

SE Epicure

HD **Diets: road-tested**

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cover story

Cranky, tired and hungry, it's been a tough quarter for the Good Food team.

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We're a nation of diet-mad, sugar-restricted, gluten-free, activated nuts. Talk to anyone at the (filtered) watercooler and they'll likely be starting, finishing or praising some kind of miracle cure-all diet: 5:2 is no longer just the recommended intake ratio for fruit and veg, raw is the new cooked, and healthy-food advocates have the kind of cult following once reserved for members of Abba.

Diet-based cookbooks are huge **business**. Sarah Wilson's *I Quit Sugar* and *I Quit Sugar for Life* have **sold** a whopping 220,000 copies since *I Quit Sugar* was released in February 2013. Wilson sits at third position on Nielsen Bookscan's list of Top 10 food and drink titles of the past 12 months (taking bronze behind two Jamie Oliver hardcovers). In the same bestseller list you can also find Michelle Bridges' *Superfoods Cookbook* and *Healthy Every Day* from paleo-diet guru Pete Evans. The "paleo way" was the most Googled diet of 2013.

There's also a rise in vegetarianism and veganism. Findings from Roy Morgan Research show the number of Australians agreeing with the statement "the food I eat is all, or almost all, vegetarian", grew from 1,608,000 in 2009 to 1,935,000 in June 2013.

Whatever happened to just cutting out chocolate bikkies or taking the stairs at work?

To be fair, fad diets are hardly a new trend. Atkins, anyone? How about liver cleansing, cabbage, or grapefruit diets? Or, for those super keen to shed that puppy fat, the tapeworm diet might have been up your (back) alley. However, thanks largely to reality television and social media, fad diets are in our face and Facebook feeds like never before.

How effective are these diets in promoting weight-loss? How expensive is it to cook with coconut oil and almond **milk**? The team at Good Food decided it was time put some of the nation's more popular diets to the test.

Each staff member across editorial and production chose a diet to road-test and dived into the heady worlds of activated almonds, two-day-a-week fasting, and teddy bears made of carob. No cheating, no shortcuts, and no excuses such as, "I've got a restaurant to review".

Some of us found this an easier task than others.

NB: No one was allowed to choose the olive oil, fish, and **wine**-friendly Mediterranean diet. That one is a walk in the park compared to these hardcore options.

Here's what we found.

The diet: Paleo

The premise: Eat like Paleolithic man. Meat! Vegetables! Nuts! Fruit (but not too much fruit). Fish! More meat! Just stay away from grains, **dairy**, legumes, processed food, and other fun things.

Callan Boys

OK, strap yourself in. The paleo-faithful preach we should eat the same food as our caveman cousins because our metabolism hasn't evolved to handle the staples that make up our modern diet. Foodstuffs the result of modern farming - grains, refined sugars, Happy Meals - are a no-go. Hardcore paleo dieters also really hate legumes.

But hang on, surely Encino Man had access to peas?

"Well, yes, maybe, but peas are classified as an anti-nutrient."

Peas are a what now?

This is a diet (and, at times quasi-religion) I found hard to navigate, especially if you start throwing around questions of logic, anthropology, and calcium deficiency. However, it's not like Atkins or Scientology where there's only one L. Ron Mother Hubbard in charge of the cupboard. Each time I asked the internet if I could eat or drink this or that, Google would return myriad opinions from self-appointed experts of The Paleo Way. In the end, I simply cut out all grains, **dairy**, caffeine, alcohol, legumes, processed foods, and refined sugar for 30 days.

Removing gluten and caffeine in the one blow was crushing. By day two I wanted to die. By day three I could hardly move and wanted to pull my soul out through my knees. Things got better after a week. My energy levels became stable, I was sleeping better, and my mind was more focused. I had a blow-out 20 days in with a night on the grain and the grappa and felt more lethargic the next day than I ever had before.

My main qualm with the paleo diet is that I found it dull. Granola for breakfast, sashimi for lunch (hold the soy), and meat and greens for dinner each day make for a long week. I could have planned the days out better and injected each meal with more variety, but with a busy schedule it's hard to do. I don't know how anyone could pull this off with a family of non-paleo dieters.

The pros After a couple of weeks, you do start to feel pretty good.

The cons No **bread** is one thing, but no **cheese** either? That's just rude. And, if you happen to be into food, this diet is also about as exciting as watching the Weather Channel for three hours.

Dish discovery Paleo Burger (aka a burger without a bun, aka a rissole with salad). The best parts of a burger without the carb coma afterwards.

Dish disaster Almond **milk**. It is vile. Granted, I should have removed the skins after soaking and before blending.

Top three pantry staples Steak, brussels sprouts, granola.

How hard is it to eat out? Very. Especially when you have to sound like a wally by asking what oil things are cooked in and whether the meat is grass-fed. Seeing untouchable and amazing pasta on the menu also hurts.

Did it work? Yes. Felt better, lost a couple of kegs. To quote a colleague however: "Who the hell wants to feel good all the time?"

What will you keep? Have cut down on **bread** and caffeine in a big way.

The diet: 5:2 Diet

or The Fast Diet

The premise: A diet that involves calorie restriction for two (non-consecutive) days a week and unrestricted (!) eating the other five days.

Ardyn Bernoth

Not only would I be slimmer but also more intelligent and younger looking with a decreased risk of getting cancer. Sign me up, I thought as I watched the BBC documentary Eat, Fast and Live Longer presented by

Michael Mosley mid-last year. His beguiling claims (which made the diet a worldwide trend), plus the fact that it just seemed like a good idea to give my body regular respite from the bombardment of food and **wine** I subject it to, convinced me to embark on the 5:2 Diet with my husband. Twice a week we fasted, usually on a Tuesday and a Thursday, though fasting (which conjures up visions of water and boiled lollies) is a bit of a misnomer. According to the rules of the diet, men are allowed to eat 600 calories a day, women 500. We usually ate a poached egg on a wee bit of toast for breakfast, chopped carrots for lunch and steamed vegetables for dinner. It seemed like a perfectly fine amount of food and forced us to not drink **wine** for at least two night a week; a huge bonus. For a few weeks it was great. Maybe not great; 4pm on the fasting days was horrible. My body craved sugar and something to get it through its circadian slump in energy. By dinner we were ravenous and still hungry going to sleep, but the morning brought with it the joys of a new unrestricted eating day. A month into the diet we would guiltily look at each other on the evening of the second fasting day, then reach into the fridge for a bottle of riesling and a pork loin. So, the 5:2 Diet became the 5.5:1.5 Diet, then the 6:1 Diet. It is perhaps lack of discipline on our part that we lost no weight, did not appear more youthful and did not notice an upsurge in intelligence. Meals are something that mark our day with pleasure and conviviality and making them as boring as those fasting days was too hard for us. We stuck to it for three months (properly for only one month). Sadly now, I am on the 7:0 diet.

The pros Unrestricted eating days.

The cons Fasting days are soooo boring.

Dish discovery Any food you have on the fasting day, you love.

Dish disaster The boredom of just vegies for dinner.

Top three pantry staples Carrots, green veg and herbal tea

How hard is it to eat out? On fasting days, don't even try.

Did it work? I did not lose weight or look younger but I like the concept of giving the digestive system a break (and staying away from alcohol) for two days a week.

What will you keep? I would like to continue doing one fasting day a week. But I have been saying this for three months and it hasn't happened.

The diet: I Quit Sugar 8-week detox program

The premise: Follow Sarah Wilson's mantra, break the habit and cut out all sugar.

Annabel Smith

"No. I. Do. Not. Want. A. Biscuit," I growl through gritted teeth. It's week one and my partner has mistakenly offered me a Monte Carlo. Welcome to the sugar-free detox. Thankfully I wasn't a cranky pants for too long, and the sugar cravings subsided within a fortnight. Sarah Wilson's eight-week program lures you in with an easygoing "just try and cut back" first week, then - BAM! No more refined sugars, goodbye so-called healthy sugars (honey, stevia) and farewell fruit (fresh, dried, juiced). The aim is to break the sugar "addiction" and ultimately "recalibrate". Sugar is a sneaky thing. It slips into ingredients lists where you least expect it, so I got my JERF (Just Eat Real Food) on.

In her original book, Wilson suggests only two to three recipes a week. The online eight-week program is more prescribed, with tailored meal planners, and videos and forums for support. I opted to go it alone with the books and blog. Appealing to farmers' market-frequenting hipsters, Wilson encourages you to make hung yoghurt cream **cheese**, pickles, chia jam and sauces from scratch. Without the time (or inclination) to dedicate my weekend to DIY, I preferred to cobble together her vegetable hashes and cook my meals from scratch. Although most of the recipes are gluten-free, there's no rule against carbs and avocado and **cheese** toasties are encouraged for breakfast. Taking that as my cue, **bread** became a crutch. I don't know how I'd have gotten through winter without sourdough to mop up the stodge.

Around the halfway mark I caught the flu. I desperately craved an apple and fruit juice - anything crisp, fresh and full of vitamins. Broth and apple cider vinegar sloshed baby kale had to suffice.

Declining dessert at dinner parties was tough at first, but **cheese** platters and red **wine** were my vices. Cake displays would call my name, but as soon as the moment passed I didn't give it a second thought. You realise how much emphasis we put on sugar and celebration.

I lived vicariously through friends at birthdays and get-togethers, and was surprised at my restraint. When I wanted a chocolate fix I tried a cute carob bear, which didn't hit the sweet spot.

Wilson provides plenty of detox recipes to get you back on track if you "lapse", but it's by no means a guilt trip. Confession time. On the home stretch at 7.5 weeks, Supernormal's peanut **butter** parfait, a salty-sweet stunner of a dessert, was my undoing. Four hours later I crashed, and boy did I crash hard. I was tucked up in bed at 7.30pm with aching teeth and a throbbing headache. After that comedown, I'll be transitioning back gradually!

The pros Avoiding processed foods and JERF-ing (Just Eating Real Food) instead. No more afternoon sugar slump/3.30-it-is. Red **wine**, beer and neat spirits are allowed. Eating three hearty, filling meals and skipping desserts and chocolate binges.

The cons Mouth ulcers from lack of fruit and worrying I'd get scurvy. Dealing with a flu sans OJ. My bowel took a beating while I was "recalibrating". Getting irrationally cranky and emotional going cold turkey.

Is it expensive? The coconut oil, activated nuts, farmers' market shopping trips and vegetable boxes add up. \$12 for a mini packet of powdered organic vanilla pods was a painful purchase!

Is it time-consuming? If following the online eight-week program, expect to spend a large chunk of your Sundays cooking up for the week ahead.

Dish discovery Coconutty granola - this crunchy, nutty, subtly spiced gluten-free granola is staying in my brekkie repertoire.

Dish disaster Fruit-free cleansing smoothie concoctions during detox week (cucumber, avocado, spinach and coconut water — bleurgh!)

Top three pantry staples Chia seeds, rice malt syrup, natural yoghurt.

How hard is it to eat out? Armed with the eating-out cheat sheet there were plenty of options, but say goodbye to sushi rolls and Thai and **Chinese** cuisines. Steer clear of sauces. Breakfasts out are easy - simply select eggs and sides.

Did it work? Yes, sugar cravings went away after a fortnight. I was snacking less, eating three main meals and my energy levels were steady. I ate fewer processed foods and it forced me to question the ingredients of everything. Weight loss was negligible but my skin cleared up and I felt healthier in general.

What will you keep? I'm easing myself back into sugar, but I'll definitely be more mindful of snack choices and sneaky hidden sugars.

The diet: Vegan

The premise: A plant-based diet, so no animal products whatsoever, including honey.

Sarah McInerney

It was cupcakes that did it. Plant-based and delicious, they convinced me going vegan for a few weeks would be a great way to re-examine what I ate and why, with some new cooking (and eating) experiences along the way. The aim: 22 days, as per the celeb eating challenge du jour tackled by the likes of Beyonce, Jennifer Lopez and Jay-Z. I ended up doing it for a month, tacking on another week and a bit to make up for a bumpy start. "Vegan turbulence" is how some bloggers describe the digestive transition. Mine was a bumpy ride: urgent dashes to the loo, heartburn, sharp stomach pains, all culminating in a lightheaded mis-step, when I tumbled out of a bus on one particularly bad morning. To be honest, its effect took me by surprise, given I eat vegetarian about five days a week, but I guess I did have a rather bad **cheese** habit.

Once I made it through the transition though, it was smooth sailing. The eating-in side of veganism, I loved. I experimented with tempeh (not a fan), tried to perfect "nut cheese" (it's nicer than it sounds) and sprinkled an abundance of nutritional yeast on dishes as a B12 source. I enjoyed exploring new parts of my cookbook collection, in particular Pete Evans' Healthy Every Day and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage Veg. Blogs and forums were a great help, especially when I was feeling unwell, and also as a supermarket guide. Thank goodness for smartphones, as I was having to Google so many food labels before being able to plonk something in my trolley.

Eating out in Sydney's inner west was fantastic: pizza, pad Thai and kibbeh, all vegan, all delicious. Further afield, it was a little more challenging, requiring many questions and clarifications. In one case, a restaurant went through the motions with me, agreed to exclude a few ingredients, only to serve me up the oyster-sauce laden dish as written on the menu. It certainly increased my empathy and respect for the vegan community.

The pros Eating cruelty-free. Plus vegetables, legumes and tofu are delicious.

The cons Reading food labels. Variety when eating out. No more **cheese** (was actually easier than I thought).

Dish discovery Sadhana Kitchen's raw, vegan neopolitan cheezecake. I'm still dreaming about it.

Dish disaster Vegan "chorizo" burrito.

Top three pantry staples: Tofu, vegetables, nuts.

How hard is it to eat out? It requires many questions (even once the dish arrives) and in many places a resulting scarcity of options. But there are some great vegan restaurants out there too.

Did it work? I was more mindful of what I was putting into my mouth, both emotionally and practically. As a result, I lost four kilograms, felt lighter and healthier and that had a really positive impact on my mood. I also cut my caffeine intake, which meant I slept much better. It made me realise how much of a treat that skim flat white and a milky cup of tea really are.

What will you keep? Understanding where our food comes from and how it gets to our plates has always been important to me. I have definitely reduced the amount of animal products I consume, but am not quite ready to make the full transition to veganism. After this challenge, however, I can definitely see it being part of my future.

The diet:

Low-FODMAP

The premise: Helps sufferers of irritable bowel syndrome.

Megan Johnston

For most people, eating is a pleasant affair. But for sufferers of irritable bowel syndrome ... well, there's no polite way to put it. Meal-time triggers digestive problems such as bloating, pain and "toilet problems".

The low-FODMAP diet is designed to help us poor souls. Developed by a Melbourne dietitian, Dr Sue Shepherd, and researchers at Monash University, it limits sugars poorly absorbed in the small intestine, such as lactose, fructans and fructose.

FODMAP stands for "fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols". This means limiting foods such as **milk** (lactose), honey (excess fructose), onion (fructans), stone fruit (polyols) and legumes (galacto-oligosaccharides) - though some people may tolerate certain groups better than others. It's also vital to consult a doctor to rule out other health complaints first.

I've followed the diet for a few years and, personally, it's been life-changing. Eating out can be tricky but it's nowhere near the gamble it used to be. (And unlike people with coeliac disease, I can cheat now and then without serious repercussions.)

Shopping for groceries can be a pain, however. Monash University's smartphone app is handy and a few convenience foods now bear the "FODMAP-friendly" logo but two of the biggest FODMAP offenders - onion and garlic - are in practically everything else.

Many recipes can be adapted to suit low-FODMAP requirements but the best flavours are often lost along the way.

Still, the health benefits have been worth the hassle for me. The diet now seems like second nature but I do long for a garlicky, gluteny pizza now and then.

The pros A healthier digestive system.

The cons Time consuming, boring flavours, expensive.

Dish discovery Low-FODMAP green curry chicken (no onion or garlic).

Dish disaster Hard, gluten-free breads.

Top three pantry staples Rice noodles, passata for gluten-free pastas, onion-free salad.

How hard is it to eat out? Difficult - few menus offer low-FODMAP options though more chefs are catering to food intolerances.

Did it work? Yes - no more upset tummy, pain or fatigue.

What will you keep? The whole diet - unless doctors find a cure for IBS.

The diet: Raw food

The premise: Ingredients should be eaten in their natural state and not heated to anything above 42-45C to preserve their maximum nutritional value. Backers claim the diet reverses ageing and combats disease.

Jane Holroyd

Goodbye **bread**, goodbye **dairy**, goodbye anything processed, baked, steamed, toasted, roasted or pasteurised. It was difficult to tell where the pain of caffeine withdrawal ended and the pain of everything else began. The philosophy of the raw food diet intrigues me. Not being a big meat-eater I figured subsisting temporarily on raw fruit, vegetables, nuts and sprouted grains wouldn't pose too great a challenge. In some ways it didn't. I replaced my usual muesli (oats are steamed) with a buckwheat version, snacked on fruit and veg and raw cacao-almond balls. I lunched on salads with nut-based dressings. Dinner discoveries included "spring rolls" and a raw zucchini pasta that was saved by sun-dried tomato sauce and a raw cashew **milk** curry that would have been nicer in warmer weather. The hardest part? Chowling through cold dinners while my family beat the chill with warm bowls of pasta. I missed yoghurt, and **bread**. And I'm sick of nuts - yes, even in a cashew "cheeze" cake.

The pros You can eat as much as you like, though most "rawists" believe you shouldn't eat early in the day because the body's digestive system isn't firing.

The cons Cold dinners on frosty nights, being confined to the dips platter at social gatherings (hang on, that hummus is made from cooked chickpeas ...). It's time consuming. If you want to eat grains, you have to soak, rinse and sprout them over several days (even then their appeal is questionable) and just about every recipe requires a food processor and/or dehydrator. Not ideal when you prepare separate meals for the rest of the family who aren't concerned about the ravages of ageing.

Dish discovery "Spring rolls" (lettuce leaves stuffed with a tasty combo of sprouts, vegetables and dressing).

Dish disaster The lowlight was an almond curry: a thick, cold nut slurry over vegetables and chickpeas that took four days to sprout.

How hard is it to eat out? Very, unless you count a trip to the greengrocer. I did get lucky though with a trip to an Asian fusion restaurant where staff accommodated my lifestyle choice with an amazing array of pickled veg, raw sea bream with crispy seaweed and a delicious beef tartare with clam mayonnaise.

Is it expensive? Yes and no. I went through nearly a kilo of almonds in a week - and avocados ain't cheap - but then, meat is also pricey. Also, the quality of fruit and vegetables matters more because they're the central plank of any meal, so I opted for organic.

Did it work? I've managed to cut my caffeine intake, my skin is a little clearer and my energy levels don't seem to experience the same peaks and troughs (though this could also be a result of cutting coffee).

What will you keep? I am trying to keep on with the sprouted buckwheat muesli, and taking raw lunches to work, and I'll make my own almond **milk** once a week - it tastes better than UHT brands.

The diet: The "Reboot With Joe" five-day juice cleanse

The premise: Nothing but fruit and vegetable juice for five days to "regain vitality, lose weight and kick-start healthy habits".

Steve Colquhoun

A couple of years ago when I caught the doco Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead on late-night TV, starring overweight Aussie Joe Cross on a journey to save his own life, I was taken with the possibility he advanced that "juicing" could right all the wrongs of the modern diet. Like everyone, I've read a lot of theories around food, but not a lot of hard facts - is meat good (paleo) or bad (vegetarian), or is it gluten, sugar, salt, caffeine or alcohol that makes you feel sluggish? About the only thing most people can agree on is that vegies are chockful of good stuff. So why not eliminate everything else and treat my insides to the colonic equivalent of a spring clean?

Well, chewing, for one thing. Mastication, I've discovered these past five days, is vastly under-rated. The clue I missed was when I told co-workers - who were subjecting themselves to weeks-long diets of various description and severity - of my plans to do a five-day juice cleanse, and they responded with "Oh God, are you sure? Maybe just three days?" They understood what I didn't - that juicing equals hardcore privation.



The shiny new juicer I bought for this exercise has dominated our house this past week, noisily whizzing up five separate juices a day and producing more pulp than a Tasmanian timber mill. I have juiced a veritable forest of kale, an orchard of apples, and fields of carrots and cucumbers. I have spent hours planning, listing, shopping, prepping, juicing and cleaning.

Despite manic adherence to the juicing rule book, I didn't suffer any of the detox headaches, aches or fatigue that were forewarned. I almost wish I had; then I would know that my body had been challenged. And even though the program makes no weight loss promises or predictions, I did think such a radical shift would shed a bit more than 1.9kg. For those reasons, I wouldn't do it again.

The pros Proved a great conversation starter and talking point among friends.

The cons It's expensive (around \$50 a day for the produce); time-consuming (two hours a day in prep/clean-up); and uncomfortable (diarrhoea attacks, wind pains, veggie burps and furry teeth).

Dish discovery None.

Dish disaster Anything with beetroot in it. Great on a sandwich, too strong for a juice. Also turns whatever comes out the other end a slightly alarming shade of pink.

How hard is it to eat out? Utterly impossible - unless you enjoy watching other people eat, and apologising to the next table for the stricken gurgles of your tortured stomach.

Did it work? Not really. By Day three my energy levels seemed a little higher than normal, and overall I lost a moderate amount of weight (1.9kg), about half of which came back in the first 24 hours afterwards. But I was looking for a far more tangible effect, good or bad.

What will you keep? I may not eat another vegetable for the next six months. After that, I will probably choose more salads and veges, and fewer stodgy, processed foods.

The diet: Gwyneth Paltrow 7-day Detox

The premise: Cut carbs, red meat and all processed foods to look good and feel great.

Nicole Papaz

Gwyneth, "40 and fabulous" as it says in the introduction to her bestselling detox cookbook *It's All Good*, has been labelled a lifestyle guru with her famous blog GOOP and her first cookbook *My Father's Daughter*.

It's a spiritual ride with Gwyneth, whose philosophy focuses on eating healthy, unprocessed food straight from the earth. Her devotion to clean living came after she had a panic attack, which sparked a round of tests, and inspired her healthy lifestyle choice.

First step: shop. My page-long list was mammoth, full of ingredients I'd never bought before - hemp seeds, apple cider vinegar, raw honey, loads of beetroot, and for my morning snack on day three: "a nice pear". It took about two hours and required travelling to three shops and one market to **buy** everything I needed for the week. Next, prep my meals, another two-hour exercise. Soak the almonds, chop endless amounts of veges, make "vegenaise", a less creamy, less everything version of mayo. This wasn't easy; where was Gwyneth's chef when I needed him?

The first three days of the diet were rough going. There was so much prep to do for the two juices, one snack and two meals I had to consume each day, and fitting in work and social events to the mix was nearly impossible. I was grumpy, spaced out and my tummy was rumbling.

By the fourth day, I got my energy back. I could concentrate at work, was happier, and felt a sense of lightness. This diet really does give you more energy and makes you feel great, but it's a lot of work. With some carbs and red meat, I could perhaps be persuaded to adopt this lifestyle, but I'll need to work for that celebrity salary first.

The pros Five meals a day of the best organic produce money can **buy**.

The cons It was a very costly diet - about \$110 a day. My kitchen was a mess and compost bin was full after all the juicing.

Dish discovery Turkey meatballs (with a few additional ingredients, such as parmesan and chilli, they'd be completely delicious).

Dish disaster The creamy avocado and cacao smoothie wasn't easy to get down. It looked like a chocolate milkshake - tasted like glue.

Top three pantry staples Kale, beetroot and rocket.

How hard is it to eat out? Impossible. Unlike the US/UK, kale juice isn't yet a menu staple alongside our trusted OJ - so eating out was off the cards. I spent Father's Day lunch eating a rocket salad and watching my family devour a leg of lamb. I don't know how Gwyneth does it. The day I finished I went straight to George Calombaris' Jimmy Grants for a lamb souvlaki.

Did it work? It really did. From day three, I felt so much healthier, had bucket-loads of energy and my skin was looking great.

What will you keep? Incorporating juices into my diet rather than a muffin or danish for morning or afternoon tea. Juices are a great way to keep you going until the next meal without the calories.

The diet:

Michelle Bridges

12 Week Body Transformation (12WBT)

The premise: What it says on the box: lose weight, tone up, get fit.

The cost: 12WBT costs \$199

Nina Rousseau

Oh God, it's week five and I haven't started. I was so there for pre-season: I bought balsamic vinegar to bedazzle my beets, I joined the pool, I looked up scales on the internet, I imagined a more muscled, high-ponytailed version of myself.

Honeyed crumpet in hand, I eagerly watched Mish's pre-season Mindset Videos. They were great! So uplifting! Chockful of tough love and habit-changing tips to break free of those "salty, fatty frenemies" and a particularly rousing two-part session about the sinister world of self-sabotage.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ADMIN?! I'd fallen so far behind: diarise training for 12 weeks (are you kidding?! I can barely comprehend tomorrow), clean the pantry, plan my meals, shop, measure myself, weigh myself, assess my fitness, gear up, write down what I ate, track my exercise, print out the meal plans, cook. It felt like a second job.

I made some attempts: My four-year-old and I stretched and bended to Dance Like Nobody's Watching, a choreographed 45-minute workout that was a hoot. I substituted potato (that starchy vegetable devil) with sweet potato, I started eating breakfast (good morning, baked beans), I ate snow peas and carrots as snacks.

But it wasn't enough. In distress, I emailed Mish's super Support Crew and, within 24 hours, as promised, heard back from Dane: "Even though you haven't yet got started, it's not the end of the world!" Dane wrote encouragingly. I confided that I'd stopped swimming laps because I wasn't sure how it fitted in with Mish's exercise regimen. "Of course if you only feel up for swimming, then this is absolutely fine! Doing something is always better than doing nothing!" said Dane, with practical advice about assessing my level (beginner or Thorpedo?). Basically, swimming for 45 minutes is the go.

Week five, and I've finally started.

Next time, I'm signing up for the No Admin diet. I don't blame Mish - especially after her Mindset Video on the "blame game" - and for all my carry on I do wish I'd made more of an effort. I needed to be more psyched. To quote ex-Richmond coach Danny Frawley after a Tigers win: "Our self belief is unbelievable." Mine wasn't. It was in tatters going in, and my admin was up the wazoo. Never mind. Onwards and upwards. 7WBT here I come!

The pros Sensible, non-faddish philosophy geared to long-term health. There were no wacky ingredients, just normal food, which was good. And brilliant support, from the crew and Mish's prolific dieting community.

The cons The admin and exercise are time-consuming. Not buying runners? Mistake. Big mistake. And it turns out carbohydrates dictate my personality. No carbs = cranky shrew wife with no sense of humour.



Dish discovery Blanching broccoli to toss with smoked trout, a few lentils, celery for crunch, some roughly pummelled almonds for texture, fresh herbs from the garden, a squeeze of lemon.

Top three pantry staples Balsamic vinegar, oats, baked beans.

How hard is it to eat out? Hard but not impossible.

Did it work? Not yet.

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