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INTRODUCTION

Planning Your Journey

*I don't think it takes more time to be
mindful than it takes to be mindless.*

MYLA KABAT-ZINN

You've got a clear destination—intuitive slimness—but only a vague sense of how to get there from here, especially if you've never tried bypassing that old bridge to weight gain: dieting. If you're thinking you could use an accurate road map right about now, I think you're right. But you've already got one; you're holding it in your hands. At first glance, this program looks a little different than other weight-loss maps. It is. The big difference: there's more than one way to travel through it. *The Self-Compassion Diet* lays out four separate weight-loss routes: (1) the path of self-compassion, often called loving-kindness; (2) the path of hypnosis, sometimes referred to as positive suggestion; (3) the path of mindfulness, also known as conscious awareness; and (4) the path of social support, used interchangeably in these pages with the term “compassionate community.”

If you were expecting one direct route to your desired weight, this multi-route approach may seem confusing. And if choice frequently makes your head spin or your eyes glaze over, take my hand. As your compassionate-eating guide, my job is to show you around, point out

the best ways to go. So sit back, relax, and let me help you plan a comfortable, customized trip. But first, let me show you the lay of the land, the layout of the book.

The four weight-loss routes covered in *The Self-Compassion Diet* are spread out over nine different chapters, two chapters per route, plus one chapter on where to go once you have integrated the practices into your life. The first chapter for each route gives you the theory behind the guided practices in the companion chapter that follows it. If you want a comprehensive view of the routes—a readable review of key concepts, theoretical perspectives, historical events, and landmark studies, plus inspiring cases (my clients' and my own)—you can go straight to chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7. If you'd like to work with the practices—traditional meditations, guided visualizations, hypnotic trances, and writing exercises—turn to chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8. If you need guidance for the next leg of your journey—for how to discover your most effective practices and find supportive travel mates—continue to chapter 9.

For a fuller view of the whole compassion-enhancing landscape, take a look at the following chapter previews: Chapter 1 explains self-compassion, and how a little goes a long way toward sustainable weight loss. Chapter 2 demonstrates what a measurable difference self-compassion makes by assessing how self-compassionate you are before and after the six guided practices that are provided in the chapter. Chapter 3 explains why the age-old technique of hypnosis helps you lose more weight and keep it off longer, long enough to establish healthy eating habits. Chapter 4 poses twenty-one questions to help you assess your hypnotic ability, and then, according to your ability, shows you how to hypnotize yourself slim with six winning suggestions. Chapter 5 explains why eating with awareness helps you gain control and lose weight by connecting the disparate dots between the ancient awareness practices of mindfulness meditation and the modern-day wisdom from food science. Chapter 6 shows you

how to have your cake, mindfully eat it, and lose weight too, with one mindful-eating assessment and eight guided visualizations and eating meditations. Chapter 7 explains why recruiting the support of at least one successful weight-loss partner, or perhaps more, helps you achieve lasting success. Chapter 8 helps you further understand and make use of your current support network before guiding you through six illuminating practices for building a stronger network. Chapter 9 helps you organize your old weight-loss toolkit, and offers final suggestions for choosing and committing to favorite practices for your continuing journey.

So you can see, the odd chapters are theoretical, the even are practical. Except for chapter 9, which thinks it's even. In addition to the twenty-six guided practices in the first eight chapters, you get four practical suggestions in the ninth and final chapter. All the chapters have one thing in common: sidebars. You know, those boxed features in magazines and books. Whether the chapter is odd or even, you can count on "Finding Thinspiration," beacons of hope and motivation where you least expect them: eating in, watching TV, dining out. You'll also learn to trust your food-scientist alter ego with "Personal Slimming Lessons," experiments that help you challenge common dieting wisdom. What's more, you'll find ample opportunity to cultivate a kinder, gentler attitude with "Think Kind Self-Thoughts," caring responses to your harshest self-criticisms. Plus, smart answers to FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) or, as I like to call them, NSQs (No Stupid Questions).

Still with me? Good, because the plan's about to get even simpler. Forget about keeping track of the number of chapters and practices, and remember this: you've basically got four ways to go through this book, and no wrong ways.

Option One: The first option is the simplest way to go. Read this book cover to cover. Read it without practicing; even a simple

read-through of *The Self-Compassion Diet* will make you smarter, if not a little kinder. Perusing these pages with intellectual curiosity, you will become more knowledgeable about the psychological approaches to sustainable weight loss. Page by page, you will come to view yourself with more loving-kindness. And if you're contemplating weight loss, but aren't ready to spring into action, the act of reading will help you get ready.

Option Two: For the most comprehensive approach to the book, read *and* practice from cover to cover. It's a tall and maybe impractical order, but it's my very best suggestion. Route by route, learn the theory, then try the practices. Start with self-compassion: work fifteen to twenty minutes of your favorite self-compassion, mindfulness, or hypnosis practice into your daily routine, and find the support of others when you are ready. The initial time investment is a little steep; if you tried a practice a day, it would take a month to try them all. But the dividends of loving-kindness, unconscious wisdom, conscious awareness, and positive support are invaluable, and they start paying off immediately.

Option Three: If you're crazy busy or busy enough, the third option is a time-saver and allows for two ways in one. (1) If you're clearly done with dieting and you've already chosen one particular route, go directly to the theory and practice of your chosen route. Read the theory, do the practices. The practices are self-explanatory, so you could theoretically skip the theory. But in the rush to practice, some important things, such as clarity and inspiration, might get lost. (2) If you have yet to choose your best route(s), check out your options. Learn about the four routes in chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7; notice which appeal; and then turn to the most appealing companion chapter and try the practices. For example, if chapter 3 invites you to try hypnosis, advance to the trance practices in the next chapter. Even if hypnosis holds little allure, I encourage you to visit chapter 4 for

the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) exercises, which help revamp counterproductive thoughts and behaviors. These CBT exercises help you do more than accomplish basic weight-loss tasks (setting goals, identifying eating patterns, and charting your progress)—they help you snap to attention and jump-start weight loss.

Option Four: If you want to get the feel of *The Self-Compassion Diet* without reading the whole book, the fourth option gives you the bare minimum and a perceptible preview of the enormous benefits that come with time and practice. Read chapter 1, skipping over the sidebars, and proceed to chapter 2. Take the Compassionate-Eating Quiz and find out how self-compassionate you are. Do the first and simplest practice: Loving-Kindness Meditation. If you have got the time and inclination, do two more: Compassionate Advisor and Head-to-Toe Appreciation. If the fourth option leaves you wanting more, reconsider options one through three.

The self-compassionate diet succeeds where others fail because, among other reasons, it encourages you to find the way that works best *for you*. If you can't imagine taking a break from traditional dieting as I've suggested, then follow your diet plan and *The Self-Compassion Diet*. The combination will enhance your chances of success. I know it sounds counterintuitive—be softer on yourself, lose more weight—but it works. If giving yourself a hard time worked better, I suspect you would be reading a boot-camp diet book right now.

That said, in at least two cases, what works best is neither obvious nor intuitive. If you have a history of trauma or a life-threatening eating disorder, don't try these practices alone. Enlist the help of a trusted therapist or another health-care professional. If you've got medical concerns, including issues related to gastric bypass surgery, consult your physician before starting this or any eating program. If you're the picture of health, you will still want to prepare yourself. To help you get ready, set, and practice, consider the following suggestions:

GET READY: If you just want to read the book cover to cover, find yourself a quiet moment, a comfortable chair, and a good reading lamp, and you're all set. But if you're keen on practicing too, success comes more easily when you make time and space for regular practice. Any amount of time you can set aside for practice is good, but fifteen to twenty minutes a day is ideal. If twenty minutes seems like an eternity or impossibility, consider doing several shorter sessions throughout the day. If a quarter of an hour feels like a warm-up, beef up your practice to thirty minutes or an hour by adding periods of silence or continuing with the basic elements of the practice. While there's no best time to practice, there's something to be said for practicing at or around the same time of day. That way, rather than thinking about when to practice, you're in the habit of just doing it.

GET SET: A space conducive to the self-compassion practices is one that's safe and quiet, away from distractions—the phone and significant others, pets included. (Unless Fluffy or Fido is especially well-behaved.) Some practitioners find lighting incense or candles enhances the quietude of the space. Feel free to experiment with the setting and the seating. Most of the practices in this book can be done sitting or lying down, except for the writing and eating practices. Those are easier to do sitting at a table or near another flat surface. A meditation cushion may be the traditional seating arrangement for the mindfulness and self-compassion practices, but it is by no means essential. If you'd rather spend time in an MRI machine than on a *zafu*, a Japanese sitting cushion, try a recliner, a couch, or a chaise lounge. And if back pain or another medical condition makes sitting or lying for any length of time uncomfortable, you can always do these practices standing.

If you notice preventable distractions, address them before you begin practicing rather than hoping that they won't bother you. Of course, you can't prevent all distractions. Between your outer world

(barking dogs, sirens) and inner experience (physical, emotional, and mental reactions), it's only a matter of time before your attention is divided, diverted, or otherwise disturbed. If you are unable to remove all your surrounding distractions, think of them as party guests: it's then easier to acknowledge them and maintain focus. Some guests leave promptly; others overstay their welcome. Rather than showing unwanted guests the door, your job as the gracious host is to stay with them, even the high-maintenance ones, for the duration.

PRACTICE: For a clear sense of the intention behind a practice, read the introduction, then follow the script as written. If it's a short practice, you can read through the script once or twice, close your eyes if you like, and mentally guide yourself through it. For the longer practices, you will need to keep your eyes open and meditate on the words as well as the suggested images, ideas, and feelings. If with faithful practice, you come to know the longer scripts by heart, you've got a choice: eyes open or closed. For a deeper, more relaxing experience, especially with the guided visualizations and hypnotic trances, consider enlisting an actual or virtual guide—a generous friend to read you the practice scripts, or a recording device that can play your reading voice. For a best-of-both-worlds approach, you might try listening to *The Self-Compassion Diet* audio program. At the touch of a button, my voice will virtually guide you through many of the practices contained in these pages.

Most of the practices begin by inviting you to focus on the breath, and settle into a comfortable breathing rhythm. There's nothing more natural than breathing, but conscious breathing is easier said than done. Rest assured—a clear understanding of the instructions and regular practice definitely makes it easier. "Focus on the breath" simply means direct your attention to the rise and fall of your chest, the air at the entrance of your nostrils, the sound of the breath in your ears . . . any aspect of your breathing that's easy to observe. When the

mind naturally wanders from your focus, the task becomes refocusing over and over again. “Settling into a comfortable breathing rhythm” calls for letting the inhalation naturally deepen, the exhalation gradually lengthen. Nothing more. And yet, many practitioners try to force the issue by inhaling a big gulp of air or exhaling a huge sigh. Like restful sleep, you can’t force deep breathing. If you find yourself forcibly trying, then pause, refocus, and practice patience. The breath will naturally settle into comfort. When you’ve finished practicing, keep breathing as you reorient yourself to your surroundings and reflect on your experience.

Once you’ve tried a practice, feel free to tailor it to your strengths and interests. If visualizing is a turnoff and writing a turn-on, for example, turn the guided visualizations into journal-writing exercises. The most effective practices are the ones that are beneficial and doable—the ones that find a place in your daily routine. They aren’t the ones that you think you should do, but won’t do.

You can always make more preparations, but if you’re serious about getting to a healthy, sustainable weight, you will want to stop preparing and start practicing. Preparing is an important step forward, but it can’t get you where you’re going. Ditto for know-how. All the know-how in the world can only take you so far. Transforming your eating habits also takes calm, conscious awareness and loving-kindness, all of which take practice. It’s easy to buy a book or a CD, try on a new idea, make a temporary change. But lasting transformation—well, that takes practice.

PART I

Self-Compassion

*The Power of
Loving-Kindness*

THE KINDER, GENTLER THERAPIST

Often we can achieve an even better result when we stumble yet are willing to start over, when we don't give up after a mistake, when something doesn't come easily but we throw ourselves into trying, when we're not afraid to appear less than perfectly polished.

SHARON SALZBERG

From my blue leather easy-chair, I watch psychotherapy clients shrink before my eyes. You might joke, as many do, that I shrink people for a living. But to be fair, my clients have been shrinking themselves under my watch through my career's many incarnations. Listening to countless stories of pounds lost and regained these last three decades, I never would have guessed that more self-compassion, not self-discipline, is the answer to dieters' prayers. I never could have predicted that a more forgiving attitude toward oneself and others would help those desperately seeking a slim physique to have a happier, easier, if not speedier time with losing weight.

As soon as clients tap into the power of self-compassion, out goes the "battle" from the battle of the bulge. When they take a kinder, gentler view of their bodies, their whole selves, as well as a softer stance toward their imperfect food choices and daily weight fluctuations, they struggle less and eat more healthfully almost immediately.

As soon as my clients hear the word "self-compassion," a tenet of Eastern philosophy that is just making inroads in Western psychology,