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Eat the way you look at a beautiful picture or sing in a beautiful choir.

– Muriel Barbery, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*

My Story

I used to publish diet books. Big, bestselling, blockbuster diet books. And what happened? I put on over 2 stone and developed a spare tyre around my middle . . . this is how I lost it without losing my mind and how anyone can too, living in the real world.

I had all the good intentions in the world and they were always at their height on Sunday evenings. ‘This week I’m going on a health kick . . .’ and then life just seemed to keep getting in the way, usually by Tuesday. I had no excuses. I was a health publisher, surrounded by the latest advice. And yet, I was so wrapped up in deadlines and ambitions that I forgot how much I love to feel energetic and full of vitality. I fell into the trap of comforting stress with my nemesis foods and alcohol. I picked from the buffet of diets

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I had at my fingertips: low-carb worked for a while, until I could take life without bread no more, and I filled my cupboards with healthy foods that sat there staring at me.

I was frustrated that I could no longer fit into any of my clothes. My tummy had become a dreaded muffin top, which I guess is another sign that your jeans are the wrong size. I often felt bloated, sluggish and slow and remembered a few years before when I walked everywhere, was full of beans and felt great about myself and about life. When I tell friends now that I was more than 2 stone overweight, they often refuse to believe me.

‘So where did you hide it?’

‘Your scales must’ve been lying.’

‘I just don’t remember you putting on weight.’

Well, for me, the extra inches were pretty evenly distributed all over my body, from my thighs to my bum, my tummy and my arms. And I didn’t gain weight quickly; over three years the pounds just crept on, very quietly and very gradually.

Many of us have a trigger when it comes to weight gain. It might be giving up smoking, never quite managing to shift the baby weight or letting stress get the better of us. For me the initial trigger was a fall down some stairs and a dislocated shoulder. Unfortunately I developed a frozen shoulder as a result and found it incredibly difficult to cook for a few months, plus I could only walk a little way before the deep ache in my shoulder set in. I had to resort to ready meals or picnic dinners and became quite sedentary (not to mention fed up).

My healthy habits slowly deserted me and even when my shoulder was back to normal, I didn’t make an automatic return to lots of walking and healthy eating. I was

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in the cliché vicious circle as the lack of exercise and good food affected my energy and stress levels, both in the wrong direction, and the lack of energy meant I couldn't be bothered to go for my usual long walks at the weekend. I still indulged in edible treats; I just stopped burning them off.

Once you have got out of the habit of healthy living, it's no mean feat to start up again, especially for more than a couple of days. As my trousers started getting tighter and tighter and I went up a size, and then another, I would spend the weekends promising myself that this was the week I would change. But it just never got beyond the vague promises. I was continually disappointing myself and feeling like I had no willpower at all; I practically wrote myself off as just being weak.

So how *did* I make the change and see it through beyond the first few days, weeks and now years? Why did it work? What did I do? And why did I end up starting the Flat Tummy Club?

- I was honest with myself and with anyone who would listen
- I focused
- I made a plan
- I committed to the plan and found the time
- I used my brain and improved my knowledge
- I was optimistic and also realistic
- I dealt with my stress
- I ate delicious food
- I enjoyed myself
- I roped in a friend

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All these steps just happen to be proven to help ensure successful weight loss that lasts. I pulled together all my favourite strands of knowledge from across my 10 years of health publishing and began to formulate a plan. I knew that buying a week's worth of healthy food and promising myself to exercise every day wasn't going to cut it, so I would have to do some preparation work first.

I started the first week with an exercise in honesty: keeping a full and complete food, drink and exercise diary the week before New Year. A friend joined me and in early January we went through our diaries, weighed ourselves and even took pictures. It was hilarious and a wake-up call – a good combination. It soon became clear what we each needed to do if we wanted to lose our tummies. I needed to replace the crisps, cheese and booze that had taken over my life and my friend needed to curb her comfort foods. We both needed to find the healthy foods we love and move a lot more.

I took up my own challenge and went for it. I planned that first week with military precision and when I did go out for meals, I scoured the menu for the healthiest options, often very pleasantly surprised as a result. I've still got my diary and I ate plenty of food, but it was all *real food*. I replaced sandwiches with soups, ate a lot of clementines and smoothies and I cooked easy, healthy dinners. I walked every day, whatever the weather. In a week I lost 7lbs of Christmas indulgence, which was just the motivation I needed to keep going, as well as finding it so much easier to get out of bed in the morning, feeling less stiff, far less bloated and about a million times better mid-afternoon.

Three months later, I had lost my initial 1½ stone target, another three months and another ½ stone. Over a year

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later and I am a walking cliché, but I feel so much better, more energized, more balanced. I'm back in my old jeans, 30 bags of sugar lighter and even feel good in a bikini!

First Days of the Flat Tummy Club

I started the Flat Tummy Club with my friend as a bit of a laugh, especially as everyone kept calling it the *Fat* Tummy Club by mistake. We had a founding membership of two, but as I told people what we were up to, friends started asking, 'Well, can I join?' We had created our very own mini 'slimming club' without having to go to the local community hall on a Monday evening.

I ventured into the world of Facebook and started emailing the Flat Tummy Club every week with a few tips, thoughts and recipes. One brave friend gave an anonymous review of having a colonic (see page 227), while another became my snack guru and 'Dawn's Banana Loaf' (see page 369) began its journey towards the cult status it enjoys today. A blog and website eventually followed, and now a book! The message from that first day, when my friend and I could hardly manage to take photos of each other for laughing, stays exactly the same . . .

Feel good, not guilty!

I'm one of those people who are pretty independent and happy in their own company, but there are times when a bit of friendly support is invaluable. I had felt bad about myself for years, but here I was, feeling great and having a laugh. Personally, I think it's incredibly easy to fall into putting on weight, but once you do so, it then gets wrapped up in all sorts of feelings of self-esteem, control and our sense of

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happiness. Everyone is different and we all have a complicated relationship both with food and with our health. I was out of balance and it's that sense of being level again that I cherish.

Going on a fad diet with weird rules could never have given me that balanced approach. I might've managed a couple of weeks and then what? Back to square one. I needed to embrace a healthier lifestyle full stop, one that two years later I'm still very happy to live.

Enough About Me, What About You?

The point of Flat Tummy Club is that it's about *you*. *The Flat Tummy Club Diet* helps you not only to get a flatter tummy, but stay at your happy, healthy weight – no counting calories or mung beans required (unless you like them).

There are some initial steps I take you through before you even change what's on your shopping list. We tackle the mind first, writing your own diary and using a simple questionnaire, so that you can recognize where your tummy came from and discover the impetus to stop vaguely promising yourself to eat less bread or go on a detox, and instead create a fully fledged plan.

We then create the practical plan, because all the research and my own experience show that preparation is the key to success. I am also here to help you stick to your plan and overcome the challenges: from getting home so late you just can't be bothered to cook to Monday mornings when you wonder if all this healthy living is really worth it. There are specific Flat Tummy tips, from Banish the Bloat (see page 129) to Flat Tummy teas, foods, Flat Tummy Workout exercises and restaurant know-how.

Thanks to everyone in the Flat Tummy Club, there are

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anecdotes throughout that, if you are anything like me, you might just recognize, from sugar binges at the weekend to not knowing how to lose weight and cook for teenage children at the same time. And there's plenty of inspiration, from one woman who tried the Portuguese Chicken and Mint Soup (see page 278) and now makes it practically every week to another who simply started eating a healthy breakfast every day and hasn't looked back.

The beauty of *The Flat Tummy Club Diet* is that you get to make your own decisions and create your own simple plan, rather than try to follow a one-size-fits-all approach that however hard you try, you can't shoehorn into your daily life or that makes you feel you are on a depressing deprivation diet. With a few prompting questions, you will soon discover that *you know the answers* to how you can lose weight or stay slim because you know your body better than anyone else.

The key is to start with a positive and honest attitude. If you start to feel really good about yourself and put your health at the top of your agenda, then in turn the effect on those around you will be equally positive. I've also found that being positive about my health and fitness has had an amazing impact on my life in general – I'm more relaxed and optimistic, comfortable with myself and confident with others. That's why the Flat Tummy Club is a guilt-free zone, because if you lose weight from a negative starting point, it will never last.

I will help you put your plan into action, day by day for the first three weeks and with plenty of practical ideas and recipes for continuing for as long as you need to lose weight. My hope is that you will then discover changes that can last a lifetime, because they fit *your* life, rather than leaving you

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wondering what on earth to do once the sachets of ‘diet soup’ run out! It’s all about being self-aware, maintaining a balance and continually firing up your passion for finding new foods, activities and healthy inspirations.

The Flat Tummy Club Diet is published in May by Hodder. Here's a little description of what's included...

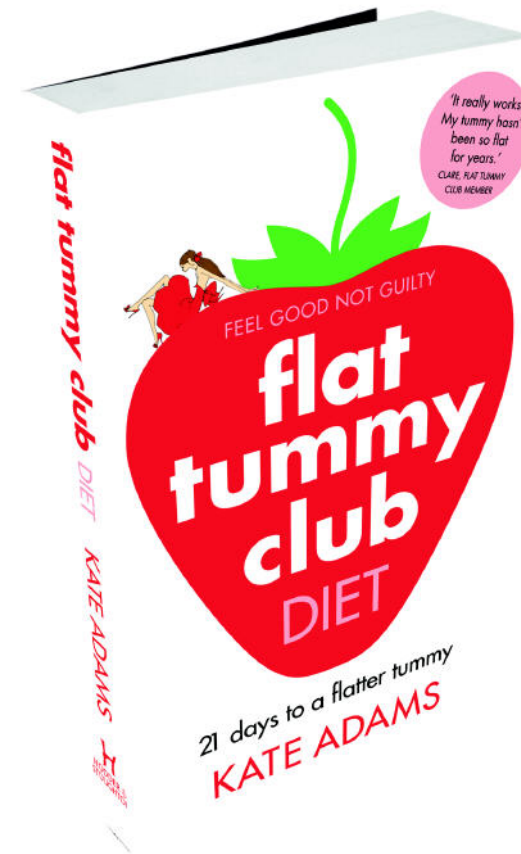
Depressed by her expanding waistline, Kate Adams set out to lose weight - and keep it off for good. Six months later and over two stone lighter she decided to share her experiences and set up the Flat Tummy Club.

1. Do the Flat Tummy Inquisition to work out where exactly your spare tyre comes from.
2. Beat the bloat and shed up to 7lbs in a week with the 7-day Jump Start.
3. Swap in the Top 20 Flat Tummy Foods to keep you on the straight and narrow-waisted.
4. Keep your flat tummy forever with tips to help you maintain your willpower when stress, holidays and work start getting in the way.

'In winter, you develop the art of layering and loose waistbands, but summer can be brutally exposing. Former health publishing director Kate Adams may have the answer...the Flat Tummy Club diet.'
Evening Standard

'The book proof arrived on Friday and I spent the whole day with it :-). I'm normally the type to say, "I'll get started on Monday" but I read through, made a shopping list and by lunchtime on Saturday I was cooking up a storm... breakfast muffins, fruit compote, veggie chilli, to name a few.'

Carol



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