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Make peace with your body

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So here it is, finally, the brilliant idea yo-yo dieters have been “weighting” for – a way to ditch diets. It’s so pivotal, it’s likely to force Australia’s \$745 million weight-loss industry to pad products and programs with holistic attitude to survive.

Pressure began building against the weight-loss industry in early 2009 when Choice magazine’s January report on the “one-size-fits-all” pharmacy-based diet programs concluded that they just didn’t shape up. Choice’s research showed that diet plans were most successful when there was “effective counselling on long-term diet, lifestyle, behavioural and psychological issues”.

Now there’s a secret, if never there was one. The best long-term strategy for losing weight permanently is to understand why you eat inappropriately in the first place. Find the cause and you find the cure.

Choice’s conclusion seems obvious doesn’t it, a real no-brainer. How much longer can Weight Watchers’ lifetime membership – oh, the irony – survive such damning epiphanies?

And yet in 2009-10, Australians spent \$745.6 million on low-calorie foods and shakes, diet cookbooks, weight-loss guides, dietary supplements, surgery and counselling services, according to business intelligence company IBISWorld.

Then four months after Choice’s report, in June 2009, the former Rudd government flagged that something had to happen to ensure Australians have access to effective weight-loss products and services in the National Preventative Health Taskforce report, Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020.

How to slay the diet demon

By that time, Sara Redman, a psychologist, life coach and Pilates instructor, and Susan Henshaw, a former fad dieter, were already road-testing their revolutionary approach to diet-busting with the BodyZen program.

Henshaw, a former cabbage-soup dieter whose lowest point came when weight gain contributed to an incapacitating injury, finally learnt she had to peel back the layers of the onion to win her freedom.

The most useful question to ask yourself, says Redman, is: "What emotions are you eating?" Anger, sadness, fear ... or maybe that long-lost cousin, joy? Typically, she says, inappropriate eating stems from the need to smother one or more of these primary emotions.

The BodyZen 12-week program (www.bodyzen.co) involves workbook-driven self-examination with email support from Redman and Henshaw, and online forum support from other users. The diet-busters are also working strongly towards a 2011 roll-out of workshops, one-on-one coaching and more online accountability throughout the course.

Their goal is to help women and men make better, more self-nurturing choices, to pack up the "ugly mirror", the "fat tops" and other accoutrements of self-loathing and to wear their own skin, comfortably. No diets or recipes are offered.

Can we hack it?

But in this quick-fix, instant-gratification society, are there new-generation dieters ready and motivated to spend time in self-examination to reach their goals? Perhaps, given that the personal development movement has everyone workshopping their lives on weekends at "Unleash the Power Within" seminars and at workplace team-building days.

Besides, as we all know, life has a pesky manner of asserting itself and wearing away all our excuses until we are left with the uncomfortable truth, which dieters can lap up or choose to ignore.

"Many of the women who come to us may be diet junkies but they know the quick fix doesn't work; they just don't know what else to do," says Redman. "We encourage people to understand that it's really about what's going on emotionally for them and in their minds, and then give them the strategies and techniques to adjust and to apply to their daily living."

Interestingly, about half of BodyZen's users don't have weight-loss issues. They're among the vast female population not just seeking peace with body image but permission to self-nurture without feeling selfish.

“There is a level of emotional intelligence required for people to be successful with it,” says Redman, and they do have to be ready to make a shift in their fundamental beliefs and actions.

It’s a big agenda for what is essentially a self-help book (or audio) with online support, but the BodyZen program has big heart and integrity of intention and the dieting population is certainly primed for this shift. The weight-loss industry had better hoick up its skirts and get with the program.

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