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# Introduction

There is something magical about France, and especially about Paris, that defies description. Ambience, charm, chicness, history, colour, architecture, fashion—the list goes on. Paris is a complete feast of beauty. People fall in love with this city for their own personal reasons.

For me, it was love at first bite. Nothing gets my heart racing like my love of French food. What I find most enticing is the ability of the French to elevate food and wine to an art form—and pamper themselves by indulging selectively, yet still ensure they look spectacular in a Chanel suit. After all, image is everything, especially in Paris. The French seem to break every rule of modern diets and remain effortlessly slim. In other countries, the more obsessed we are with thinness and dieting, the fatter we become.

Rather than spend hours sweating on a treadmill, the French seem to be able to easily balance food, lifestyle and movement, which allows them to eat what they really want

and stay slim without resorting to crazy extremes. While falling in love with France—and a Frenchman—I simultaneously fell in love with my tastebuds, believing like the French do that managing my weight need not be torturous, but rather a love affair with our five senses.

Eating, for the French, is a sensual experience, not a fearful one. Just like a sommelier tastes fine wine, I learned to savour the varied tastes, textures and aromas of the food I ate. By being fully present while eating, in both heart and mind, I began to hear the subtle, inner symphony of pleasure, which taught me so much about feeling truly satisfied. And I realised that in the past I had done a lot of swallowing, but not much tasting. For years I had regularly eaten my sorrows, my fears, my past and my future. I got all the calories but without the bliss. Yet, just by closely studying the habits of all the slim French people, I came to understand that managing your weight can be fun and even indulgent. After all, if you want to find out how to do something, it's best to learn it from those who do it best.

My firsthand observations, while living with a traditional French family in Paris, gave me the invaluable gift of freedom: freedom from ever dieting again. By learning to recognise and respect my internal cues of hunger and satiety, I began to listen to my body. By allowing myself to eat previously forbidden foods, I discovered there was no reason to eat them all at once when I knew I could have them again later. By slowing down my eating pace, I learned to truly savour every morsel and to be fully in-the-moment

while eating. Although I ate less, I actually enjoyed food a whole lot more. I was relieved to discover you don't have to give up sumptuous foods to be slim and healthy.

You can learn these French lessons too. Adapt them to your own environment, lose weight and keep it off for life. And not with a scowl on your face but with the blissful smile of a Cheshire cat.

In France, the epitome of *la belle vie* (the good life) is food—the great ice-breaker that brings people together and makes life more pleasurable, moment by moment. The French agree that food is sacred and that eating must be undertaken with great respect and ceremony. I was fascinated by how the French focus pure loving attention on their meals, cooking and eating only the freshest, best ingredients. All over the country, you find patisseries selling mouthwatering gateaux and warm baguettes on one corner and on the next, a café where the French linger over *un café* for hours, taking their time, simply contemplating life. France is known for rich desserts, foie gras, full-fat cheeses, charcuterie and wine, yet most people seem to have little trouble maintaining a healthy weight.

It's been called the French paradox—and I was determined to get to the bottom of it.

I am not French, nor was I born in France. So I didn't have my tastebuds trained from a young age or any secret well-honed tricks passed down from generation to generation instilled in the crib. Instead, I had to change several decades of dreadful dietary habits—habits that were

preventing me from reaching and maintaining my ideal weight. But I did change for the better and the results have lasted.

Ironically, the secret to losing weight and keeping it off did not involve applying aggressive discipline and deprivation—it was about believing that I deserved to love what I eat and eat what I love. I learned to distinguish between physical hunger and psychological hunger, respect fullness, and eat with pure awareness. I replaced self-criticism with self-nurturing. I embraced the concept of quality over quantity and learned to go that extra mile to make each meal special. The French believe good food is their birthright and adopting this concept led me on a pleasurable journey to spoiling myself thin.

You don't have to speak French, or even go to France, to do what I did because once you learn the principles of eating and moving like the French—with balance, variety and moderation—you can adapt them to any geographical environment.

The experience of living with a family in Paris gave me an insight into how the French eat at home every day. I realised that it is not just about what you eat (although good nutrition is important). Understanding how and why you eat is a key factor in achieving lasting weight loss. By giving myself permission to eat what I had spent years trying to avoid, I began to derive great pleasure from small quantities and eat without guilt, while staying attuned and responsive to my inner satiety cues. As the French remain

a culture motivated by the pleasures of good food, I too acquired a deeper appreciation of quality, freshness and flavour in my food, along with the ceremony and pleasure taken at mealtimes.

In Paris I discovered a rhythm of life and a relaxed attitude that allowed me to say yes to all the foods I love, yet still lose weight without any blood, sweat or tears. Without ever feeling deprived, I managed to lose the elusive ten kilos I had been wrestling with for years. I realised that lasting and permanent weight loss is more involved than simply following a calorie-controlled meal plan, because we need to become adept at nourishing not only our body but also our mind, heart and spirit. I had to learn what to do when I thought I was hungry but when, in truth, what I really needed was not food.

The French stay slim not because they are genetically blessed but, quite simply, because of the difference in their culinary attitudes and dietary habits. They have a mindset that helps them stay slender and they refuse to accept that being overweight has to be part of their fate. When food is viewed as a pleasurable source of sustenance rather than used as a coping mechanism, there is never a valid reason to eat more than the body needs at any given time. It seems that a positive self-image and a healthy level of self-acceptance towards your own body and beauty are very useful if you want to fight the flab. When you embrace your body image and accept your genetic blueprint, you are more easily able to master the art of intuitive self-care. The

French know how to love themselves, flaws and all. It's no secret that they want to be beautiful, in love, feel sexy and take care of themselves so they look good.

Not surprisingly, seduction and flirting are art forms in France. They love to engage in flirtatious behaviour every day, so feeling good in your own skin is of the utmost importance. I remember the look of alarm on my mother's face when a Frenchman winked at her flirtatiously in a café when she was visiting me. When I calmly explained that this cheeky behaviour was not an uncommon occurrence, her look of shock turned to one of discreet pleasure. It is exactly this playful spirit that is part of the Gallic charm, and the French thrive on looking and feeling their best at all times.

The lessons I learned in France unexpectedly, but thankfully, survived my return to Australia. Since leaving France in the early 2000s, marrying an Australian and having two children, I have never deprived myself of any delicious thing. I eat cheese and bread and drink red wine with dinner. I adore chocolate and the regularity with which I eat it is really quite impressive. Yet, even after two pregnancies, I am not overweight or unhealthy. In fact, after converting my Australian husband Simon to the French way of eating, he too has effortlessly lost ten kilos with a smile on his face.

The set of behaviours I learned will help anyone who struggles with losing those last ten kilos, or who repeatedly cycles between overeating and restricting food, or has been exasperated by ever-contradictory nutritional information and simply wants clear, accurate and lasting information on