

## The Click and The Plan

Someone recently asked me: **If I understand you correctly, when you say you MUST be ahead only one day, you mean that you always have the next day's food ready to go *and* cooked?**

First please remember, I'm many many years into lowcarb-ing by leading with the diet, (that is, by planning and being decided and food-prepared ahead of time). More importantly, the day I decided this for what now really appears to be the last time, I had a "click" moment in November 1998, sometime right after Thanksgiving. I was standing at my refrigerator, ready to take, you know, just one big bite of semi-legal peanut butter. I was beginning to bargain with that when I stopped for a moment and realized what I was about to do. In that quiet little moment, I looked back on my life and really, *finally* saw my single lifetime pattern, and I saw my single food-life truth, which had included several "momentarily successful weight loss events," but had never changed me into a person who could permanently maintain the eating and therefore the body I wanted to reside in. All those "successes" had really been failures that just hadn't fully happened yet.

That was my moment of acknowledgement. If I wanted to get thin and healthy and STAY that way, I had to acknowledge that every single time, what made me do a U-turn on the path was wagging a firm, healthy diet—first just a little until I let that slide into a lot. That was the moment I decided to just grow up and eat a firm healthy diet, to put that decision, in almost every sense, above everything (and yes, everybody) else in my life.

Only several years later could I see that what I always did was BARGAIN with food, and that the decision I made in November 1998 was to stop bargaining. That is what we addicts do to keep ourselves locked in our self-destructive patterns. We play all kinds of hideously complicated games with food.

All the rest—first the weight loss, then the sanity, the peace, the forgiveness, internal and external, and then the retro-fitting of myself sort of "back into the world"—came SLOWLY as a result of that single no-wagging decision. That was all stuff I didn't know I would need to do to stay with this, all I wanted was to be thin and stay that way. In many respects, therein sits the conundrum, the riddle of all this: had I not let that other stuff come in, I don't think I would have been able to stay.

**"If you build it they will come."** "it" = the diet. "they" = all the emotional insights and other life pattern changes necessary to maintaining what you build which, in this case, is a healthy body and a changed, saner, healthy relationship with food.

I have made some minor mistakes since that decision, and learned and made minor adjustments in response to them. I took ONE meal off the diet after that click, very early on (December 26, 1998), and thank goodness, the physical repercussions were so dramatic, they gave me a lesson I have not forgotten.

I did this before Fitday (don't know if it was around and I just didn't know about it, or if it wasn't yet invented). But boy do I ever use that tool now, and wouldn't want to be without it. I've learned how to do this almost effortlessly, or maybe with just the least amount of effort required, which is a really nice place to learn your way to.

It simply took lots of time and plain old practice. And yes, I'd say it took several years of OVERdoing it, OVERthinking, maybe even OVERbehaving the way I wanted to be. The other way—trying to UNDERplay this—had not worked. That was exactly what I acknowledged in my click moment.

**Do you always have your food both cooked and planned at least one day in advance? Or so you sometimes have it just planned, and cook it \*on\* the day you are eating it?**

My answer is yes. And I know that seems contradictory to less experienced perspectives.

SOME days, just because of the way life is or can be, I do have to plan AND cook AND package in advance and have a lot of stuff in meal-sized containers ready to grab and walk out the door. I have a 5-point checklist/mantra I rattle off to myself every morning as I leave for work: *Vitamins? Snack? Lunch? Water? Keys?*

I mostly DO have to do it that way during the school year when I work. I will be doing it later today. Tonight I'm having salmon for dinner, I'm cooking enough extra so that I'll have pieces for lunch both Monday and Tuesday. I set the salmon out of the freezer yesterday morning (and made a mental note that it's my last package of salmon so I'll need to get more soon). I also set pork side out of the freezer this morning because I'm almost out of cooked, I'll cook that after work tomorrow.

As soon as I'm finished writing this, I am also deboning and chopping 8 large chicken thighs I braised yesterday, for chicken meat to put in my meal-sized salads. I'll eat some of it for lunch today, freeze the rest in 1 cup containers, and save the seasoned stock for soup making some other time.

I also set tomorrow night's dinner meat in the refrigerator when I got up this morning, that's another helpful routine I've put in place. Tomorrow night it's bone-in skin-on chicken breast halves (including an extra one that will be leftover for another meal). It's my last package of those, so I need to watch for the next sale. I have many many boneless chicken breasts though, because those were on sale last week. Thighs were on sale this week!

So see, I've got a basic, healthy food machine spinning quietly but constantly, I have it "underneath" me now as a matter of habit. I've learned how to do this, and I can do it pretty much without thinking now. And yet, there seemingly always will remain this trap—"without thinking" STILL sometimes leads me to going slightly off track, not with eating the wrong things, EVER, but just by eating slightly wrong amounts of the right

things. (Of course fundamental to knowing I'm on or off track is daily weighing, another thing I will never stop doing.) Over this journey, by keeping my eyes on the facts, I have also learned what to do—and what NOT to do—when it's time to shift into gentle “recovery” mode.

When my weight drifts up (to me 143-144 is alert time), it is an outward indication that I'm getting a little discombobulated. So I take a deep breath, face the Fitday, and switch as much as possible to the foods I know my body adores. That's chicken, turkey and salmon. I cut back a lot on pork and avoid beef completely. I also keep an eye on my protein portions, I can tend to overdo that when I'm not thinking. I also have to make sure I get PLENTY of veggies—during busy times I find it's easy to let those slide. I keep my calories under 1,800, but not very far under for long because anything less and I get HUNGRY. And hunger will STILL undo me every single time.

I have had few surprise mini-“emergencies” in the years since starting this much more mindful, planned lowcarb life approach. One was a call in the middle of the night from our (grown and married) son to tell us he was about to have an emergency appendectomy. It was a weeknight, so my lunch was already in the fridge. I grabbed that before we walked out the door to go to him (to eat for breakfast in case we were there all night—I knew that by lunchtime, since the hospital was only 3 miles from our home, I'd be able to get something suitable, and I did.) The other was an emergency doctor visit for me, I was seeing flashing lights out of the corner of one eye, which is the prime symptom of a detached retina which needs immediate surgery. It turned out to be a false alarm, it was something called vitreous separation, an aging thing, not my retina. But I had my lunch with me for that 9:30 a.m. appointment, just in case I was admitted for surgery (where I would have also had to stand firm against a dextrose drip and who knows what else). By dinnertime, my husband or one of my closest friends would have come through for me food-wise, if necessary.

I have had lots of challenges, including a breast cancer scare, a 16-day bedside vigil that included missing Christmas with the rest of my family while my aunt-like-a-mother died, our older son's out-of-town wedding, vacations, none of which were emergencies, but things that I certainly could have latched onto as excuses to take a day off or “lighten up” on myself. I've endured several 1 to 2-day long power outages, even a 5-day power outage in 2008, and managed okay through them (those really are tough!). I went through 9-11 without eating a bite off plan. Once or twice I've even had plates full of dessert in front of me, and walked around in a social setting, forking them but never took a bite. Not easy, but not impossible, especially when I arrived with a belly full of meat, fat and veggies. I do pretty much what I have to do to keep the beautiful peace and sanity.

You will be amazed that there is almost no situation in which you can't eat right for your body. The worst it gets is a little awkward socially (see the essay “Awkward vs. Regret”). And that part slowly gets easier with persistence and practice, and with the people around you slowly coming to their own understanding that you are just a little unusual with food. Hard as it is to believe, after they get over their initial surprise, and

sometimes some well-meaning attempts at helping and arguing with you about what really are YOUR choices, that's eventually as meaningful this gets—and as meaningful as this needs to be—to anyone else.

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