

“A brilliant new look at living an authentic life.
Read this book and change your life!” —**Dr. Drew Pinsky**

You Are
WHY
You Eat

**CHANGE
YOUR
FOOD
ATTITUDE,
CHANGE
YOUR LIFE**

**DR. RAMANI
DURVASULA**



FOREWORD BY VANESSA WILLIAMS

What if you could stop eating, stop working at a bad job, stop a bad relationship—stop anything when you have had enough? Understanding WHY you eat can lead to real and lasting change—both in weight loss and all other areas of life. In *You Are WHY You Eat*, food becomes a digestible metaphor. Most of us are unable to walk away—from a plate of food or a bad situation. But instead of staying and trying to please others all the time, what would happen if you listened to your inner voice?

Dr. Ramani reveals that how you eat and live often ties directly into the desire to please your stakeholders—parents, partners, friends, and society. Understanding WHY you eat will lead to real change and let you take back your life.

In *You Are WHY You Eat*, Dr. Ramani takes a fresh, brave, and edgy approach to self-help. Through real-life anecdotes and thought-provoking exercises, she gives you the tools you need to live on your terms. This powerful book will help you trust your gut, while making that gut smaller at the same time. And it will teach you to live a life that is bolder, more authentic, and less riddled with regret.

This book is about learning how to quit, when to quit, when to walk away, and how to acknowledge when you are full. It's about turning off the voices of the world and listening to the one that matters most: your own.

You Are
WHY
You Eat

**CHANGE YOUR FOOD ATTITUDE,
CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

DR. RAMANI DURVASULA

Foreword by Vanessa Williams



Guilford, Connecticut
An imprint of Globe Pequot Press

To buy books in quantity for corporate use
or incentives, call (800) 962-0973
or e-mail premiums@GlobePequot.com.



skirt® is an attitude . . . spirited, independent, outspoken, serious, playful and irreverent, sometimes controversial, always passionate.

Copyright © 2013 by Dr. Ramani Durvasula

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed to Globe Pequot Press, Attn: Rights and Permissions Department, P.O. Box 480, Guilford, CT 06437.

skirt® is a registered trademark of Morris Publishing Group, LLC, and is used with express permission.

Project editor: Ellen Urban

Text design and layout: Maggie Peterson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Durvasula, Ramani.

You are why you eat : change your food attitude, change your life /
Dr. Ramani Durvasula.

pages cm

Summary: "An intelligent, timely, and prescriptive book that shows how your attitude towards food often reflects your attitude towards other areas in your life—jobs, relationships, money—and how you can let go of trying to please others all the time and instead satisfy your own true appetites and live a more authentic and healthier life"— Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7627-8245-1 (hardback)

1. Food habits—Psychological aspects. 2. Health—Psychological aspects. I. Title.

TX357.D84 2013

394.1'2—dc23

2012033961

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The material in this book is intended to provide accurate and authoritative information, but should not be used as a substitute for professional care. The author and publisher urge you to consult with your mental health care provider or seek other professional advice in the event that you require expert assistance.

To Maya Sai Hinkin and Shanti Lindeman Hinkin

—MY ANGELS—

who make me brave and let my spider senses sing.

To my muse, William Wallis Pruitt,
for awakening the poet inside of me
and reminding us every day to live the questions.

*“If you want the truth,
I’ll tell you the truth:
Listen to the secret sound,
the real sound,
which is inside you”
—Kabir*

CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction	ix
PART ONE: <i>The WHY Foundation</i>	1
Chapter 1: Tapping Your Spider Senses	3
Chapter 2: Stakeholders and Their Hold on You	16
Chapter 3: The Not-So-Golden Rules	41
Chapter 4: Conquering Fear	59
Chapter 5: Gatekeeping	75
Chapter 6: Using Data Wisely	87
Chapter 7: The Promise of One	97
PART TWO: <i>Join the Dirty-Plate Club</i>	103
Chapter 8: How Do You Eat?	104
Chapter 9: Brains, Behavior, and Bagels	121
Chapter 10: Mastering the Cookie Jar— Knowing How to Pull the Triggers	135
Chapter 11: Quit the Clean-Plate Club	152
PART THREE: <i>Eating Patterns = Life Patterns</i>	163
Chapter 12: Food as Metaphor	164
Chapter 13: Love and Relationships: When Do You Hold and When Do You Fold?	169
Chapter 14: Full from Your Job? Follow Your Dream	189
Chapter 15: Retail Therapy	202
PART FOUR: <i>Taking Risks and Learning to Fly</i>	211
Chapter 16: The Body Count	212
Chapter 17: The Mindful Moment	224
Chapter 18: Anarchy or Authenticity?	236
Epilogue	243
Acknowledgments	245
Notes	248
Resources/Tools	254
Reading Group Guide	257
Index	260
About the Author	267

FOREWORD

Is it ever easy for any of us to listen to ourselves? I know that in my career, I have had times when I didn't listen to myself, and when things went wrong, I knew that if I had listened to myself (and my mother) in the first place, I could have avoided a lot of trouble (Ramani calls these our "spider senses"). I struggled with sorting through the different kinds of advice I got from different kinds of stakeholders. But I learned from these experiences and let them guide me to new paths in the future and a career that I have loved at every turn of the road. At the end of the day, each of us knows what is best for us, but sometimes we need to make a few mistakes to get there. Life is a journey, and Ramani's book is about making an authentic journey that is led by the compass that each of us has within us.

As a woman, especially one who works in the very public business of entertainment, I have lived under the glare of having my body and face scrutinized as long as I could remember. As the mother of daughters of varying ages, and from watching my friends, I know that issues of food, weight, and body image are a burden that women of all ages, races, and kinds struggle with. What is so bold about Ramani's stance is that for once, someone is telling us our bodies are a good thing and when we listen to our bodies, our hearts, and our minds, we are more likely to find a greater balance than just trying the next new diet or depriving ourselves of the foods we enjoy. She and I are foodies. When we eat out together, we comment on the struggles that a bowl of pasta can bring, and she has taught me some interesting tips.

And let's face it, the heart and the stomach are connected in many ways, and Ramani and I have dished a lot about relationships, heartache, and men. It often comes back to the same place—listen to yourself, honor yourself, treat yourself the way you want a partner to treat you—and I love that Ramani is suggesting that you start by doing this at the table. Once you start getting respect for yourself in one area of your life, it will follow in others.

By helping each of us see that this is a journey that is both inside of us but also impacted by the world outside of us, it helps us understand

the battles we need to wage inside of us, while we have to live in a complex food world. On one hand the world is telling us to be a size 2, and on the other it is shoving burgers and pie in our faces. This book doesn't deny that reality, and tells us that there is no getting around it; we have to learn to eat in a challenging world, and only we know our own bodies.

I have watched Ramani's journey myself, and we became friends when she was going through a divorce and struggling with listening to herself, so I know that she not only has the scientific and psychological chops behind this but also the personal insight and struggle. She is able to communicate her complex ideas in a simple way that I know will change so many lives. I know her beautiful daughters, Maya and Shanti, and I know her as both a friend and as a mother. She gets it, and she has lived it.

Whether you are looking to change your dress size or your love life, take on your dreams, or just figure out how to connect back to yourself again so you can live a healthy, fulfilled, and authentic life, Ramani's book will take you there. A message lives inside this book for almost everyone I know, and I am confident that Ramani's voice will change your view of the world and open you up to yourself. I'm so glad the world will finally get to read her words.

Vanessa Williams, Chappaqua, NY

INTRODUCTION

The Watts Towers stand tall above a gritty urban neighborhood in South Los Angeles. A man named Sam Rodia, a laborer, not an artist, spent thirty-three years of his life building them between the years of 1921 and 1954.

He found a small triangular lot in his neighborhood and started collecting rebar, scrap salvaged from the railroad, and other found objects that he stacked and welded together. Slowly, the towers began to emerge and take shape. They are a unique tribute to urban art, to a neighborhood rarely visited by most Angelenos, and speak to the dedication of one man. Each time you look at them, new details emerge. They are most certainly a national treasure.

These towers were a massive undertaking, and Rodia built them alone—scaling the ninety-nine feet up with harnesses and climbing the structures like ladders to ensure his work reached greater heights. He was a quirky guy and often found himself in conflict with his neighbors, but he persisted. When asked why he worked so tirelessly on these towers, he simply said, “I wanted to do something big, and I did it.”

Even more compelling is the fact that suddenly, one day, he was done. He just finished. There was still more space, more time, and more stuff to stack. But he stopped. He was simply done. In short order he packed up and moved away to Martinez, California, where he lived until his death in 1965.



How often do people know they are “done”? How often do they know when to walk away from a project, from a relationship, from a job, from a casino table, from a sale, from a conflict? Well, the simple answer is: not often enough. Hell, most people don’t know how to walk away from a plate of food when they are full. A recent CBS news poll found that 54 percent of Americans almost always eat until their plate is clean. And that’s the problem. The way we eat has some heavy implications for our lives. Most people think simply cutting carbs or working with a trainer will help them lose weight, but that’s not the case. Understanding why

you are eating or getting a second helping is a much greater tool than following strict, arbitrary rules written by someone else. It's your body—you should know what it likes. As soon as you can understand the psychology to your eating, you'll lose weight. And the rest of your life will fall into place as well.

That's where *You Are WHY You Eat* comes in. This book is about learning how to quit, when to quit, when to walk away, and how to acknowledge when you are full. It is about trusting yourself and knowing that you are full—even if that means leaving behind a plate full of food. It's about turning off the voices of the world and listening to the one that matters most: your own.

Rodia knew he was done. And after reading this book, you will, too.

Start by asking yourself one simple but significant question: Does your life look the way you want it to look? Has the weight you have put on taken control of everything you do? Does the thought of losing it seem impossible, or overwhelming? Sadly, most of us are living a script written by other people, and as a result of this, many of us learned long ago to stop listening to our own instincts. We don't often trust ourselves. It's easier to do what the world asks of us than to blaze our own trail. If you do what the world wants, then you are a hero; if you do what you want, you are selfish. But when we defy our instincts, our sense of what is right for us, far greater problems can arise. Weight gain is one of the most common.

When I was training to be a psychologist, it became clear that one of the key issues in human growth is taking responsibility. Unfortunately, we have gotten to a place where taking responsibility has become more about apologizing after the fact, rather than weighing out what we want to do and thinking about the ramifications ahead of time. Personally, I'm working harder than I ever have before; the stress of being a divorced mother is enormous, and I have more to juggle and deal with financially and logistically than I ever did when I was married. But I'm incredibly satisfied with my life, and despite the fatigue, financial crises, and uncertainty, my life is characterized by possibility and joy.

Believe me when I say: It wasn't an easy place at which to arrive. I was pretty miserable, in fact. To ease my misery, I turned to food. I overate because I was in a dark place in life for a long time. I knew my marriage wasn't working, so I just kept eating. I was stressed about my two

children, feeling like I didn't measure up as a mother, so I kept eating. I didn't love my work, so I kept eating. I was lonely, so I kept eating.

Food became a distraction—a place to numb myself, reward myself, and soothe myself. It allowed me to not think about the other stuff. I didn't know how to stop eating when I was full because I was using food to do too many things. I didn't know how to walk away from my plate or how to trust my instincts. So exactly how would I have gone about fixing the big-ticket issues in my life if I couldn't do something as simple as walking away from the table when I was full?

There was literally a moment for me when I knew I had to make some major changes in my life. The problem, though, was that when I took stock of what needed fixing, I realized my marriage and my career were two things that were simply too enormous to take on. The wake-up call came when my youngest daughter, who was two years old at the time, became seriously ill. After a hospitalization and IV medications at home for a month for her, my husband and I had the chance to attend a wedding, our first night out in months. I knew life had gotten the best of me, and that I had put on some weight. I grabbed some oversize garments my mother had brought back from India and figured I would “toss” them on. I had become so big that as I pulled them on, the delicate silks just tore. I went through three dresses and ended up choosing the one that had torn the least.

I knew that I'd gained weight, but had no idea just how much, exactly. If you had asked me to guesstimate, I would have probably thought I weighed around 160 pounds. I popped on the scale, which I hadn't stepped on for about two years, and to my genuine surprise, I topped 200 pounds.

I knew at that moment that *something* had to be done, but I still didn't know what to do, or how to do it. That night at the wedding I ate like it was my last night on Earth. I ate my meal, the entire contents of the breadbasket, and half of my husband's dinner. My husband wanted to get home to our child, but I refused to leave before the cake came out. I was on a mission, and I wasn't leaving until I'd shoveled it all in.

The next day, still stuffed, I went to a farmers' market with my family and I ate burgers—plural. I literally went on a bender. That was September 30, 2005. In some ways, I knew this was it—that I would never eat this way again. I was saying good-bye to a lifestyle.

On October 1, 2005, I vowed never to return. I jumped on the scale and started my journey weighing 201 pounds and wearing a size 18.

I took stock of a life that was a mess, and realized that most of the other changes I needed to make would impact other people. There was my weight, and there was everything else that needed fixing. As for the “everything else”—well, I wasn’t ready to take all of that on yet. But food was within my control. My attitude was that if I failed at this weight-loss experiment, then life could go on as it had been. I had no weight-loss goal; I just wanted to see if I could ease up on the food intake and maybe start to exercise (at that time I would get winded after going up a flight of stairs). I knew what I put into my mouth was the one thing I could control at that moment.

I started small. I excavated the treadmill in the corner of the playroom and I started with walking just five minutes a day. I increased my routine by five minutes on weeks I didn’t lose any weight. I didn’t go to a dietitian or a trainer; I just used basic common sense. I got rid of the junk food in my diet and made a promise to myself that I wouldn’t get to the point where I let myself feel hungry (a feeling that often resulted in panic for me). I allowed myself unlimited fruits and vegetables (because no one really ever binges on broccoli). My new food reality was simple: It was no longer ten cookies, it was one. It was no longer a burger and fries. It was chicken and vegetables.

Was this easy? No. Is it easy to this day? Nope—not even close. Is it still a struggle? Would I prefer to eat burgers every day? Absolutely. Did I need to lock the cupboards in the kitchen and pour soap on leftovers so I didn’t eat them? Yes. But I lost ten pounds in six weeks, and by the time I’d lost twelve pounds, people started to notice, and that gave me the strength to keep at it. Ten pounds became eighty-five pounds, and the original five minutes on the treadmill became an hour a day, and eventually hiking mountains around the world.

There was an extra reward to shedding that weight: I gained another kind of strength along the way. As I started losing the weight, I felt able to make other, bigger, more life-altering decisions. It was like my spider senses—the term I use to describe those true gut feelings we use to guide us—were numbed by the weight, and once I was able to get the weight off, my senses were sharper. I also believed in my power and ability to make a change. Knowing we need to change something is only half the battle in life; actually making the change is the payoff. The weight loss created an awareness that made me realize, yes, my marriage

wasn't working, and I could fix that situation too by applying the same techniques.

With a stronger mind, body, and heart, I started being able to heed my instincts when it came to the big-ticket items in my life. I was able to have painful conversations with my husband, which had seemed unthinkable years before. I made career changes and forays into the media space, despite professional resistance by my academic world.

There was an extra reward to shedding that weight. I gained another kind of strength along the way.

Throughout the process, which was arduous, I felt the disapproving voices of those around me. Friends, parents, in-laws, and colleagues called me out on it, saying, "You don't know what you're doing. . . . You're making a huge mistake. . . . You're going to regret all of this for the rest of your life. . . . You are destroying your children; they will be from a broken home." But I inherently knew that what I was doing felt right. I felt like I was at the edge of a cliff and that I was going to jump, but with a parachute on my back. Everyone around me told me that the parachute would not open, but the chute was really just trusting myself, and I fully intended to take the leap. I closed my ears to the advice from the people around me. I came to realize that they were terrified because my choices impacted them. My actions would not only call their own actions into question, but would also change their lives. I jumped.

The chute opened.

I am now a happily divorced woman. I consider my ex-husband to be one of my closest friends. We regularly spend time together with our children and have moved on with our lives. We have constructed a new kind of family, one that really works. The weight is still off and my body is stronger than ever.

THE DARK SIDE OF LISTENING TO YOU

It was risky. I had to make a choice, and there were downsides; I could either stay the course and honor myself, or stay in a life that felt wrong.

Some people tried to coax me back to my eating days to draw me back to being the person I once was. (When someone puts sweets and dessert in front of me, I still feel like an alcoholic in recovery.) Some continue to label me selfish—a villain, a sellout, and a family wrecker. That is the hard part about honoring your instincts; it means making enormous changes, and before it became easy for me, I knew it was going to become very hard. But the discovery that came from the weight loss was that it is okay to leave food on my plate when I know I am full; it is okay to listen to myself. It is okay to start taking care of me.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? When I look back, I wonder why I didn't take back my life sooner, before I turned forty. But looking backwards is generally a waste of time. I learned to honor myself on my time, and my life has been spectacular ever since. Easier? No. More authentic? Yes. I do realize now that the main thing that held me back was my fear of the body count, of disappointing people, of losing people. The fear of losing people who would be, were, and are affected by my choices. I made some real sacrifices to live a real life.

As you read *You Are WHY You Eat*, these consequences will be addressed in a real way. There is a body count and collateral damage when you honor your instincts. Family members told me that when I got married and had children, I should give up on my dreams. Many family members rejected me entirely for my decisions, and while some have since come around, I have lost contact with several of my family members. I defied the rules of order in my family and my culture, and it cost me.

A NEW LIFE RISING FROM THE ASHES

The holes left by the losses have been sumptuously filled—by exquisite friends, happy children, a wonderful career, and a great love. As we honor our spider senses, which you'll read about more comprehensively throughout this book, and learn to listen to ourselves, we become more skilled at knowing what and whom to let in (or out), and how we spend our time. The naysayers from my old life aren't in my life anymore, and my social and family landscape looks very different today than it did back in the old days. The people who populate my world now are different stakeholders; they celebrate my successes and console me when I fail, but most important, they revel in the fact that I honor my spider senses,

while I do the same for them. By becoming more authentic, the people who enter my life are also more authentic.

Many times, denying our own spider senses—our inner voice, our sense of being “in tune” with ourselves—can yield a smaller body count, but at a great cost to ourselves. There’s a great analogy in war: A soldier jumps on a grenade to save his team; one dies so many others can live. There is a certain perceived nobility in that. Many people stay in bad relationships and marriages, unsatisfying jobs, and unfulfilling lives so they can “save” the people around them. Life is not a grenade, and trying to avoid the disappointment of others is not about heroism but often about fear. If we can learn that while initially there will be loss and pain, in the long term, the hurts will heal, and even those who were hurt by you honoring yourself may be propelled into a more honest life. In addition, the example you set by honoring yourself, and doing so without fear, may in the long term enhance many more lives.

Staying in bad situations can cause collateral damage as well. In the short term, staying in a bad situation is easier, despite the long-term damage. But sometimes short-term losses are needed for long-term gains. Do you really think a spouse or intimate partner in a loveless relationship benefits from the disillusioned partner sticking around? Do your children benefit by you sticking it out in an uninspired job? Do you benefit from eating everything on your plate? This book will help you to rewrite your scripts and redefine what makes a hero. It surprised me to learn that honoring my spider senses and simply eating differently led to changes in every arena of my life.

For me, giving up on my dreams and not honoring the life I desired would have ultimately made everyone’s lives worse. Heeding my inner compass allowed me to create a new life and a new world. Now, every morning when I wake up, I’m filled with a sense of possibility rather than a sense of despair.

I have stories from patients who weren’t so lucky—examples of people who lost more by staying in something bad rather than accepting that they were “full,” and leaving, or quitting. Many of these people have reached the latter part of life filled with regrets, but are now realizing that it’s not too late to make a change, to honor their instincts. It is likely that my sticking it out and eating everything on my plate would have resulted in far worse outcomes for my children and my health in the long term.

While I definitely made my life more difficult by leaving in a practical sense (financial challenges, single parenthood), I made it authentically better—substantially, tremendously better. Every morning feels like a holiday, every day piled up with potential.

We *can* find peace in chaos. The illusion is that financial comfort, stability, monogamy, and permanence are guarantees of safety and security. After reading this book, you will realize that by honoring yourself and listening to your own inner voice (while managing the voices around you), true security can be found within yourself—even in the midst of day-to-day challenges.

There were lots of wonderful bonuses that occurred when I changed my life. I got bold. I started exploring the world alone, taking trips, and began commemorating each anniversary of my weight loss with a hike. I've climbed to the top of Mount Fuji and been to Mount Everest's base camp, among many others. These were trips I talked myself out of in earlier years—too much money, too much time, I wasn't strong enough. Once I started listening to me, somehow the details came together, the money worked itself out, and I came back a better version of me. The only way you can achieve a successful summit is by honoring your instincts, knowing the best path, knowing when to rest, and knowing when to turn back.

A BETTER LIFE THROUGH BETTER CHOICES AND BETTER VOICES

And that's what this book is about. It's about achieving the most out of life. It's about understanding your needs and trusting yourself. It's about collecting data through experience so you can best assess and execute major decisions in your life. It's about knowing when to stay and when to walk away. It's about making better choices in the beginning, because getting out is a lot harder than getting in, in the first place. It's about balancing the voices in your life with the voice you want to live. It's about food as the metaphor for so many other elements in your life. It's about how to fill your plate, knowing when you are full, and ignoring childhood teachings and golden rules that are based on obedience rather than growth. And if the only thing you learn from *You Are WHY You Eat* is *how* to eat, then you are still ahead of most people who are banging their heads against the dieting wall every day.

I have so many patients who come to see me to discuss their weight, who then realize that this isn't about food or calories or exercise. It's about something bigger in their lives, like loneliness, hurts from the past, lack of intimacy, and damaged scripts that underlie the overeating, disordered eating, and unhealthy eating. Overfull plates are often substitutes for something that just isn't right—for families and other stakeholders that didn't listen, but insisted on clean plates and no questions.

RECORDING YOUR STORY

Ignore the rules you were taught and change things. Be true to you—you know your needs better than anyone does. Are you sure you are full? Even the best-intentioned among us ask that question of our eating companions. Often it is just good manners. But the only way you can answer that question is to be completely honest with yourself. *Are you full?* In this book I'll share stories with you that my patients, associates, friends, family, and colleagues have shared with me. I'll share inspiring quotes and my own life's experience. I'll ask you to do some homework, too, in the form of exercises, which will be offered in every chapter. I'm going to ask you to get a journal, make notes, and really think about the exercises you're going to be asked to complete. A journal can be a blank book, a smartphone, a laptop, or a tablet. It is best if you keep all of this in one place, so you can see the accumulation of the information and watch your own development unfold. I think the best way to tackle this book is to read it at your own pace, and then focus on one chapter a week, and really spend time that week on the exercises in that chapter. For more tips, be sure to check out the *You Are WHY You Eat* app on your smartphone.

Trust yourself. Don't be afraid to try. Don't be afraid to experience. Don't feel you have to stick everything out. When you finish this book, you'll have helped yourself. You'll learn to trust your gut so you won't overfill your gut anymore.

This book is your place to express and think and process. It is meant to give you a framework, but more important, it is meant to give you permission—permission to leave food on your plate, to break the rules, to listen to yourself. Use your journal to take notes and complete the exercises I'm going to ask you to dedicate yourself to throughout the chapters. Write everything in this journal.

The clever French writer François Duc de La Rochefoucauld writes, “We are so accustomed to disguising ourselves to others that in the end we become disguised to ourselves.” *You Are WHY You Eat* teaches you how to stop disguising yourself—at the dinner table, with your partner, with your family, with your children, at your workplace. Listen to your gut; it’s trying to tell you something. In the pages that follow, I will remind you how to do something that you were born knowing how to do. And it will start, and perhaps end, with food.

At the end of each chapter of the book, I will present you with a *why* and a *now*. The Why will summarize the key elements of the chapter, and The Now will provide exercises to make the book actionable and link back to your life today.

THE WHY

I’ve been where you are. I’ve struggled, too. And I found that only by being true to me was I able to get to where I am today. Trust yourself, honor yourself. And I want you to know, this is coming not only from my personal weight-loss journey, but also from twenty years of reading, writing, researching, and conducting clinical work. It’s also from my experience as a student and a teacher, a patient and a therapist, from being a wife, an ex-wife, a partner, a mother, a sister, a daughter, and a friend.

THE NOW

While I may be the one sharing my story here, it’s a universal one. I marked the moment, the very day I changed my life. I said good-bye to an old lifestyle and hello to a new one, and I want you to do the same right now. *You Are WHY You Eat* will teach you how to do this by teaching you how to listen to you.

Your first exercise is to write the new you a letter, and to create your own moment or date to say good-bye to the lifestyle you’re about to change. No time like the present! Here’s a letter from someone I worked with who was ready to make a change, but feel free to create your own, with your preferred style or way of writing.

Dear Future Me:

I'm writing to let you know that the old me is saying good-bye to a lot of things. Today, this 26th of January, I'm saying good-bye to eating when I'm not hungry, being the person all of my friends call on when they want a partner in crime to overindulge with, and to the weight that has accompanied my overly easygoing self. The new me is ordering what I want to eat at dinner out, not what everyone else wants to split. I've spent a lifetime being accommodating—I go with the flow and I really never mind letting someone else choose a restaurant or a movie. But I have found, as a result, that I never stand up for myself with food either. I'm not blaming others for how I eat or how I got here, but today, I'm speaking up for myself, starting now. If I don't want to start dinner with deep-fried calamari, then I'm going to say so instead of just saying, "Okay." I think I'll be better able to articulate other things in life that I want for myself once I can start speaking up about the little things, too. Then, I want to at least start thinking about going back to school, making the career shift to get out of this rut, and start taking some more chances. Just not sure how to get there yet. . . .

Signed,
The old me

Take out your journal and say good-bye to your old lifestyle and hello to the new one.

PART ONE:

The WHY Foundation



A picture of me and my daughter seven years ago, before I lost 85 pounds and changed my life.

CHAPTER 1

Tapping Your Spider Senses

At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.

—Lao Tzu

There is one premise you should accept as you read this book: *You are the expert of you.* You need to trust yourself in order to find freedom and achieve your destiny. You will learn how this book can be used and how we gain trust in ourselves. You will learn what “being full” means, not just with regard to food, but also in life. This book can be a workbook, it can be a good read, it can be the foundation for a journal; it is a tool to help you unlock a new kind of life.

Do the right thing.

What is the right thing? And what if it's not right for you but is right for someone else in your life?

The writer Henry Miller once wrote, “We slaughter our finest impulses every day,” because early in life we learn to live for others. In many cases, our parents want what they think is best for us, as do other family members, friends, and teachers. But what about *you*? What do *you* want for you? And if you listed out what you wanted for yourself, how many of those things are honestly things you want for yourself, and how many of them are you channeling from what the world wants for you?

This chapter will teach you the most important element of this entire book—the foundation on which it's based: learning to tap into and use

your spider senses. The term *spider sense* actually originates from the world of Marvel Comics hero, Spider-Man. After Peter Parker endures a bite from a radioactive spider, he gets all kinds of superhuman powers, including the *spider sense*—a sort of sixth sense that allows him to detect danger before it occurs. This allows him to be tuned in and to eliminate any danger before it harms him. Grabbing a rapidly whizzing fly is no small task if you are hanging out in a web, but if you can sense something before it happens, then you are at an advantage, just like a waiting spider.

Thus, a spider sense is a gut instinct, a sense of knowing danger, but also knowing yourself. Spider senses are about the impeccable timing we could all have if we were able to lie as quietly as a spider in a web and listen to ourselves. In *You Are WHY You Eat*, you will have a chance to awaken the spider senses you already have, hopefully without enduring the bite of a radioactive spider.

EVER JUST HAD A FEELING? THOSE ARE YOUR SPIDER SENSES

It's those hairs that stand up on the back of your neck; it's the flutter in your gut, that inherent sense that you know what you need to do—even when it flies in the face of what everyone else wants you to do. You just know. A spider sense is a psychological gut punch. It's a primitive and personal sense of feeling and knowing what to do. It's that reptilian brain that knows something is coming before you can ever see it. It's knowing you.

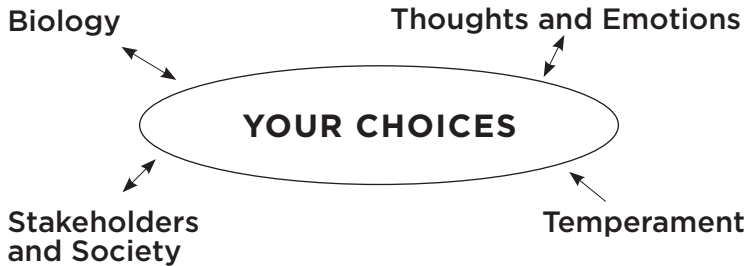
You use your spider senses every day, and more times than you know for some big-ticket decisions. I can all but guarantee that when you really, truly trusted your spider senses, you made some of the finest, most honest, though perhaps riskiest decisions of your life. Here are some examples of our spider senses in action:

- It's pushing away a half-full plate of food when you are full.
- It's not wanting to go on that second date.
- It's thinking that the smaller college is a better fit for you than the bigger (albeit more prestigious) university.
- It's turning down what seems like a dream job after an unsettling meeting with your potential supervisor.

- It's canceling the wedding a month before the date because it just doesn't feel right.
- It's checking in with your teenage daughter who seems a little off today.

LEARNING TO TAP INTO YOUR SPIDER SENSES AND TUNE OUT THE REST

Every decision we make—every choice, every behavior—is motivated by multiple factors. In fact, when you realize all the things that impact your choices, they don't look like your choices anymore. At the most basic level, biological factors like hunger, thirst, and simple physical needs can drive the choices we make (if we are hungry, we eat). But things start to get complicated when we start factoring in the rest of it. This diagram shows the stuff that circles and impacts your decisions.



What often gets lost here is what we want, need, and inherently know about ourselves. Our choices and spider senses are not just about biological needs; they are also about us knowing ourselves. They are about a lifetime of accumulated data, of our personalities, of the things we are interested in, of the way we want our lives to look. Think about a person who has driven the same car for a while, or captained the same boat. They know the nuances of how to accelerate, how the vehicle turns, what the little noises and engine pings mean. The same thing applies to us. We know what the little noises and pings mean, but we rarely honor them.

The tricky part of really using our spider senses and making choices is being aware of the things that impact them (the outside elements in the diagram).

Society and Stakeholders

These are the people who are a part of our lives—our moms and dads, boyfriends or husbands, girlfriends or wives. They are our children, our bosses, our friends, and our neighbors. It is all of the childhood teachings and outside forces. Things like our communities, advertisers, and marketers that tell us how to live our lives and spend our money. They can have a huge influence on our choices even if we don't realize it. At the table, this can simply be someone else criticizing us for not eating all of the food on our plate.

Many of my patients can point to one moment when their body image—and subsequently, their relationship with food—shifted. It was usually because of a comment from a stakeholder or a negative experience in their own little society or community, such as in dance class or gymnastics. This moment is pivotal because it's also when they stopped listening to their spider senses.

Thoughts and Emotions

We can talk ourselves into or out of anything. Sometimes we know exactly what we want to do or what we should do, but we think our way *out* of doing it. We rationalize, justify, and compromise with thoughts that are governed by our histories and the world around us. Emotions can be even more powerful, especially our dark emotions, such as depression and anxiety. Any type of mental illness can have a detrimental effect on our spider senses—it causes them to deteriorate and leads to a lot of second-guessing. A typical part of the diagnostic picture of depression, anxiety, and many other mental disorders is self-doubt and feelings of worthlessness. This doubt can definitely scramble spider senses, and sometimes even when someone is not experiencing major depression but just “the blues,” self-doubt and second-guessing can really numb your spider senses. Relying on your spider senses means valuing yourself, which is harder to do when you are experiencing sadness or worry.

As a reminder, if you are struggling with chronic feelings of doubt, emptiness, second-guessing, worry, or sadness, I strongly encourage you to talk with your health-care practitioner or a licensed mental health professional.

Stress can also impact these emotions and emotional responses. The biggest scrambler of spider senses is fear. Unless a tiger is chasing you, decisions made on the basis of fear tend to be destructive. Other emotional

executioners include envy, greed, doubt, and good, old-fashioned ego. At the table, thoughts and emotions can lead us to eat for reasons unrelated to food—to soothe an emotion, or because we have distorted thoughts about food.

Biology

We all have biological drives over which we have less control. We are driven by hunger and thirst, we have a sex drive, we feel fear in our guts. Our biological drives may lead us to eat, but in general our biology does let us know when we are getting full. And when it comes to complex and emotional decisions such as ending a relationship or leaving a job, biological drives may be of limited utility. Societal norms prevent us from simply responding to our biological drive without some conformity (you don't grab the bread off of your boss's plate at a business lunch because you are hungry). So biology is tempered by reality. At the table, biology is often our friend, and if we just slow down, we can give ourselves the chance to know we are full. But our brains love rewarding food, and once the dopamine starts flowing, sometimes the rewarding taste of that cupcake can override our spider senses that are telling us we have had enough.

Temperament

This is also sometimes termed our personality. A good part of this is inborn; we are born with certain quirks and edges, some of which get smoothed down with time, and some of which are simply who we are. Some of us are risk-takers, some are more open, some are more conscientious—and these temperamental styles will have an impact on how our spider senses are formed, and how we act on what we want. At the table, certain temperamental or personality styles may lead us to feel more compelled to finish everything or to second-guess ourselves.

So what impact do these elements have on your life? Well, these outside forces are like interference that jams up a cell-phone signal. Your instinctual signals, your spider senses, may be clear and clean, but the interference of society and stakeholders can jam up the signal and the spider senses get lost. In life, you often know exactly what you want or need to do, but then, *bam*—the voice of a parent, the disapproval of a friend, or an advertiser that tells you the way your life should look scrambles your signals. For example, you know you want to move to Miami after you graduate, but

your mother and father tell you how great your life would be if you stayed in your hometown—that you'd have more friends and a support system, and it's "what you know." Perhaps while you were away at school you knew the best thing for you was to move to Miami. You had it all worked out. Then *bam*—you tell your stakeholders, and they influence your decision.

The only constant in this equation is you. To trust yourself, you need to know what you want, to know that you are full.

Your signals are scrambled and your decision-making ability impaired.

The world doesn't know what you want or need; only you do. And much like a waiter in a restaurant does not know if you have had enough to eat and offers you more food for his own purposes, the world offers you advice

for its own purposes. The only constant in this equation is you. To trust yourself, you need to know what you want, to know that you are full.

That's where the spider senses come in.

LISTEN TO YOUR GUT—IT'S TELLING YOU SOMETHING

Spider senses have been termed variously in psychological literature as intuitions, hunches, and gut feelings. They get termed "gut instincts" because that's where we feel them. Someone close to me once said, "If your stomach ain't churning, then you ain't learning." There is more than a little truth to that. The fact is, the "gut," as astutely pointed out by researcher Michael Gershon in *The Second Brain*, is populated by nerve cells, and also sitting near that gut are neuroendocrine systems such as the adrenergic system that underlie our "fight or flight" response. All of those tickles in our gut are fast-tracked to the brain, where the decision-making gets executed. So our guts and our brains are soul mates of a sort.