

Never Say DIET



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I had a pretty gifted metabolism that could combust a full plate of ziti at lunch and dessert twice a day. A year ago, however, despite my dedication to regular exercise, my metabolism slowed to a crawl, and eight pounds piled on at my waist, threatening to cost me the cool wardrobe I'd built over the past 15 years. I was also worried that the obesity and diabetes in my father's family would finally catch up with me. Plus, a recent spate of cluster headaches had left me puffy and sore on one side of my face. That's when my friend Nancy told me about an eating plan that had helped her deal with a few health issues while dropping her muffin top.

Nancy's plan came from her friend Lyn-Genet Recitas, whom I visited at her yoga studio in Harlem. Lyn is not a doctor; based on anecdotal client research, she has created an eating program that fights inflammation and weight gain. Some of her research flies in the face of accepted science (for instance, she says, "Oatmeal is the devil!"—meaning that it stops you up and bulks you out, which in my experience is 100 percent true). She sent me away with a 14-day meal plan.

As I forged into the beginning of her mostly vegetarian cleanse—shaved carrots and beets with lemon juice, no added sugar or salt allowed—I had an unexpected reaction: I realized for the first time how emotionally charged was my desire to eat whatever I pleased. But since Lyn believes that we oversauce and oversalt our meals to the point that we can't enjoy the ingredients, paring food back to its original natural flavor is key to changing how we eat. I came to see her point—but in those first days, the food was so bland that my poor husband declared, "I know how this works: You go from looking forward to each meal to dreading it!"

But amazingly, just a few days into the cleansing program, I began to taste—perhaps for the first time—the natural sweetness in carrots. I switched from packaged breakfast cereals to grains, flax and dried fruit, with a vegetarian salad for lunch.

Over the next several days, I began to lose weight, and we added in new foods one by one (fish, chicken, beef, lamb) to see which would cause the weight loss to stop. To my astonishment,

it was salmon that packed on a pound and a half, while steak did not. From there I was able to create my "friendly foods" list and avoid my "bad" foods. By the end of the first week, I'd lost eight pounds, and the soreness around my face had vanished.

Today, a year later, I no longer have sugar cravings. Since I've upped my water intake to 64 ounces a day and reduced my daily caffeine to a single cup of coffee, my skin has begun to shine (people have noticed), and my abdomen has unbloated. The pounds I lost have stayed off, so I don't have to sell my wardrobe on eBay.

But here are my biggest surprises: The biotin from the flax has made my hair stop falling out (a process that I'd been assured was just a part of aging), and the elimination of juices has killed my acid reflux.

Lyn's plan is not for everyone, but she does count various magazine editors and chefs as fans. Read our interview with her on page 134; if you decide you want to reach her, you can do so by e-mailing her at theplan@lyngenet.com. She's a taskmaster, but I, for one, have found that her regimen changed my life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Jane Seymour".

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AMERICA'S NEXT TOP DIET GURU?

Former restaurateur Lyn-Genet Recitas has created an unusual, even controversial weight-loss path for her clients. Funny thing, it seems to be working >> *by* JUDY JONES

» **TO MANY** Harlem residents, Lyn-Genet Recitas is best known as the woman who runs Neighborhood Holistic, a nonprofit center that offers yoga, massage and alternative-health services on a sliding scale, making them accessible to people of all income levels. To

her private nutrition clients, however—a list that includes a disproportionate number of high-profile chefs, restaurateurs and media executives (among them *More's* editor-in-chief, Lesley Jane Seymour)—Recitas is a guru whose radical rethinking of healthy eating can produce life-changing results. “I lost 20 pounds in a few weeks and no longer have acid reflux. I sleep better and am more energetic. And people say I look 10 years younger!” raves Scott Conant, a New York City-based restaurant owner and guest judge on Bravo’s *Top Chef*.

His enthusiasm is typical of followers of The Plan, an eating protocol that Recitas cobbled together from diverse sources, such as yoga, Chinese food theory, herbology, homeopathy and naturopathic nutrition (she has a master’s degree in the latter from Clayton College of Natural Health), as well as 25 years in the restaurant business. The result is a quirky eating program that conflicts with standard dietary guidelines—but may actually be effective.

Recitas, a 46-year-old with 11 percent body fat, reveals to *More* the thinking behind the buzz.

JJ How did you become so interested in nutrition?

LGR I was a very sickly child and a chronic migraine sufferer. Doctors put me on all sorts of medications. Then, when I was 14, I had a migraine that basically lasted all summer, and I said, This is ridiculous. That’s when I started studying nutrition seriously, just to make myself better. »

JJ Your views are unorthodox. What made you think outside the box?

LGR After I got my undergraduate degree in holistic nutrition, people would come to me with their weight issues, and I would suggest healthy foods for them. But they were also bringing me their health concerns. I began to notice that whenever there was a bump up in a client's weight, there was a corresponding increase in the symptoms of whatever her malady was. I started to collect data, do research and create a list of the foods that have caused the biggest reactions in my patients. What's new about The Plan is the realization that certain perfectly ordinary foods are not only making you fat; they're causing you to age prematurely and are probably triggering health problems you're predisposed to, such as constipation, acid reflux, migraines, joint pain or eczema.

JJ In your view, what causes these negative reactions to foods?

LGR It's a kind of allergic response, and it's related to the idea that chronic low-grade inflammation contributes to many conditions, like heart disease and diabetes. This concept has been on the medical front burner for maybe 10 years. I believe that when an allergen is introduced into your system, your body tries to keep the bad guy away from the heart, liver and brain by flooding the tissues with water. This reactive response can last up to 72 hours and not only will cause weight to stay on but may also kick-start some ailments that are latent in your system. [Editor's note: According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, there is no evidence that food allergies contribute to chronic low-grade inflammation in your body.]

JJ What are some foods you believe can cause problems for many people?

LGR Some examples are shellfish (with the exception of scallops), turkey, pork, eggs, Greek yogurt, roasted nuts, asparagus, green beans, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, beans, oatmeal, salmon . . . the list goes on. This

does not mean these foods are bad for you. It just means that, based on my research, there's a possibility that these foods won't work with your chemistry.

JJ Your list consists of foods that most nutritionists would say people should eat. How do you explain the fact that your results often conflict with studies done by scientists who've invested millions of dollars and years of laboratory research?

LGR Much of their testing isn't done on an individual basis. Each person is chemically unique. Foods may be healthy in a vacuum, but when combined with your individual chemistry, they can be quite toxic.

JJ So research reflects averages, not individual experience?

LGR Yes.

JJ How does reactivity change as we age?

LGR I've noticed that changes in your reactions to foods come in spurts. There's generally a leap around age 25, then a big one between 33 and 35, another big one around 42 or 43 and another one around 50. For some women, there's a leap with the birth of their first child—and a second child throws all women for a loop. Because of the increase in chronic inflammation over the years, the food you're eating now will have a different effect on you than it did when you were a teenager.

JJ What are you basing your numbers and conclusions on?

LGR On my own research. On my clients. All I'm using is data that I've compiled.

JJ Let's look at a specific example from your list. What is the problem with oatmeal?

LGR I'd estimate that 95 percent of the people I work with can't eat oatmeal without gaining a substantial amount of weight. It can cause two days' worth of constipation and particularly affects my migraine sufferers.

JJ You know, oatmeal gives me indigestion, but I've always thought I must be crazy because it's supposed to be so good for you. »

LGR Exactly! That's just it. Everybody's saying, "I thought I was crazy" and "I thought I was the only one." People are making themselves eat these foods that are supposed to be good for them and cutting out the cookies. But the cookies aren't the problem! The problem is letting other people tell you what is healthy for you.

JJ Can you explain the theory behind The Plan?

LGR The Plan is basically an elimination/rotation diet in which we're looking for responses to specific foods. Tests should be done on everything you eat on a regular basis. If you eat fish, you should be tested on fish; if you eat pork, you should be tested on pork; and so forth. Most people eat 30 to 40 of the same foods regularly, so I would run through all of those to make sure they're working for you.

The Plan starts out with a three-day cleanse. It rotates from season to season and is tailored to each individual. I recommend lots of fresh vegetables that are lower on the reactive-food list, as well as brown or basmati rice. The first day after the cleanse, I start to program in foods that, based on my research, are the least reactive. I have structured it so that you should be losing half a pound a day. If you're not and your weight stabilizes, it means that the food you ate is mildly reactive for you; if you gain half a pound, it means the food is reactive. If you gain one or two pounds, we know that food is really toxic for you and you just shouldn't eat it.

JJ I like the way that shifts the attitude from "Oh, I gained two pounds; I must have done something wrong" to "I gained two pounds; something I ate isn't right for my body."

LGR Yes. Once you know your friendly foods, you can create your own list of foods that you love. I have a lot of clients who'll say they're going away for the weekend, and they know they're going to gain five pounds. Who cares? You put your friendly foods back in for a day, and the weight will fly off. That takes so much stress and anxiety out of eating.

JJ Can you describe the general format of The Plan after you've established which foods work best for you?

LGR Yes. It consists of three meals and a snack every day. Basically, you have lower-gluten carbohydrates and one animal protein a day, a protein and a fat at every meal, some fruits and unlimited vegetables. You can also have some nuts and cheese. And a glass of wine is encouraged, as is dessert. You're having about 1,800 calories daily, and you're still losing half a pound a day.

JJ Are there any across-the-board exclusions?

LGR During the cleanse, yes. An important element of The Plan is having no salt for the first three days, which sensitizes the palate. That, plus programming in the least reactive foods, makes people more aware of how their bodies respond to food.

JJ So you're not judging reactivity solely by whether you've gained or lost weight.

LGR We can use the scale as a gauge, but people will know how they react to a food by how they feel. I think that's what makes The Plan so revolutionary. It's about teaching you to listen to your body. You should never feel gassy, bloated or tired after a meal. Those are all signs that your body can't process that food.

JJ It's interesting to realize just how unconscious we can be about our interactions with food. Whenever I experience those problems after meals, I assume I must have eaten too much—even when I know I haven't.

LGR We live in a society that takes you away from your body. I'm doing the exact opposite. And it's super fun because it's like a huge puzzle, and your body is giving you the clues. I'm not making up all this stuff. I'm just putting together a lot of pieces that nobody has put together before. 🍌

TO CONTACT RECITAS, who works one on one with clients around the world, e-mail her at theplan@lyngenet.com or call 646-330-4769.



For a sample three-day detox program, go to more.com/recitas.