



By Josephine Brouard



Diet dilemma

It's the age-old mystery: what does it take to drop a dress size and keep off the weight for good?

FRANKLY, I think talking about diets is extremely uncool. But that's what I'm doing today. The catalyst? A recent holiday cruise on which I noticed two kinds of middle-aged "types". The first were fit and svelte men and women of a certain age... while the second looked like soccer balls on legs.

Don't know about you, but I know which profile I'm opting for in my maturity: the trim, elegant "oldie", thank you very much.

That seemingly straightforward ambition seems to be getting harder every day to achieve, however. It's OK when you're younger to be a couple of kilos heavier than you should be because, mostly, you get away with it. But, as the years pass, your bad eating habits have a knack of catching up with you – and it becomes surprisingly tricky to lose the flab, or to keep off the weight.

And in my case it's mea culpa all the way. I can't blame my genes, my thyroid or my metabolism for my silhouette, because I think all those excuses are a crock. No, the nub of the problem lies with me: I eat more than I should, and I don't exercise enough to compensate for my appetite. With eyes way bigger than my stomach, I continually choose oversized portions, then berate myself for my lack of self-control. Honestly, how self-defeating is that?

I seldom say no to dessert either. In fact, if it tastes wonderful – and most of them do – I'm more likely to ask for seconds.

So here I am again, determined to get serious about losing weight. Will I succeed this time? I was able to stick with Jenny Craig a decade ago over a period of about 12 months, and the results were inspiring. I dropped two dress sizes and was able to squeeze into a delectable rose-printed Paul Smith frock for a special occasion.

Just knowing that I've done it before gives me the impetus to believe I can do it again. Now if only I can learn to keep the weight off! That Paul Smith dress, you see, hangs forlornly in my wardrobe, waiting to be worn again some day...

Of course, I know that losing weight is largely about what's going on in my head when I suddenly feel the urge to guzzle or graze. I also know that it's about how motivated I feel to lose the weight. I've stuck photographs of me at my most svelte all over the house as salient reminders of how much better I look when I have hip and cheekbones. I gaze in wonderment at this fabulous me, but, alas, this tactic fails to do its work as it should. Before you can say "hey ho, another kilo", I'm relishing another ice-cream cone, far from the eyes of my long-suffering husband, and wondering a few days later why my scales are failing to play ball.

Perhaps it's not enough to put the photos on my bathroom mirror, my computer and my refrigerator door? I need one in the car, for when I'm cruising past the shops; in my wallet, for when I'm about to fork over a few dollars for an

indulgent treat; and how about a parrot who squawks, "Traitor!" when I wake at 2am – as is my wont – and convince myself that it's OK to have a midnight snack?

There are two types of middle-aged folk all right: the ones who give up on their battle of the bulge – and those, like me, who daily strategise ways to outsmart their saboteurs to slimness.

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In desperation, I've now even joined an internet diet site to help me lose weight. I get daily reminders to tally up the kilojoules I'm consuming; to drink more water; to commit to some exercise over and above walking the dog; plus cheery reminders once a week to step on the scales for a weigh-in. (This last week I lost almost a kilo. Hooray!)

Now if I can just be strong for the rest of my life, I may never write regarding this topic again. That, at least, will be a weight off my mind. ●

Josephine Brouard has a psychology degree and a fascination for human behaviour.