

The NoSDiet Manifesto

Lose weight the sane and rational way.

No funny science or calorie accounting involved, just a few simple mnemonic tricks for giving your willpower the upper hand.

There are just three rules and one exception:

No S nacks

No S weets

No S econds

Except (sometimes) on days that start with 'S'

That's it. That's the whole diet.

Too simple for you? Simple is why it works. Read on for explanations, justifications, and rants.

Why should I buy this book?

The whole diet is on the cover. That's really all there is to it. Remember those simple rules, and you could put this book down, walk away, and lose weight.

But chances are you don't quite believe it. You're intrigued, but need some more convincing. You have questions. Isn't it supposed to be better to eat lots of little meals? (see page 37). What counts as a 'sweet?' (see page 7). Do holiday's count as 'S' days? (see page 4)?

This book answers these and many other questions. It's essentially a "Frequently Asked Questions" list, such as you often see on the internet. In fact, most of the questions come from visitors to www.nosdiet.com web site, which has been around for over two years and has drawn tens of thousands of visitors. Flip through and see if you can't find some of your own questions.

The website is still around, and you can read most of the contents of this book on it for free. Take a look. Join the free email support group while you're at it. But unless you have a million dollar printer and a lot of time on your hands, you aren't going to produce something as portable and easy on the eyes as this little book.

14 words aren't much to remember. But remembering that *you've committed* to them can sometimes be tricky. Physical reminders help. The book itself serves this purpose, and in the back you'll find business cards, refrigerator magnets, and stickers; a "propaganda pack," to remind you at every turn that you are on the no s diet.

Why are other diets so lousy?

Most diets today can be divided into two categories: Pseudo-science (or "focused-gluttony") diets that hold you can go on being a glutton as long as you focus your gluttony on particular kinds of foods to the exclusion of others (no agreement on what these particular kinds of foods are, of course), and diets that require you to be a full time calorie accountant.

The pseudo-science diets are patent nonsense. They contradict one another, go in and out of fashion every ten years, and never seem to gather any serious scientific support. You won't stick with one of these because it won't work and [it might even make you sick](#). You'll also come to realize that not being able to eat whole categories of food is a real drag. At the outset, it might seem worth it to trade pasta for unlimited steaks, but it gets old fast.

It's funny that these diets masquerade as scientific, because psychologically they rely on the most primitive magicism: magic potion foods that are good for you and can be gorged with impunity, and cursed poison foods that explode with a mouthful (carbohydrates and fat are the two biggies, alternating roles).

The calorie accounting diets are time consuming and joyless. You won't be able to stick with one of these because it will make you miserable. If you think of food as fuel, a mere quantity, you'll come to hate it -- and yourself.

Pretty much any diet will lose you weight if you stick with it. The problem isn't how to lose weight. The problem is how to stick with the diet. [According to the FDA](#), 95% of dieters fail to do this for more than a few months at a time. You need a diet

that acknowledges this grim statistic and targets the real culprit:
not your belly, but your mind.

Why is this diet so much better?

Because it is simple, sustainable, and you aren't really depriving yourself of anything. You don't have to sacrifice anything -- not time, not health, not any delicious thing. There are no magic potions and there are no poisons. You are targeting just the culprit, just the bad habit of overeating itself.

Overeating is first and foremost a bad habit. Bad habits are overcome by willpower. Willpower doesn't work unless it has clear, limited goals. And that's just what the NoSDiet consists of -- a crutch and a focus for your willpower.

And I imagine it's also good for your teeth (no sugar).

Ask yourself if you can imagine staying on a particular diet for the rest of your life. If not, don't bother starting, it's a waste of time and will.

That's much too rational and straightforward. Come on, REALLY, why is this diet so much better?

You wouldn't take diet advice from a fat person, why take it from a fat book? Weighing in at just 14 words, the NoSDiet is the ultra featherweight of diet plans.

Is there any scientific evidence that this diet works?

Absolutely none. But I'm not aware that I have any competition in this regard.

What days start with "s"?

Saturday, Sunday and "Special" days. Special days include (your) national and (your) religious and (your) close family and friend's birthdays. My apologies to atheists and non-native English speakers. A lean and hungry look becomes you.

What do you mean by "sometimes"?

I stuck the word 'sometimes' in the exception to remind you not to be an idiot on S-days. It's been my experience that the good habits you build on the non-S-days will see you through the S-days without too much excess. My S-days tend to be no worse than my pre-NoSDiet ordinary days.

What do you mean by "seconds?"

As I mentioned in a [post](#) to the nosdiet yahoo group, by "no seconds," I officially mean one physical plate, and I think for beginners especially it's good to stick with this, even if it means a fairly overloaded plate. If the amount of food on your one plate is a little bestial and disgusting, that's part of the educational process.

What do you mean by "sweets"?

I mean something whose principal source of calories is sugar. Go ahead and put sugar in your coffee or oatmeal; you have my blessing. Of course fruits are fine.

But beware of soda and corn syrup "juice" drinks. I'm not just being a killjoy; Americans get an estimated 10% of their calories from such nutritionally bankrupt "liquid carbohydrates." (footnote pending)

I wouldn't worry too much about borderline foods like yoghurt and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. If these are a problem for you, i.e., you eat them every day and lay it on thick, then make them esser. If not, don't. Just by targeting the really egregious offenders you'll be cutting out a lot of calories. And you'll be that much more likely to stick with the plan. If you're like most first worlders, it's a little revolting to think how much unambiguously crappy food you consume. So forget the borderline cases, the clear cut cases are 80% of the problem and 0% of the headache.

This is probably the most important S. Do you know how many pounds of sugar the average American ingests today? [According to the USDA's Economic Research Service](#), 105 pounds (2001). That's about 20% of total calories. You could make a snowman out of that. That's less than 2 years till you've eaten your body weight in sugar. If you're a real whopper, chances are you eat even more sugar than that, so I figure it works out about the same. And this is a pretty conservative number. The ERS assumes that over 40 pounds of "delivered" sugar is "lost" (147 delivered, 105 ingested), which I find a little hard to believe, but I guess we're wastrels as well as gluttons.

How do you think that compares with the sugar intake of our ancestors? We don't have to go back to hunter gatherer times to find a striking contrast, or even before Columbus (when it was close to nil because there was no refined sugar in most places). 1821 will do: 10 pounds (that's delivered, not ingested!). (footnote pending)

You don't need to be an Atkins nut to see there's a problem here. Indeed, why bother taking it to the next level, severely restricting carbs in general, with all the dubious health issues that entails, when there is plenty problem here, at the sugar level? If orange juice is really your problem, you don't have much of a problem.

I'm not some food hating, pleasure begrudging voice in the wilderness. I'm not telling you to give up sweets completely. I love sweets. But I love them even more on S days. That way I can love them unreservedly, without also hating them for what they do to my body. On S-days, I make sure to pick out something really nice, to make it count. Sweets weren't designed for daily, routine consumption, physically or spiritually. Deserve your desserts. They taste much better that way.

Does fake sugar count as an "s"?

As I mentioned in a [post](#) to the nosdiet yahoo group, I would avoid fake sugar products for 3 reasons.
they tend to be pretty disgusting
you *know* that in 10 years scientists are going to discover that they're even worse for you than real sugar.
you might be fooling your taste buds, but you're also fooling the habit forming portion of your brain. It's bad psychology, and the whole premise of the nosdiet is that psychology is the most important part.

So does it officially count as an S? No. But I'd be surprised if you can eat a lot of it without reverting to genuine S.

Aren't you worried about fat?

I don't want to seem like I'm coming down as "pro-fat" in the carbs vs. fat debate. I think the evidence strongly suggests that too much fat is bad for you. But I also think that much (if not most) of the fat people consume is in the form of snack foods (chips, crisps, etc.) and sweets (candy bars, ice cream, pop tarts, Capt'n Crunch, cake, etc.), which *are* restricted by the noSdiet (these also tend to be the worst kinds of fat). So while the nosdiet does not address fat explicitly, it does so as a kind of side effect.

The reason I don't address it explicitly, besides the fact that the side effect restriction seems just fine to me, is that it's a more complex issue than sugar. There are good fats and bad fats, and it's often less clear which foods are high in fat whereas sugar tends to jump right out at you. Simplicity and clarity are important. If you have a complicated diet that is 100% in sync with the latest nutritional research and covers every theoretical base, it won't do you any good if you can't stick with it. Zero percent of a hundred is zero. An eighty percent solution that you can actually stick with is infinitely preferable to that.

I also don't think that anyone in the medical profession would suggest regularly going 5 straight days without any fat. Unlike added sugar, it has some nutritional benefit, the body does need it.

What about healthy snacks?

Eat healthy meals. If you know you have just three, you'll make them count. I'm perfectly aware that an orange between meals is not going to kill you, that, taken in itself, it's perfectly healthy. But the idea is to have the orange instead of, not in addition to, and in justification of, some unhealthy part of your meal. The problem is primarily one of self-discipline, and if you start making all kinds of exceptions, you'll fail.

Please tell me EXACTLY every single food I can and can't eat!

No. Sorry. Don't have the time for that. And it's really not necessary. "Sugar" as I've defined it above means "lots of sugar." If you have to wonder, it's probably OK.

Just about every diet guru publishes a list of permitted and forbidden foods. And they're bestsellers. People buy millions of copies of these lists. I am utterly baffled by this phenomenon.

I'm baffled because it's so utterly hopeless an enterprise; there are, for all practical purposes, an infinite number of foods. I'm baffled because the things that wind up being forbidden are often so absurd: beets, for example. I guarantee you, no one ever got fat from eating beets. If you see a fat person eating beets, that's not why he's fat. And most of all, I'm baffled that anyone really imagines they will play scavenger hunt at the supermarket for more than a month or two. It shows an utter ignorance of human psychology.

And yet, as I mentioned, people buy millions of copies of these lists. They must get something out of it. Maybe they get an "insider information" thrill out of reading these oddball restrictions and think "whew, glad I know about beets. That would have killed me for sure." What they don't get is any thinner. These books may be good for a thrill, but they are psychological suicide as far as losing weight is concerned. Who is really going to run around a supermarket with a book in hand? For a week, maybe. For a month, maybe. But that's it. At that point they'll feel justly overwhelmed. But maybe that's [all they ever wanted](#) .

What about nutrition?

The nosdiet is a framework for controlling excess. Beyond that it makes no stipulations about your nutritional or gastronomic choices. That doesn't mean they're not important, they're just separate issues. Fight one enemy at a time, not three at once.

That said, I find that having a limited number of limited quantity meals makes me take them more seriously, both from a gastronomic and a nutritional point of view. Pretty much every meal I eat is delicious or healthy or both.

If you feel the need to take a systematic approach towards nutrition too, be my guest. The nosdiet is compatible with pretty much every other diet plan I've come across. You can be a No-S/Vegan if you want (shudder). You could even do No-S plus Atkins, or No-S/Zone if you want to hedge your weight loss bets (though I think it's becoming increasingly clear these last two examples are emphatically **not** going to help you in the nutrition department, if at all).

What about exercise?

Of course you should exercise. Diet can't substitute for exercise. You need to do both. If you're having trouble figuring out what exercise to do, consider [walking](#) . If you feel walking is too, well, pedestrian, get over it. Health-wise, it's the best long term exercise you can do, and the only consistently useful or interesting one. If you need more color, you'll get plenty using my [homemade exercise machine](#) as a supplement.

Will this diet help me look like Kate Moss?

No. It will help you attain and maintain a healthy and therefore presumably attractive weight. I'm not sure it's healthy to look like Kate Moss.

It won't help you look like Victoria Beckham, known as Posh Spice, Courtney Cox, or Calista Flockhart, either (I just threw that in there for the [search engines](#) . Sneaky, yes, but who knows [how many](#) young lives I'm saving :)).

What if I am an idiot and insist on following the letter of the law but breaking it in spirit by (say) eating a gallon of ice cream every S-day and counting my second cousin's hamster's birthday as an S-day?

Then I can't help you. You will be fat and die young.

What if I screw up?

Say "I screwed up" and try not to do it again. Don't try to compensate for your screw up by extra deprivations -- self-revenge will only make you resentful and that much more likely to quit altogether. This diet isn't about perfection, it's about staying healthy. It's about what you do most of the time, not about achieving some kind of world's record.

The other advantage of this attitude is that it deprives you of a very seductive excuse -- I can cheat *because* I can make up for it later. The knowledge that there is no make up test, that you have only one chance to do each day right, will make you that much more serious about passing the first and only time around. It's a principle worth applying to other aspects of life.

But I'm genetically fat!

It's possible, but *you* probably aren't. If you're like most overweight people, it's no mystery why you're fat. You're fat because you eat too damn much. I don't care whether it's carbs or hydrogenated oils or granola bars, you just eat *a lot* of it. Maybe you don't metabolize your food quite as efficiently as your skinny neighbor, I'll grant you that (maybe), but the fact remains, you eat too much. I don't mean to be insulting, I used to eat too much too. I put it this way because you're never going to lose any weight if you pretend that there are more complex and flattering reasons for your condition. So get this genes stuff out of your head, it's probably an excuse.

Consider this: [according to the CDC](#), the obesity rate in the United States has doubled since 1980. Rapid mutation? Sorry folks, evolution doesn't work that fast.

Or go to a poor country. Where are all the fat people? Moved to America? Fat chance.

If you're still convinced that you've been doomed by your genes, view this diet as an experiment. If you can stick with it for 6 months and not lose a significant amount of weight, then you can plead genetics with a clear conscience. And I suspect you'll be at least a *somewhat* skinnier genetically fat person.

But I'm a grazer!

This is a more sophisticated excuse. Under laboratory conditions, people who eat a controlled amount of calories over the course of many small meals metabolize them more efficiently than people who eat the same amount of calories in the traditional three.

Where's the rub? In real word conditions, people who eat more frequently than the traditional three square meals wind up just plain eating more food -- substantially more. And despite their metabolism's scrambling, they [chunk up](#) . The NoSdiet isn't a lab diet, biology divorced from psychology. It's a real world diet, built to withstand the pressures of your stubborn, sneaky mind.

But I'm an exception!

So is everybody else. And even if you truly happen to be the one,
it isn't *useful* to think this way.

But I want an excuse, not a solution!

It sounds crazy, but a lot of people think like this. They'd prefer to stay fat and blame McDonalds or refined carbohydrates or hydrogenated vegetable oil or their lousy genes or anyone and anything but themselves. I'm not saying these things aren't factors, but they are not the decisive factor. The decisive factor is just that: human decision.

Don't be afraid of responsibility. Responsibility can be liberating. If it's your fault, then chances are you can fix it. If it's not your fault, then you probably can't. Would you really prefer that a problem be insoluble than have to work to fix it? And yes, thinking makes it so.

Health aside, I'm amazed at how many people prefer to trade their sense of free will and human dignity for carte blanche to fail. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, choosing to be a slave because it is easier than being free. If you're one of those, keep searching, this diet isn't for you.

Are there any side effects?

Yes. By setting your willpower up to succeed, and succeeding a little bit every day, you will build up general purpose willpower. It's like doing 50 spiritual pushups every morning. Contrast this with the effects of the repeated failures of willpower associated with mainstream yoyo dieting.

Can I take my Sunday Thursday? (etc.).

Not officially.

Can I do a "some-S" diet?

You can do whatever you want, I'm not going to excommunicate you, but this isn't a good idea. No-S isn't that hard. Try doing it strictly for 3 weeks, that's about how long it takes to form a habit. You'll be surprised.

Fence around the Diet

There's a Jewish expression, "Fence around the Law," which means don't do anything that might possibly be interpreted as giving even the appearance of violating sacred law. It's a principal that has its use even with profaner stuff. When your habit is young, be as strict as you can be, comically strict even. Only when you're strong, when the habit is largely unconscious, can you afford stretchers like the above.

It might seem counterintuitive, but strictness makes things easier. There is no decision to be made, no wrangling, no "can I? can't I?". You're pre-disapproved, so forget it and move on to something else. Thursdays and fruit tarts take on the aspect of concrete walls, mine fields, and concertina wire. There's no point even trying to cross.

I love the NoSDiet, but my doctor says I need to eat 4/5/6 meals a day because of my medical condition!

The nosdiet has a little known loophole just for you. If you look closely at the site, you'll notice that nowhere does it specify the actual *number* of meals. Now most people will make a [certain assumption](#) , and most people had better stick with that assumption. But if you have a medical condition that requires you to eat more often, you can still do so and be a proud nosdieter. Just make sure to figure out what number of meals is right for you, stick with it (no changing the magic number every day), and invest in some really small plates. As for the rest of you, pretend you never read this. It's for people with doctor's notes only.

Are there any NoSDiet recipes?

No. Have you ever *eaten* a meal cooked from a recipe in a diet book? My experience has been that they're pretty disgusting. Diet books tend not to be written by people who actually like to eat. Besides, the nosdiet isn't about *what* you eat. It's about *when* you eat. It's all about timing. You can eat anything you want -- at the right time. So use your normal cookbook. It's nosdiet approved.

Recipes do make great filler, however, which I'm sure is why diet books are so full of them.

Gratuitous potshots at low carb diets

Low carb diets, whether Atkins or some spin off, are all the rage today. So they deserve extra contempt.

As a friend of mine put it "I refuse to believe that bread, the biblical staff of life, the food that sustained our ancestors for so many generations, is bad for you."

Amen.

For those of you who are not so up on the bible, consider this: the obesity rates of France, Italy, and Japan are much lower than obesity rates in the United States. Though I don't have precise statistics, I'd bet money that the majority of calories consumed in these countries come from bread, pasta, and rice (respectively) -- the staples for which their cuisines are famous. And we're not talking brown rice, or whole grain bread, or amaranth pasta. We're talking the very refined stuff Atkins and his fellow gurus insist is so evil.

I'm not saying it's great to eat a ton of refined carbohydrates. I'm willing to concede that brown rice is (nutritionally) a better default starch than white rice, and I even happen to like it (short grain, at least). But it's not the chief issue, from a weight management perspective. The chief issue is not to eat too damn much, of anything. And the nosdiet helps you do that.

Oh, and any diet that sells a bar or a snack food is a total scam. I'd rather eat a snickers bar than a zone bar, because at least then I'd be psychologically budgeting for it. The diet bar is what separates the total scams from the mere fads. They should call it

the self deception bar.

I can think of other things that start with S...

So can I. S-days are a useful structure for many kinds of habits. Among other things, I use it to regulate my [exercise routine](#).

Diet-wise, people have suggested "soda" (which is technically already a sugar S, but some people can use the extra reminder) and "supersizes," which no one really needs, and fast food junkies especially should watch out for.

Who are you?

I am a librarian by training and a computer programmer by accident. I have no training as a nutritionist. I noticed I was getting a little too heavy and came up with this common sense willpower trick. I lost over 20 pounds in two months and kept them off without spending too much time suffering or even thinking about it. People I've explained it to have responded enthusiastically and so I thought I'd stick it on the web.

I've since lost an additional 15 pounds (so total progress has been 210 to 175), but to be fair, that may have something to do with the fact that I started doing [some exercise](#). This seems to be my natural, healthy weight. People now describe me as "lean," which is sweet music to a lifelong "husky."

I've been on the diet since March 2002, with no yo-yoing. Unlike most diets, that get more and more insufferable as the gimmick ages, no-s gets progressively easier and becomes largely unconscious. At this point I'm about as tempted to break the rules as a devout Hindu is to eat a cow, or a Muslim a pig. It's a great feeling.

What are other people saying about the NoSDiet?

Not much, I'm afraid. But [send me email](#) and I'll put it up on a feedback page. Or just google for *nosdiet* on [Usenet](#) or [the web](#) .

I set up a [nosdiet yahoo group](#) for (slightly) more intimate discussions, polls, and other time killing nonsense. People have actually started signing up recently and it's becoming a good place to get support if you want to give the diet a try. You can set it to "daily digest" or "no email" if you're afraid of getting bombarded (not much danger of that at present).

If you're really bored, have a look at my [nosdiet website usage statistics page](#) .

I want to start this diet NOW. What should I do?

Keep in mind that the first three weeks are the hardest. At three weeks the auto pilot of habit starts to kick in. Until then, make your portions sufficiently generous so that you aren't tempted to cheat. Once you've made it a few weeks without violating any of the literal rules, then you can start scaling the portions down a bit. The most important part is your mind. Once you get that lean and tough, the body will follow.

You might also want to start on a Tuesday or Wednesday, to better your odds of making it to that first milestone weekend.

For people who need a physical reminder or talisman, print out the [business card](#) and tape it to your fridge. It may look enormous on your screen, but it prints out business card size. Yes, a real refrigerator magnet would be nicer. I'm working on it.

This diet actually works! How can I repay you?

You can't! I used to have a tongue in cheek paypal donation link here (the idea was you send me a *Merchant of Venice* inspired dollar per pound of flesh lost), but as I was recently informed: Google policy does not permit the advertisement of websites that contain "the solicitation of funds and do not display tax-exempt status".

Translation: my adwords competitors complained and this was the only excuse they could come up with. I'm flattered! Who would have thought a little gnat site running out of a basement could get the attention of multi million dollar competitors? I must really be onto something. And I think I can do without the 2 cents the link brought in.

Now let's just hope google policy does not forbid the mention of google policy...

What you still can do is mention this site to people you know, and link to it if you have a website. A full log file is riches enough for me. And if enough people do it, who knows, maybe I can sell T-shirts and coffee mugs or something one day.

Those whose senses of generosity and gratitude are so highly developed that this just won't do may wish to look carefully at [my other site](#) .

If you aren't making any money off this, why are you advertising?

[Google adwords](#) lets me place ads for just 5 cents a click, with a daily cap of \$2. So it's cheap. Their interface is easy and fun and your changes take effect right away. People who pay more than the minimum 5 cents a click have their ads placed higher up, but ads with a very high clickthrough rate get bumped up a bit. My ads do pretty well in this regard, and it's fun coming up with ads that place better than those of presumably much better funded commercial plans.

Yes, marketing is my hobby. I'm sure this utterly perplexes the competition. Some people spend 30 bucks a month playing online video games, I do this. And who knows, maybe it'll actually help someone.

Can I buy noSdiet branded merchandise such as t-shirts, refrigerator magnets, key rings, buttons, coffee mugs, plates, calendars, bumper stickers, business cards, lunchboxes, etc. with the entire diet (all 14 words) printed on them?

Not at the present time.

I've got a [business card](#) , which you are welcome to print out and distribute, if you can figure out how.

(relatively) **New!** I'm also working working (very slowly) on a "Propaganda Pack," consisting of some of the above, and a NoSDiet Manifesto, which will pretty much just be a high production value, minibook sized printout of this site, but might make a nice motivational souvenir/stocking stuffer. [Let me know](#)

if you're interested in either of these, and I might finish it within the lifetime of the universe.