite foods. Most food addicts are. They hate anyone who tells them that sugar, flour, wheat, and carbohydrates are problems for them. They want to run and hide from this news and most important, they want all of their favorite foods to come with them.

It's important to remember that, if you've tried every other diet in the world and nothing has worked, this could be the answer you have been searching for. Even if you do not want to admit this is possible, think about the types of foods you overeat. Do they all contain sugar, flour, refined carbohydrates, or fats? How many times have you binged on salad unless it was soaked with oil or grated cheese?

In the next chapter, you will learn about the physiological

ways these foods affect your body. For now, the best thing to do is to continue reading. You are probably scared of what you will find, but remember awareness is the key to action, and isn't it time you began taking action?

As you have read, what motivates most food addicts to finally make changes is the amount of pain they experience. What about you? How many times have you eaten something you previously swore to yourself that you would not? Do you try every new diet available only to end up gaining even more weight? Are you depressed over your body size? Do you constantly think about and crave food? Have you put your life on hold until that magical day when you will finally be thin? Do you feel guilty or ashamed about eating in front of others?

The above questions are for you to consider. If you have answered yes to any of them, you probably have a problem with food. If you are a true food addict, you are thinking about food even as you read this. You may even be thinking about your next meal. It is things like this that you need to be aware of, beginning now. Take a few minutes and think about your relationship with food. Think about all of the things you have done to get food and all of the times you have tried dieting. Awareness is the key.

Food Addiction

Before we continue, a few concepts need to be made clearer. In the previous information, we have used the terms "food sensitivity" and "food addiction" interchangeably for ease of reading. The definition of both, in this book's context, is a physical and emotional dependence on food as a way of altering moods to the extent that normal daily functioning is disrupted.

By "normal daily functioning" we mean several things. For example, many addicts avoid going out a lot so they can stay home and eat. Some people are unable to hold a job because they miss work too many times in order to stay home and eat. Others have stolen food to have what they wanted to eat. Lying about the amount of food eaten or pretending to be sick to get more food disrupts normal daily functioning.

And you? Have there been times when you have been “too tired” to attend work or school, only to find yourself home, eating the entire day? Do you wake up late at night to eat when everyone else is asleep? Are your favorite foods hidden throughout the house to make sure no one else eats them? Do you eat small meals in front of others while eating before or after them to make sure you have enough food?

These are only some of the tricks many food addicts use in an attempt to hide their disease. And that is exactly what it is—a sickness. You have no more asked for this sickness than a person who has cancer. Your overeating is a biological malfunctioning of your system, not a character flaw. This is perhaps the hardest and most important message to understand. It helps most addicts to review their relationship with food. For many, the same messages kept coming up: if they could have changed it, they would have. They had tried every diet available, with no success. Instead of looking for the flaws in their diets, all those years of failed attempts have led food addicts to believe that they are morally bankrupt, weak-willed, disgusting people.

Today, we know that is not true. Food addicts are people with a physiological sensitivity to certain foods that react negatively in their system. Willpower has nothing to do with it, and neither does moral character. Again we say, *it is not your fault you are fat*. You can't change your biological makeup, but you can change your tendencies. As a person with cancer must undergo radiation therapy, a food addict must avoid certain substances.

This does not mean you must give up eating delicious meals, but rather that you find substitutes that will not react badly in your system. Why should you? What is in it for you?

A New Life

Imagine a life where food is not the main focus. Imagine that each morning when you wake up, you feel alive and enthusiastic about the day ahead, instead of dreading the bad things you believe may happen. Imagine being able to say no to rich, sweet foods without feeling deprived or angry. But, most of all, imag-

ine living the wonderful, exciting life you were destined to live instead of being trapped by your need to overeat.

Today, as I write this, I have enjoyed more than ten years of complete freedom from constantly thinking about food. Only in a few specific cases, during highly emotional times, have I even emotionally craved any sort of food. I can think clearly and remember more than I ever thought possible.

When I wake up in the morning, I am excited to start the day. I do not dread what will happen. I no longer run to the refrigerator the minute I get out of bed, nor is eating the last thing on my mind before I go to sleep. I do not miss work because of overeating, and I no longer lie, steal, or manipulate to get food. I hold my head up high when I eat in restaurants, and I do not eat before or after I go out for meals. While at first I was afraid to bring my cup and scale into a restaurant, today I know that weighing and measuring my food in a public place is a lot less “degrading” than carrying around an extra 150 pounds.

The food I eat satisfies me. I do not go through the day hungry or wondering how I can eat more. After more than thirty years of life, I finally know what it feels like to be full. I have enough food to eat, and I am satisfied by the taste of it. I enjoy my meals, but I do not obsess over them. I eat three normal-sized meals at the usual times of day, and I do not find it necessary to snack in between. I am active and no longer trapped by my massive size, doing things I had only dreamt of before.

I tell you this not to brag, but to give you hope. If someone had told me ten years ago that I would be thin and free from obsessing about food, I would not have believed them. In my wildest dreams, I never imagined that it was possible to get through even one day without obsessing about food, never mind the past ten years. I did not believe it was possible until I saw it in other people.

For you, I am trying to be that other person. I remember the relief I felt when I found out that other people had done the sick things with food that I had. I experienced joy when I finally knew there was hope.

Now it is your turn. You have heard the evidence, and now you have to decide what to do with it. It is your choice. Do you want to continue to suffer as you have, or are you ready for a change? Would you like to know how your body reacts to those substances mentioned, or do you want to continue to pretend that you do not have a problem? Are you ready to be helped? Do you want to change your life in ways that you can only imagine?

If so, then read on. It's about time you knew these things, but more than that: *You have a right to understand how these substances react in your body.* Ultimately, you will have to make a decision about your relationship with food. For now, the best thing you can do is be willing to read the information in this book. Then, when you have done that, as always, the choice will be yours.

2

The Research

Now that you basically understand how your body reacts to food, it's time to discover the medical research about food addiction. To make an informed decision about your future, you need to know all of the facts, beginning with very early studies about dieting, then, working up to those involving brain chemicals.

While you have probably heard that dieting doesn't work, did you ever wonder where that idea came from? Several medical studies have shown that dieting increases cravings for highly palatable foods, often leading to overeating.¹ In other words, the methods you have been using to lose weight have actually had the exact opposite effect on your body. This fact has been known since World War II, when a physiologist, Ancel Keys, from the University of Minnesota conducted a study.²

In his study, Dr. Keys took a group of healthy men and put them on a well-balanced diet, consisting of half of their usual caloric intake. To him, this was classified as "semistarvation," but it is actually quite similar to today's commercial diets.³ Interestingly enough, when these men were allowed to stop dieting, they massively overate, consuming up to five meals and five thousand calories a day until they returned to their normal weight.⁴

It is important to note that these men were young and healthy and not diagnosed with any food-addiction tendencies. Imagine, then, what the results of this study mean for

Notes

Chapter 1: First, the Facts

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Index

A

abstinence, 10–11, 131–48
 and exercise, 234
 during holidays, 245–47
 and obsessions, 151
 personal stories, 94, 96, 97,
 101, 106, 108, 113–14
 and rationalization, 150
ACORN Food Dependency
 Recovery Services, 229
acupuncture, 96
addiction. *See* food addiction;
 cravings
additives, 7
affirmations, 132–34, 241,
 261–62, 267
aggressiveness, 207–8
alcohol and alcoholism, 3, 9,
 27, 28, 113, 116, 190
Alcoholics Anonymous
 Alcoholics Anonymous, 3
 Big Book, 94
 support groups, 254
alertness, 26
American Home Products,
 44

American Society of
 Bariatric Physicians, 47
anger, 10, 191, 196, 205
anorexia, 102
Anthony, Susan B., 269
antibiotics, 59
anxiety, 104, 112, 113
appetite stimulants, 9, 22
assertiveness, 207–8
atherosclerosis, 38
awareness, 11

B

barley malt, 124
Big Book, 94
Bilstad, James, 42
bingeing
 avoiding, 170, 185–86,
 255–56
 generally, 20, 24, 128, 128,
 256
 personal stories, 95, 97, 98,
 108–9
 warning signs, 172
 See also relapses
Black, Claudia, 217

- blame, 80, 200, 212, 267
 blood sugar levels, 21, 61
 Blundell, John E., 22
 body fat, 4, 12. *See also* obesity
 body image, 238–42
 conceptual aspects, 240–41
 physiological aspects,
 233–41
 psychological aspects,
 241–42
 See also exercise
 boundary-setting, 204–6, 265
 Bows, Julie, 100–101
 brain
 damage, 33, 50
 chemistry of, 19
 See also serotonin
 breakfast foods
 cereals, 125–26, 161, 168
 food plan, 161–63
 menus, 174–81
 proteins, 161
 sugar in, 107, 126–27
 brown sugar, 124, 125
 bulimia, 24
- C**
 caffeine, 8–9, 98, 103
 calorie-counting, 149–51
 cancer, 38
Candida albicans, 59
 cane sugar, 124
 Carbohydrate Addicts Diet,
 27
 carbohydrates
 non-refined, 21
 refined, 21, 24–25
 sensitivity to, 8, 62
 See also sugar
 careers, 268–69
 CareerTrack, 269
 cereals. *See* breakfast foods
 change, 4, 11, 170–73, 193–96
 chemical hypersensitivity, 45
*Chemical Pharmacology and
 Therapeutics*, 43
 chili recipe, 183–84
 cholesterol levels, 96
 Christensen, Larry B., 25
 Christmas. *See* holidays
*Clinical Pharmacology and
 Therapeutics*, 31
 codependency, 144
 coffee, 163. *See also* caffeine
 commitments. *See*
 responsibility
 communication patterns,
 206–10
 assertive vs. aggressive,
 207–8
 blocks, 206–7
 examples, 208–10
 comparisons to others,
 263–64
 condiments, 126–27, 166, 167
 Copeland, Paul M., 4
 corn sweetener, 124
 corn syrup, 124
 cortex, 19
 counseling, 223–26
 Craig, Jenny. *See* Jenny Craig
 diet center
 cravings
 generally, 3

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A recovering food addict, Debbie Danowski has maintained a 150-pound weight loss for over ten years. As an alumnus of a food-addiction treatment center, Danowski has consistently used the recovery program outlined in this book to enjoy the benefits offered by starvation methods and diet pills, without the dangerous health risks. Professionally, Danowski has written more than one hundred articles for national and local publications, including *First for Women*, *Woman's Day*, and *Seventeen*. She has also spoken about food addiction at countless meetings, seminars, and conferences, including Food Addiction 2000, the first national conference held on the disease. In addition, Danowski was employed by the food-addiction unit of Glenbeigh Hospital of Tampa, a national treatment center, to educate mental health professionals about food addiction recovery. Currently, Danowski is an instructor of media studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, and a member of the university's eating disorders prevention team. Danowski is also a Ph.D. candidate at Capella University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she is studying food consumption in film. Danowski has a master's degree from Syracuse University in public communications with an emphasis in television, radio, and film.

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Why can't I stop eating? If, like millions of others, you often ask yourself this question, you may be addicted to food—the food you eat may be precisely what makes you crave more . . . and more. This straight-talking book puts the widespread problem of food addiction into clear perspective and points the way to a life free of the obsession with food. Debbie Danowski, whose food addiction nearly ruined her life, and Pedro Lazaro combine forces to give readers a full understanding of this debilitating condition: its sources, patterns, consequences, and physiological underpinnings. Unlike fad diets and drugs with their side effects, hidden costs, and infamous failure rates, the program outlined in this book goes to the root cause of chronic overeating—and puts the tools for a lifelong cure into the hands of anyone willing to accept responsibility for a healthy, happy future.

Debbie Danowski is a recovering food addict who has maintained a weight loss of 150 pounds for more than ten years. A nationally renowned speaker, she is an instructor of media studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut.

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