

## Prevention

### My 'perfect' diet is making me fat!

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EAT GREAT, LOSE WEIGHT

# My 'perfect' diet is making me fat!

Meet three women who know a wholegrain from a white carb but still can't drop those unwanted kilos.

**Our experts fix their flubs.**

**We've followed the weight loss rules:** More vegetables, less red meat, no chips or colas. So if we're doing everything right, why is the needle on the scale going in the wrong direction? We asked our diet experts—Ishi Khosla, *Prevention* advisor, Ritika Samaddar, chief dietician, Max Healthcare, New Delhi, Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, author of *The Flexitarian Diet* and Katherine Brooking, RD, a New York City-based nutritionist—to review the weeklong food diaries of women like us and find out. Even with the best of intentions, something as simple as a healthy-but-over-sized snack can make us gain. But finding small ways to save just 100 calories a day can take off about 5 kilos in a year. Learn from these women's mistakes—their diet tweaks can help you reach your weight-loss goals.

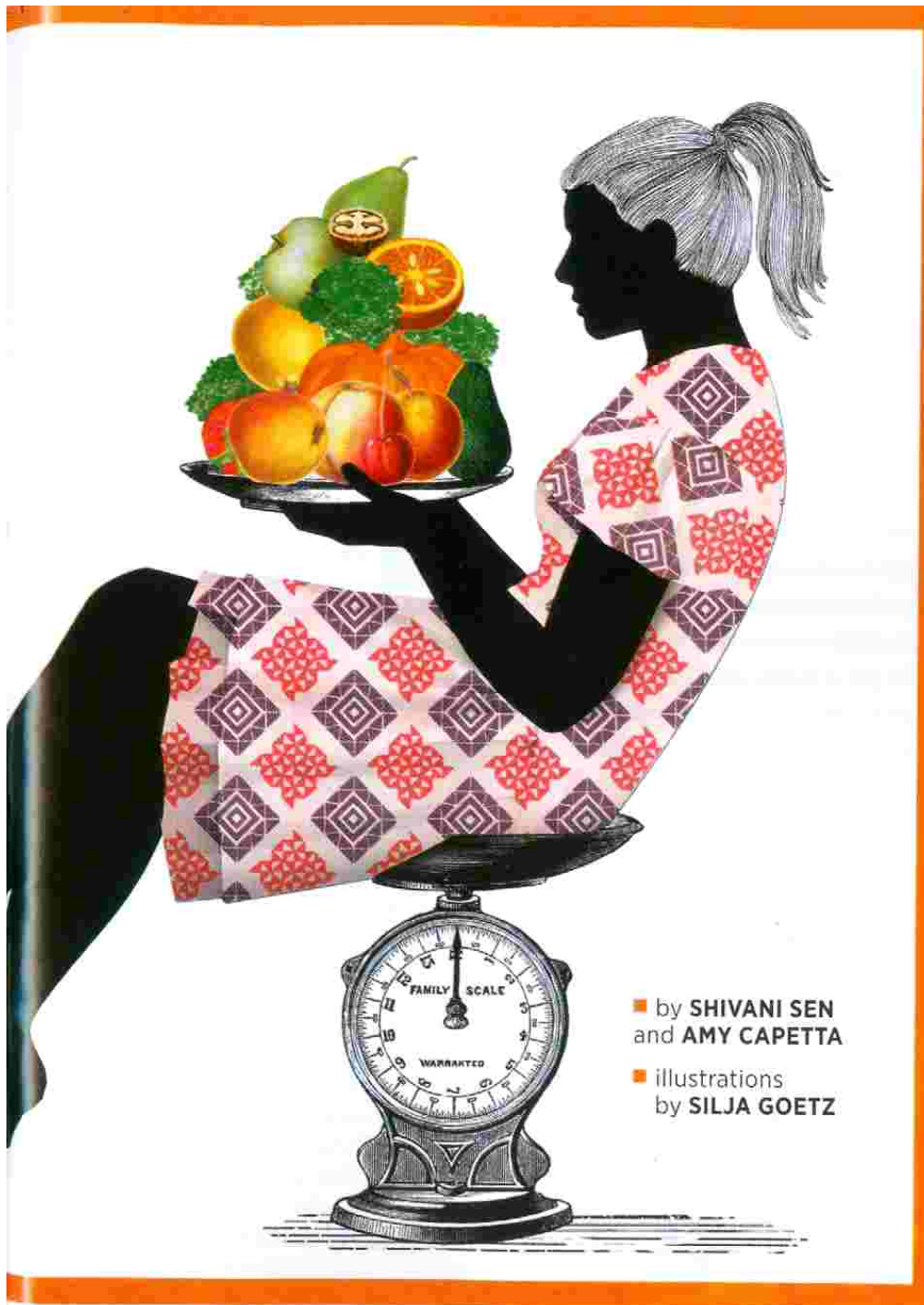


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## The Yo-Yo Dieter

“I eat healthy, balanced meals and snacks—and my weight still fluctuates”

—Gunjan Batra, 34

For the past 10 years, Gunjan has her scale swing widely. At the age of 24, just before getting married she lost about 5 kilos and maintained it for a while, but after her first pregnancy, she was unable to lose all the excess weight. This is when she got in touch with Ishi Khosla. With Khosla, Gunjan was able to lose about 23–25 kilos in about 1-1/2 years. After losing so much, she has been working towards maintaining her weight. She feels, however, that even though she eats right, her weight fluctuates. “I weigh 61 kilos now and think I eat healthy, yet I don’t know why I find it difficult to maintain a healthy weight,” she says. For Gunjan, that means making sure each meal includes a healthy combination of fats, carbohydrates and proteins, plus at least one dairy—such as curd or paneer or lassi with vegetables or dal. For snacks and on-the-go meals, she sometimes gets a coffee, or munches

on nuts. Her one soft spot is Maggi noodles, though. “I try to satisfy my cravings with barley porridge with lots of vegetables added,” she says. And to keep her ‘furnace stoked’, Gunjan eats every 3–4 hours. She also drinks plenty of fluids through the day. She indulges in fast food once a week but applies the principles of healthy eating and exercises regularly—by and large.

## EXPERT FIX

“Eating every few hours is a good way to keep your metabolism up, but on analysing Gunjan’s diet I saw that she was consuming way too many calories,” says Khosla. “Big meals and high calorie snacks were the culprits. Even though her choices were healthy, she was eating large meals; it was almost like she was eating two meals at one time,” adds Khosla. According to the expert the trick for Gunjan is to reduce the portions and pick up the right kind of snacks—this would go a long way in helping her maintain her weight.” Khosla also suggests Gunjan should keep a food diary because it makes one accountable. Other calorie-cutting tips for Gunjan are:

**Apply the principle of balance.** Gunjan’s comfort food is instant noodles but even if she eats the healthier wheat version, she is really having a full meal. “If you have not been able to hold back on the not-so-healthy stuff and end up eating excessively, apply the principle of balance, which is to go light on the next meal. Use

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food trade-offs that allow you to indulge from time to time,” advises Khosla.

**Exercise portion control.** If you must have something that’s not so healthy, restrict yourself to a smaller portion, rather than struggle with your will-power. Use smaller plates, bowls, spoons, cups and glasses. It helps you create an illusion about the volume of food you eat.

**Skip ‘diet’ treats.** Fat-free and sugar-free aren’t necessarily low-calorie. For example, one brand of chocolate chip cookie has 53 calories; the reduced-fat version has only 6 fewer. Studies show that overweight people who eat low-fat instead of regular snacks consume, on average, twice as many calories.

GUNJAN'S DIET TRANSFORMATION	
Before:	After:
<b>BREAKFAST</b> Bread toast and coffee	<b>BREAKFAST</b> Bhelpuri with yoghurt and 5 almonds
<b>SNACKS</b> Biscuits	<b>SNACK</b> 1 Fruit
<b>LUNCH</b> 2 chapattis or paranthas, vegetables and yoghurt	<b>LUNCH</b> Cheela or barley dalia with paneer vegetable
<b>SNACKS</b> Biscuits and coffee or instant noodles	<b>SNACK</b> Roasted snacks with coffee
<b>DINNER</b> 1 chapatti, vegetables and 1 bowl dal	<b>DINNER</b> Salad, vegetables and dal or soyabean
	<b>POST DINNER</b> Milk
<p>➔ <b>Saves 200-250 calories per day in snacks</b></p>	

## The Food Cop

“I stick to small servings but can’t lose the last 10 kilos”

—Vidya Kusari, 38

Vidya doesn’t eat a lot—in fact, she mostly avoids her breakfast as she is busy with her kid in the mornings, so a cup of tea is what she manages sometimes with a biscuit or two. By 10:30 am or so she is ravenous and usually grabs a piece of chocolate, her biggest weakness or some namkeen. For lunch, she fills up on veggies and dal and tries to avoid chapatti or rice. “Mostly I don’t have dinner until 9:30 pm and then usually go for a chapatti with fish and vegetables,” she says. Red meat is a rare option, so is rice and bread. Occasionally, she indulges in ice-cream or a few chocolates after dinner. She does go for a 20-30 minute walk daily and practises yoga for 15-20 minutes on most days. She weighs 85 kgs in her 5-foot-4 frame and wants to drop at least 10 kilos more. “It’s so confusing,” she says. “How can I eat so little and still not lose?” she asks.

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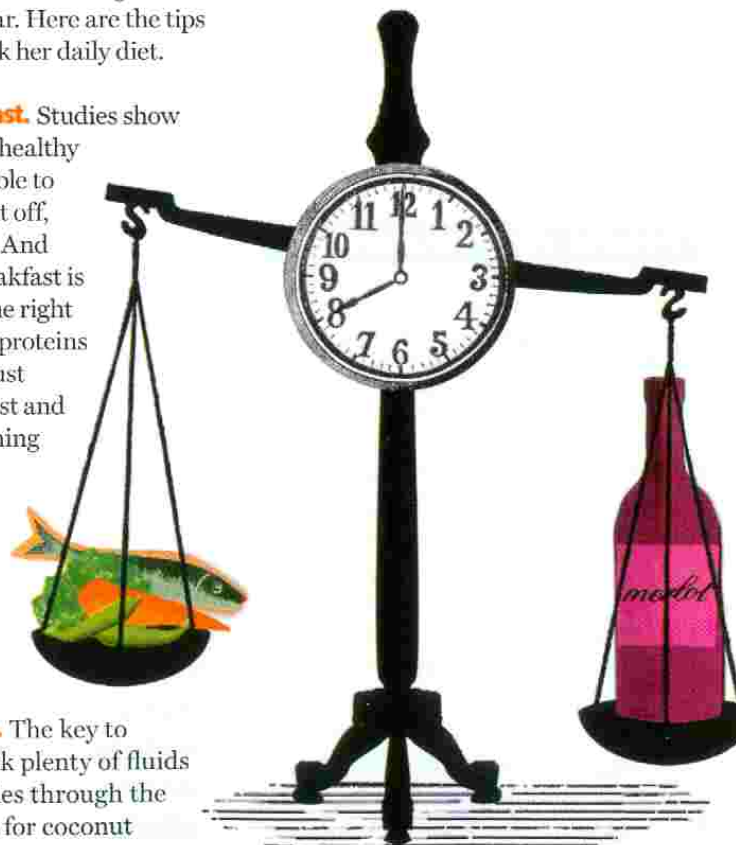
“According to Vidya’s account, her intake is not more than a 1,000 Kcal on most days, but she is still putting on weight and is not able to lose those extra kilos. Actually not eating enough is her problem. Eating small portions, infrequently slows down your metabolism, so your body can conserve energy and then to prevent starvation, the body starts storing fat. To reach her goal, Vidya should consume about 1,200-1,400 calories a day and spread out her meals and snacks more evenly to keep her metabolism stoked and blood sugar levels steady,” says Samaddar. Here are the tips she was given to tweak her daily diet.

**Eat a healthy breakfast.** Studies show that people who eat a healthy breakfast are better able to lose weight and keep it off, than those who don’t. And what you have for breakfast is equally important. The right quantity of carbs and proteins is essential. “Vidya must have a proper breakfast and then have a mid-morning serving of fruit; this will help her avoid the chocolates that she binges on during the day to quell her hunger prangs,” says Samaddar.

**Curb liquid calories.** The key to weight loss is to drink plenty of fluids that are low in calories through the day. Vidya should go for coconut

water, lemon water, soups, organic teas and buttermilk between meals.

**Keep snack portions in check.** Nuts provide healthy fats, fruits anti-oxidants and fibre. Besides salads and soups, buttermilk could be taken as snack—these not only curb hunger pangs but are low in calories. “Vidya’s snack of chocolates and namkeen bhujias add on more than 200 calories. She should pick a healthier alternative like an apple or some sprouts, that are no more than 100 calories,” suggests Samaddar.



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**Expand menu options.** “Different foods offer different kinds of nutrition which is why variety is the central tenet of a sound diet. Vidya needs to bring variety into her diet—she eats the same thing day in and day out. She can expand her choices and still create a healthy meal by including chicken, fish and eggs that are all great protein sources,” Samaddar advises.

VIDYA'S DIET TRANSFORMATION	
Before:	After:
<b>BREAKFAST</b> 2 c tea with 2 tsp sugar	<b>BREAKFAST</b> 1 c tea with 1 bowl porridge (oats) or 2 egg whites, scrambled
<b>LUNCH</b> 1 bowl vegetable and 1 bowl dal	<b>SNACK</b> Fruits with buttermilk or coconut water
<b>SNACK</b> 1 cup tea with 3-4 biscuits	<b>LUNCH</b> 1 bowl salad, 1 chapatti, 1 bowl vegetable and 1 bowl dal
<b>SNACK</b> 3-4 small pieces of chocolates or namkeen bhujia	<b>SNACK</b> 1 c tea with 2-3 digestive biscuits or steamed corn
<b>DINNER</b> 1 chapatti with 1 bowl vegetable and 100 g fish	<b>DINNER</b> Bowl of steamed chick peas, veggies and fruits tossed in extra-virgin olive oil
	<b>THE SWEET TOOTH:</b> Flavoured yoghurt

➔ **Jump-start metabolism with a midmorning snack**

## The Sweet Tooth

“I lost 59 kilos but can't give up my chocolate”

—Julia Griggs Havey, 47

If anyone knows the diet damage sugar can cause, it's Julia. She used to weigh 290 pounds (that's 130 kilos!) and chocolate and ice-cream were mostly to blame. Then, 12 years ago, she shed 130 pounds (59 kilos) by improving her diet and increasing her exercise. “I've written books about my weight loss and now coach others to live healthy,” says Julia. “But in the past few years, I've put about 20 pounds (9 kilos) back on and I'm not happy about it.” Julia still sticks to the habits that helped her lose. She drinks lots of water; gets her protein from chicken, fish and egg whites; skips colas; watches her portions; and works out regularly. “When I get busy, however, I have a tougher time eating healthy,” she says. “I'll find myself giving in to my trigger foods more often. And if I'm not in bed by 11 PM, I'm searching for a snack which usually ends up being something sweet. My diet is always a work in progress and right now, I know it needs a tweak.”

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“Julia is savvy about weight loss,” says Brooking. “She incorporates lots of steamed vegetables and fruit into her diet, which is great. But she does have a sweet tooth and that’s probably what’s undoing her hard work.” Some chocolate-covered almonds or a few handfuls of chocolate chips in the afternoon, cookies or sugary cereal after dinner—they all add up, says Blatner. To help curb her munchies, she should make sure each meal is well balanced—3 ounces (85 g) of protein, 1 cup or less of wholegrains and lots of vegetables. Here, some tips to get her back on track.

**Cook in bulk.** “It’s tough to find time to make meals every day, so when you do cook, prepare more than you need and freeze the extra portions,” suggests Brooking. That way, even on the craziest days, you have a healthy home-cooked meal ready to reheat. And keep good-for-you snacks in the house, such as wholegrain crackers or low-fat cheese wedges. “I always tell my clients that when it comes to weight loss, being prepared is more than half the battle,” says Brooking.

**Get a lower-calorie chocolate fix.** Julia loves chocolate, but just five chocolate-covered almonds have 210 calories and a giant soft-baked deli cookie could pack 400 to 500 calories. Try this instead, suggests Blatner: drizzle fresh fruit with chocolate syrup (1 tablespoon is 54 calories), stir 1 tablespoon of chocolate chips (70 calories) into fat-free Greek-style yoghurt, or sip diet hot chocolate (25 calories per packet).

### Have peppermint after dinner.

Because Julia is a classic night eater, she needs to find ways to tell her body the kitchen is closed, says Blatner. Chewing on peppermint-flavoured gum and drinking peppermint tea are two great options. Researchers at Wheeling Jesuit University found that people who simply sniffed peppermint ate 23% fewer calories, on average, over a 5-day period. ■

JULIA'S DIET TRANSFORMATION	
Before:	After:
<b>BREAKFAST</b> Protein smoothie: 1 banana, protein powder, water and ice cubes; glass of juice	<b>BREAKFAST</b> Fruit smoothie 1 small banana, 1/2 c fat-free milk and ice cubes
<b>SNACK</b> Handful of chocolate-covered almonds	<b>SNACK</b> 1 Tbsp hummus with 1 serving wholegrain crackers
<b>LUNCH</b> 1 c butternut squash ravioli drizzled in olive oil and sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and basil, with 1 head of steamed broccoli	<b>LUNCH</b> 1/2 c butternut squash ravioli drizzled in olive oil and sprinkled with Parmesan cheese and basil, with 85 g grilled chicken and steamed broccoli
<b>DINNER</b> 170 g roasted, skinless chicken breast	<b>SNACK</b> 1 c diet hot chocolate
<b>SNACK</b> 1 c frosted cereal with 1/2 c fat-free milk and blueberries	<b>DINNER</b> 85 g lean meat, 1/2 c brown rice and salad; fat-free Greek-style yoghurt with 1 Tbsp chocolate chips for dessert
<b>LATE-NIGHT SNACK</b> Handful of chocolate chips	
➡ Satisfies chocolate cravings for only 95 calories	