



Introduction

As a society, we spend a fortune each year on what has become known as the 'slimming industry'. We splash out on every new product that promises to make us look slimmer and fitter, and especially if it claims to do so quickly and easily. We buy pills and potions and various other aids in our quest for weight loss. By and large, they don't work.

We are targeted by advertising campaigns to buy low-fat, low-calorie foods and 'diet' drinks. The industry is cashing in on our competing desires for good-tasting food and slim bodies. They reinforce their message by both subliminal and overt images, in which slimness is equated with attractiveness, energy and happiness. Some companies are even trying to invent zero-calorie foods that will taste as good as the real thing - non-fattening ice cream and chocolate, for instance. They, too, are trying to exploit our dilemma.

Countless articles and books have been written on the subject of diet and weight loss. Many of these claim to have found 'the answer', a hitherto undiscovered dietary mystery hidden for generations from mere mortals like you and me! These often give conflicting advice: cut out the sugar, stop eating starch, stay away from bread, avoid yeast, and so on. Some of these can only be described as fad diets, having no basis whatsoever in science. The one thing they all have in common is this: the promise of a quick and easy path to the body shape you've always dreamt of. But far from solving our problem, such gimmicks only add to our confusion, and then to our despair when we eventually admit defeat. And there is plenty of defeat: 95 per cent of people who successfully lose weight put it back on again within a few short years.

At the present time, our society emulates and rewards thinness, and places enormous emphasis on appearance. We are encouraged to buy the product and lose weight in order to look good. These attitudes have several detrimental effects. Our teenage girls are driven to distraction with unrealistic expectations of so-called beauty; the overweight amongst us are scorned, and the obese suffer discrimination. Perhaps this is why almost a half of all non-pregnant women are currently trying to lose excess weight, and a further third are consciously trying to avoid putting it on.

Health promotion agencies emphasise the health aspects of diet and body weight. They tell us that we can add length and health to our days by choosing the right foods. Sadly, and in spite of several

sustained educational campaigns, they too have failed to change the basic facts: some 40-50 per cent of adults in Western societies are overweight, and up to 20 per cent are obese - figures which are rising with each passing year. This trend is also evident in some of the former socialist economies. These rates led the World Health Organisation to declare, in 1997, that obesity has become a global epidemic - an epidemic that looks certain to continue because our children, as they so often do, are following in our footsteps. At the present rate of increase the entire population of Western societies could be overweight or obese by the end of this century. Overweight and obesity, and their adverse effects on health, are set to become the single most important public health issue of our time. Indeed, obesity is overtaking smoking as the single most important cause of avoidable ill-health.

Some fortunate people will never get fat. They can eat to their hearts' content and yet never seem to worry about their body weight. The rest of us will need to be more careful. Two-thirds of all overweight adults gained the excess weight during their adult years. The other third were overweight as children and simply stayed overweight, or became even more overweight through their adult years. Thus, you may say of yourself that you 'have always been a little on the plump side', or even that you have 'always been big'. On the other hand, you may have started out quite slim and trim, but slowly and imperceptibly gained weight with each passing year. Do you now have to peer over your abdomen to see the dial on the weighing scales? Are your clothes feeling tight? And, if so, have you tried to convince yourself that they shrank in the wash? Perhaps you squeezed into them anyway, but have you been squeezed into submission? Have you bought the next size up? And the next? Well, that's the way it happens for most of us. A slow but relentless spread.

Overweight and obesity pose a serious threat to health. This is why doctors and other health professionals tend to go on and on about the importance of losing excess weight and maintaining ideal weight. But as every overweight person knows, it is much easier to talk about losing weight than to actually achieve it. Countless genuine overweight and obese people have tried and failed to lose weight; and they have done so time and time again. Many of these are now left with the awful impression that they simply cannot lose weight. But they can.

This book explains, in simple terms, the process of weight gain and the effects of weight on health. It also offers simple and pragmatic advice on what you can do about it. You can lose weight. You can add length and health to your days. And you can do all of that without starving yourself to death!