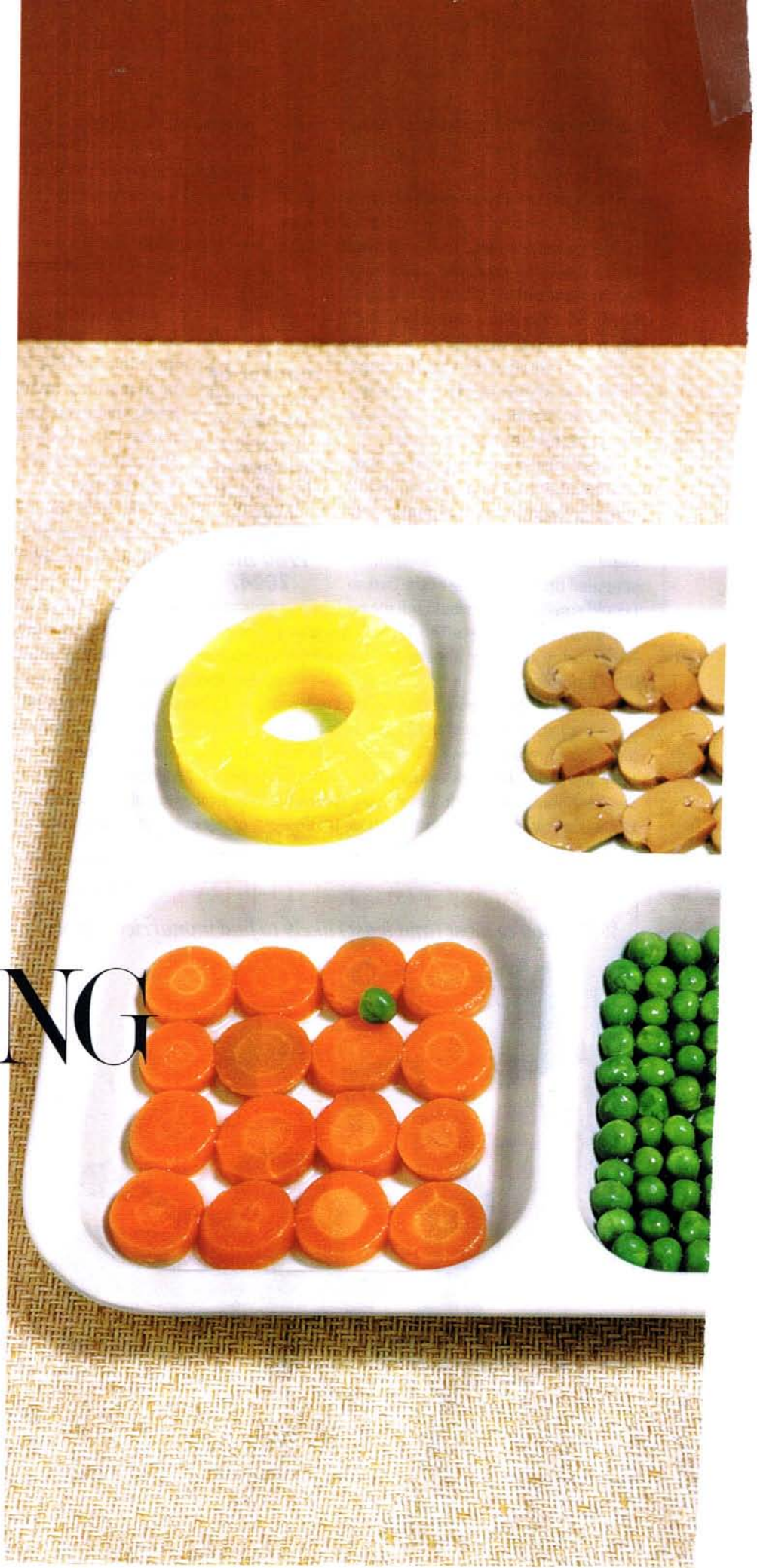
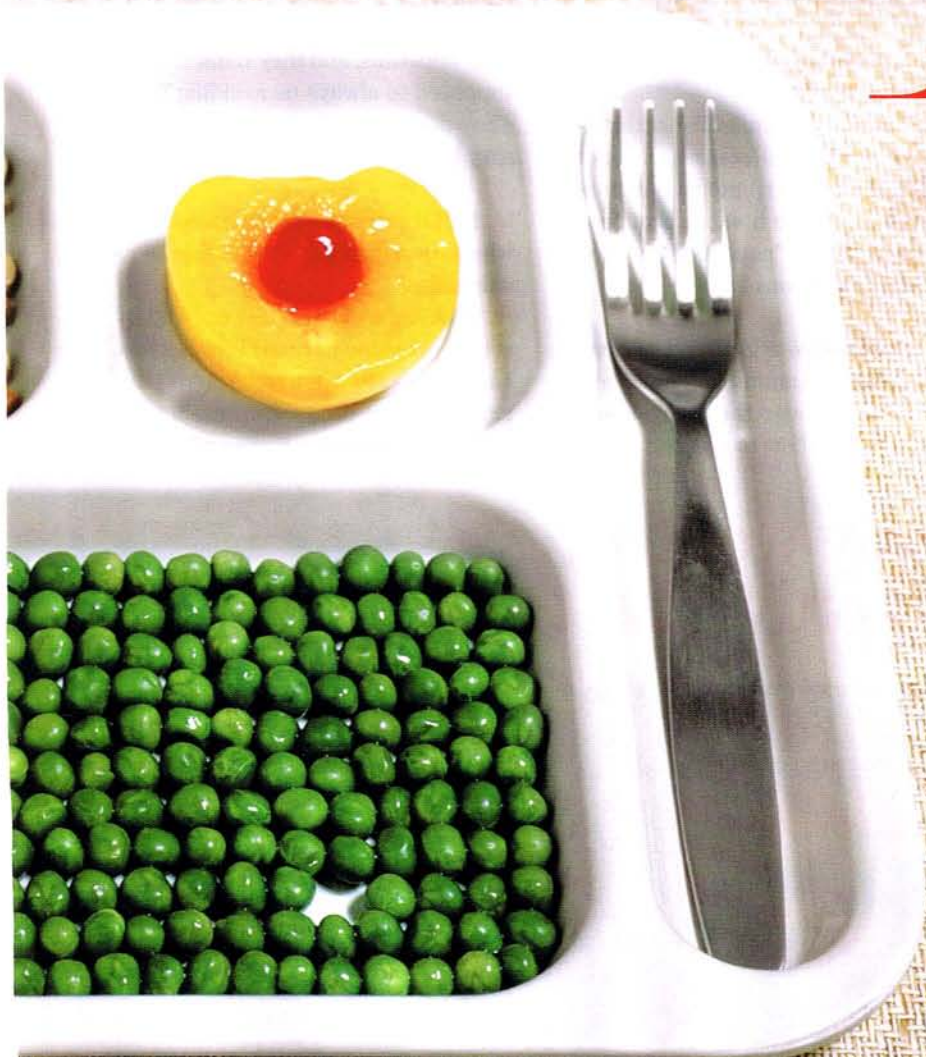
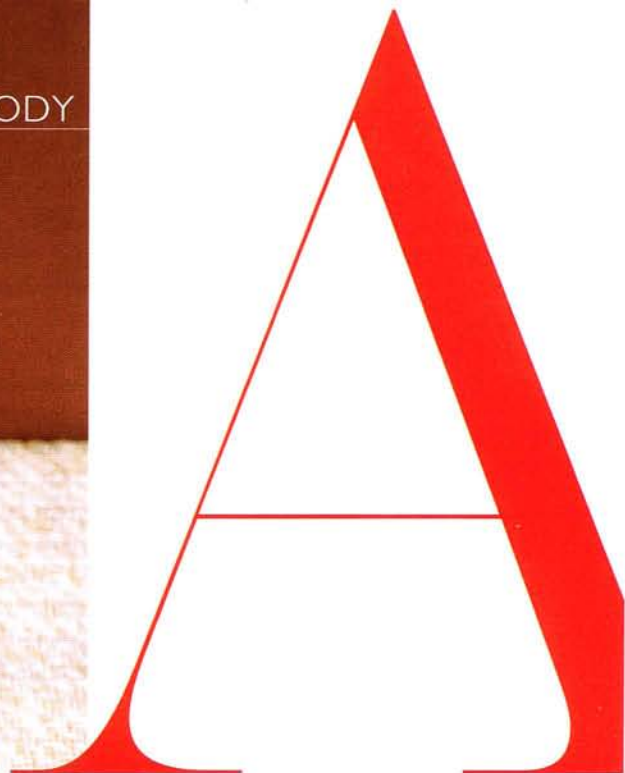


IS YOUR DIET MAKING YOU FAT?



YOUR BODY



SUSIE ORBACH THINKS SO

She wants to overhaul your eating habits—and start a class-action lawsuit against Weight Watchers International. The provocative British psychoanalyst, onetime therapist of Princess Diana, and current adviser to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, talks with
ARIANNE COHEN

Q: Why are you organizing a suit against Weight Watchers International?

A: If dieting worked, you'd only have to do it once. Weight Watchers, like most diet companies, depends on repeat customers. When I went on a Weight Watchers program in the U.K., I was told it had a 97-percent recidivism rate.

Q: But is that the company's fault? Aren't dieters responsible for their own choices?

A: I believe that companies have to have social responsibility. Weight Watchers is saying, "We have a solution for you." But the very solution it offers often promotes compulsive eating. To me, that's false advertising.

Q: What is "compulsive eating"?

A: The definition is really wide: It's not eating in response to hunger, but instead eating with regard to a set of rules, which you then break. You might decide not to eat sweets and carbohydrates, and then rebel.

Q: Why do you think that diets should happen just once? I diet every year or so.

A: A diet allows you to lose weight, but it doesn't allow you to change your eating to sustain your weight loss. Weight Watchers' notion isn't connected to hunger or satisfaction. And there are very strong arguments that if you continually put your body into starvation mode, your metabolic "set point" doesn't get reset. Under normal circumstances, if you overeat or undereat, your metabolism slows down or speeds up to keep you at a stable weight. After constant dieting, that set point breaks.

Q: Are you saying that diets set women up to be fat?

A: There's plenty of evidence that diets may contribute to fat storage. So, yeah. Also, diets contribute to compulsive eating and give a sense that food is "dangerous" or "naughty." Deprivation creates conditions for rebellion.

Q: Describe your ideal diet company.

A: I'd have an antidiet company to help women discover their physiological appetite and how to respond to it, and



Susie Orbach is the author of the classic *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*.

To find out more about Orbach and her crusade against the diet industry, visit www.any-body.org.

to understand the emotional meanings of fatness and thinness, because a lot of people are fat in their heads but aren't physically fat.

Q: So if a woman responds to her natural hunger, she'll reach a healthy weight?

A: Absolutely. Unless she's dieted for so many years that her set point is muck.

Q: So you consider any eating when not hungry to be problematic?

A: Right. And more problematic is that women are so frightened of food and of their appetites, and they think they're supposed to always be avoiding food. They don't actually know what ordinary hunger is.

Q: Isn't it extreme to label friends who go on a mini ice-cream binge as unhealthy?

A: I think that's the problem. Why do you need to have a binge? Why not just have ice cream whenever you're hungry for it? Why does something have to be forbidden to make it great? >>

“If dieting really worked, you'd only have to do it once.”



WEIGHT WATCHERS RESPONDS:

"We appreciate Susie Orbach's desire to educate women that there are no quick fixes in achieving long-term weight loss. But her criticism of us is misguided: Research has found our approach to be effective. In fact, a study published in the International Journal of Obesity found that people who achieved a healthy body weight attending Weight Watchers meetings were much less likely to regain weight than the norm. That's because Weight Watchers goes beyond counting calories, fat, and fiber; it also helps people change their behaviors, learn how to eat healthier foods, and get more physical activity, all within a supportive environment."

Q: How should a healthy woman eat?

A: Put it this way: How should a healthy woman pee? She should pee when she needs to, and not under regulation.

Q: Why is it so hard for women to have a decent relationship with their bodies?

A: Well, we've seen a profound assault on women's bodies over the past 30 years. I mean, my mom was meant to be attractive in her early 20s to get her man. Now, you've got to be attractive from the age of 6 until you're—how old is Joan Collins? There's something liberating about the sense that sexuality does not disappear with age, but there's also something quite crazy about having to conform to certain ideals of beauty.

Q: Do these pressures come from men?

A: I don't think it's men alone. I think something takes root in the culture. Much of this goes back to the marketing and style industries, who make a very strange economic argument that you can somehow sell glamour by reducing everyone down to one size.

Q: What would you like to see in ads?

A: I would like to see gorgeous women in all shapes and sizes, glamorized up as one is for a catwalk, showing clothes more actively, rather than the suggestive, look-at-me kind of thing.

Q: Aren't models, by definition, supposed to be human hangers?

A: I don't think that's true today. Now they're supposed to be sort of in-your-face and unapproachable at the same time. I've worked quite hard on countering this in the Dove campaign.

Q: How should women see themselves?

A: Women today produce themselves as a kind of commodity. We don't produce goods anymore. We produce our bodies now. It's almost like a woman's body is her brand.

Q: Isn't that just self-expression?

A: *Nooooo.* The brand is no longer the clothes that a woman wears; she wears the clothes on top of the brand of her body, and it has to conform. That's the problem. **mc**

Should You Stop Dieting?

We asked if diets make you slender, or obsessed. Here's what you said



Yes, Diets Can Make You Fat

—Monica, 32, paramedic

■ My first diet was Slim-Fast, and I was probably 20 or 21. It didn't work. I tried Atkins until I felt sick. Weight Watchers worked, but I had to obsessively add up calories, figure out food points, and deduct activity points.

→ I can't say I've stopped dieting and lost weight, but I have stopped obsessing and lost stress. I realize that losing 10 pounds won't fix my life any more than gaining 10 will wreck it. If my mind is constantly attacking my body, then I can't be at peace.

→ As a paramedic, I'm used to viewing the body as working/not working; alive/dead. I've never seen anyone die from being 10 pounds overweight. I have, however, seen people who've tried to cut their fat off, or have ruined their bodies by not eating.

→ If your weight is taking years off your life, it should be addressed. Otherwise, do the best you can and be at peace with where it leaves you.



No, Diets Don't Make You Fat

—Colleen, 24, foster-care caseworker

■ I think diets make you aware, but not obsessed. I grew up playing sports but also eating pizza, curly fries, and mac and cheese. I started college at 180 pounds; I'm 5'5".

→ While studying forensic psychology in grad school, I started looking into jobs at the New York Police Department and the FBI. That's when my life took a serious blow ... there were weight requirements! I decided to try Weight Watchers. I lost six pounds in the first two weeks. I was shocked to learn how bad my eating habits were. Through the program, I learned how to cook for myself and include my family in my healthy lifestyle.

I started going to the gym, too—within four months, 35 pounds were gone (my fiancé lost 45). I look 100 times better, but the most drastic improvement has been to my health: When I was overweight, I couldn't even run a mile. Recently, I completed my first triathlon.



Not Sure If Diets Make You Fat

—Erin, 23, marketing coordinator

■ I've watched friends and coworkers try Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers, the Zone, or eliminating sugar, wheat, or dairy—and they never seem to be happy even if they do lose the weight. I think the key is to eat everything in moderation. If you want ice cream, eat it—just not every day, and not the entire gallon.

→ I've never really dieted, but I've also never been a huge junk-food fan. The only time I gained a significant amount of weight was during my freshman year of college. Those 20 pounds were horrifying. The summer afterward, I realized I should start exercising and watching portions—but not necessarily change what I eat. It took about a year for me to lose the weight. → Now, I eat lots of fruit, yogurt, chicken, and other healthy foods. I just let myself eat what I want, in moderation, until I'm full. I'm happy with my weight now, though I'd love to gain more muscle tone.