

Kitchen Confidential

A nutritionist, a food writer, a *Top Chef* judge. We asked women whose lives revolve around eating to share their secrets for staying slim. By Rory Evans

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. And by “good intentions” we mean, say, an unsalted high-fiber rye-bran cracker that flatlines on your taste buds and leaves you craving a Snickers. People who actually work with food—those who prepare it, study it, or advise their clients not to eat too much of it—know that the principles of weight loss (“eat less, move more,” with minor variations) and the practice are often two very different things. Here are the insights of five experts, including a doctor and a food writer, on losing or maintaining weight. And not a rye-bran cracker in sight!

Jennifer Warren

Warren, a physician, is medical director of the Physicians Healthy Weight Center in North Hampton, New Hampshire.

TIPPING POINT

I grew up athletic. I played tennis, taught swimming, rowed crew in college. If I ever felt I needed to lose ten pounds, I exercised more. But in my mid-20s, I gained 65 pounds with my first pregnancy and never fully lost the weight. I put on even more with my second baby. Thirteen years ago, I was skiing with my brother, who had lost

a leg to cancer, and this was his first time out. At the top of the mountain, he turned to me and said, “Race ya!” He was off, and within four feet I had fallen; my center of gravity wasn’t working the way I was used to. By the time I got up, I couldn’t even see him. I remember thinking, Are you kidding me? I am more disabled by my weight than he is by losing a leg.

THE STRATEGY

I’m embarrassed to admit I tried over-the-counter supplements, and fen-phen. They worked, and I lost 30 pounds in about three months, but as a doctor, I

knew how dangerous those solutions were. When that weight crept back on, I did Jenny Craig. I would lose and regain the same 30 pounds. I started reading everything I could about nutrition, which led me to what’s now known as “low glycemic index” eating—and I dropped from 200 pounds to about 120 in about 18 months.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

- **Because carbs make me put on weight,** I always eat them with protein, no matter what. Even if it’s just an apple, I’ll also try to have a low-fat cheese stick.
- **For breakfast, I have a chocolate protein shake with berries** for texture and fiber. (I love chocolate, and this shake, as well as sugar-free hot chocolate, takes care of that.) For lunch, I might have nonfat Greek yogurt and lean chicken or a buffalo burger. At dinner, I have salad and grilled chicken or fish.
- **When my husband and I have dinner out,** we don’t allow bread or chips on the table. I remind myself that it’s just a piece of bread—it’s not the key to happiness. Then we split a salad and a protein entrée. Yes, we are a waitress’s worst nightmare, but we tip well.
- **I used to love candy;** now I don’t keep it in the house. I’ll have a Greek yogurt with a teaspoon of peanut butter or a few cocoa-coated almonds mixed in. I prefer substitution to deprivation.
- **When we have ice cream in the freezer,** I wrap it in two plastic grocery bags. It’s easier to avoid when I can’t see it.

Always leave some on the plate. As *Top Chef's* Gail Simmons puts it, "I know I will eat lobster again."



- **I have a library of more than 200 workout DVDs.** There are even a couple from the late '80s that I still do: They're good workouts if you can get past the French-cut leotards. I don't need to leave the house for the gym, and if I only have 20 minutes, I do a 20-minute one. I don't get bored.

Melissa Clark

Clark, a food columnist for *The New York Times*, is the author of *The Skinny* (Meredith Books), a diet book, and *Cook This Now* (Hyperion), her 32nd cookbook.

TIPPING POINT

I was always thin until I got to college. The food at the cafeteria grossed me out, so I ended up eating mostly peanut butter and bacon. I didn't exercise, and I ate too much and drank too much. By the end of my freshman year, I had gained 35 pounds. I was back at my parents' house, looking at myself in the same childhood mirror that I was used to looking skinny in. I asked my mother, who is never critical, how I looked, and she said, "You've looked thinner before." That was the very moment I knew I had to do something.

THE STRATEGY

I lost more than 40 pounds over a year or so, mostly by counting calories. My daily goal was 1,200 calories—which I always exceeded. Usually it was more like 1,500. I also started running, which I never wanted to do. My friend told me, "Think of it as 20 minutes a day that will make you happy and thin." That still motivates me.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

- **I've found that what you think is hunger is often just a craving.** You can usually wait that out; in 20 minutes or so, it's gone. I only eat when I'm truly hungry, and when I feed the beast exactly what it wants, it turns out I don't need that much. Usually, it's toast with peanut butter, tomato, or avocado.

- **A lot of cooks end up eating the equivalent of two meals**—one as they're prepping and nibbling, and another one at the table. So when I work, I'm always thinking, This is for cooking, not for eating. And when I do eat, I sit down so the experience and calories register.

- **Fat is good. A little of it makes me feel more full**—I can't do fat-free dairy, so I have whole milk and a little sugar in



Nutritionists know to snack on a few nuts, like walnuts for their healthy fats and almonds for fiber and protein.

“Fat is good.”

A little of it makes me feel more full—I can't do fat-free dairy, so I have whole milk and a little sugar in my cappuccino.”

my cappuccino. But then that's usually enough for breakfast.

- **I order steamed vegetables from Chinese restaurants often,** but I never eat them naked. I have to have a drizzle of sesame oil and soy sauce.

- **When I'm not working, I make a point of ordering a salad for dinner,** but never the one with the lowest calories. I'll get the blue cheese and bacon. I leave some of that good stuff on the plate, but still get a small taste of it in every bite.

Felicia Stoler

Stoler, a registered dietitian, is the author of *Living Skinny in Fat Genes* (Pegasus Books).

TIPPING POINT

In my mid-20s, I went from a size 4 to a size 8. I worked long hours at a law firm and didn't exercise, and also didn't realize that I couldn't eat and drink the way I had in college. That bridesmaid with the chubby face in the photos at my sister's wedding? That was me.

That's when I went to the doctor, worried that my big tummy was caused by an ovarian cyst. I was directed instead to a nutritionist who helped me lose 25 pounds. It's because of her that I studied nutrition instead of going to law school.

THE STRATEGY

I have to practice what I preach. I exercise regularly. I eat a lot of fiber, and I watch my calories—eating foods I love, but not all the time. The 100-calorie packs of chips and crackers are big in my house. Full-size bags can be too dangerous.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

- **There comes a point where you have to start paying attention** to what you're eating and how it's going to benefit you. I don't eat lots of fried foods. I don't eat mayonnaise, but I put a little hummus in chicken or tuna salad. Same texture, more protein. Instead of butter, I use Smart Balance, which has plant sterols that block the absorption of cholesterol.
- **I travel constantly, as much as six times a month**, and that's when I really have to make an effort. I'll do a quick shop for cereal, skim milk, hard-boiled eggs, and fruit for the hotel-room fridge. With cereal and fruit and salad for lunch, I can have dinner out and eat local foods, because that's the fun part of traveling. I always carry a packet of oatmeal, since I can order hot water.
- **I pack almonds in an Altoids tin** and keep fruit leathers in my purse. I really like turkey jerky; I know it has a lot of sodium, but it has protein, takes a while to chew, and gives me a sense of fullness.
- **I pay attention to everything I drink.** I cut back on alcohol, especially in the summer, because I'm tempted to drink gin and tonics. But I also end up being more active in the summer.
- **Over the years, I've fallen in and out of love with running**, but now I ride my bike or walk. My family and I almost always go for a half-hour walk after dinner.

Ramani Durvasula

Durvasula is a professor of psychology specializing in diet and exercise at California State University, Los Angeles, and the consulting psychologist on Bravo's *Thintervention With Jackie Warner*.

TIPPING POINT

By my late 30s, I was married and had two kids and was up for tenure, and probably eating 3,000 to 4,000 calories a

day. My weight was up to 200 pounds—when you're five foot five like me, that's obese. I just wasn't paying attention. My daughter started going to a posh kindergarten, and those other mothers were so unkind to me; it was like high school. So yeah, revenge is what motivated me.

THE STRATEGY

I maintain my weight by eating 1,200 to 1,500 calories a day. Mostly I changed my habits. Bad eating, like any bad habit, is automatic. We talk about this in addiction study all the time—breaking the chain of automatic. I did that with food. I lost 80 pounds in 17 months.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

- **I came up with acronyms and phrases that I repeated**, such as “Go do something else,” when I wanted to eat something.
- **I got a child lock and kept it on the cabinet** that held my kids' snacks. The lock required two hands, I couldn't open it mindlessly, and it took enough time for me to think, Why are you pulling a Houdini to get at a snack? I still talk to myself aloud in the car when I pass an In-N-Out Burger: “Why do you want that?” The child lock is now in my head.
- **When my kids are with my ex, I eat dinner alone a lot**, and eating alone makes me eat too fast and too much. So I will call a friend and talk to them while I eat. I'll say, “I know it's rude to eat on the phone, but can you talk?”
- **I still eat all the time, as long as it's fruits and vegetables.** Those are unlimited, and really, who craves more than two peaches in one sitting?
- **For lunch, I'll have nonfat Greek yogurt**, or nonfat cottage cheese mixed with salsa or Indian spices and pickled mango. For snacks: grapes, salty seaweed snacks, and I love kale chips. I leave almonds in the car, because in Los Angeles, anything else melts or turns to mush.
- **At least five days a week**, I do 45 minutes of brisk walking on a treadmill, then 15 minutes of weights, 10 minutes of squats and lunges, and 200 crunches. I've done 200 crunches a day, without missing a day, for four years. I even did them at base camp on Mount Everest. The crunches are like a brush-your-teeth thing for me. Even when I can't do anything else, I find the time to do them—they don't require any equipment. And I suppose on the dark side, you could argue it's an obsessive-compulsive thing.

Gail Simmons

Simmons, a judge on Bravo's *Top Chef* and *Top Chef: Just Desserts*, is the special projects director at *Food & Wine*. Her memoir, *Talking With My Mouth Full* (Hyperion), comes out early next year.

TIPPING POINT

I weigh myself twice a year—at the doctor's office. I do have ups and downs of probably five pounds; I judge based on how my clothes fit, and I've been either a 6 or an 8 for at least ten years now. Could I stand to lose five or ten pounds? Sure. But I can't make losing weight my life's work. I've never understood people who can survive on just salad and grilled chicken breast. Food is a great pleasure—it's not the enemy, and it shouldn't be a source of guilt.

THE STRATEGY

I go to restaurants at least five times a week, and I don't finish everything, which is so counter to how I was raised. My mantra is, “There will be another meal.” I'm incredibly fortunate to have this job and access to great restaurants, so even if this foie gras or lobster is incredible, I know I will eat lobster again. I also exercise. I live in New York City and walk home from dinner whenever I can. I always say if I lived anywhere else, I'd be ten pounds heavier. I'm also a runner.

WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

- **For snacks, I keep a little dark chocolate** and unsulfured dried fruit. The Bananas Flattened from Trader Joe's are like candy, they're so good.
- **I don't keep processed food** or refined flour in my kitchen. If I have pretzels, they're whole grain; if it's pasta, it's whole wheat. I know it's not going to change my life, but a little fiber is always a good thing.
- **I get into trouble when we're judging on *Top Chef*.** I fill up at about 5 P.M., then get out of work at midnight. That's when we go out to a bar and I want a burger. And I get it, but the next morning, I run an extra half-mile.
- **When we're shooting *Just Desserts***, it's 5 to 15 desserts every day for 30 days straight. I start each day with kale-and-cucumber juice and poached eggs over a bowl of wilted spinach. That way, I have protein and vegetables before eating dessert for the rest of the day. ♦