

Cosmo fitness editor **Rachel Hayes** shares the diet and exercise plan that morphed her from sluggish and “mushy” to supercharged and sleek—without major deprivation.

“How I Finally Lost Those 15 Pounds”

■ *Uh-oh.* I weighed 158 pounds, the heaviest I’d ever been in my 27 years. Despite the fact that I’m the fitness editor and associate beauty editor of Cosmo and therefore allowed free access to virtually any gym and trainer in New York City, my scale was doing scary things about three months ago. Yes, I’m tall—5 feet 10—but my college weight was 140. I felt fat, hopeless, and too tired and stressed by my everyday life to make time to exercise and eat right. Then my older sister called on the morning of her 30th birthday to tell me, “It’s true—the day you turn 30, your butt drops and your body goes to pot.” I was determined to do something before that happened to me.

That very afternoon at work, a diet book came across my desk called *The Balance: Your Personal Prescription for Supermetabolism, Renewed Vitality, Maximum Health, Instant Rejuvenation* (ReganBooks, 1996), by **Oz Garcia**, nutrition director for Equinox Fitness Clubs. My first reaction was “Yeah, right.” But as I leafed through the book, his approach made sense: Pinpoint the type of fat-burner you are (slow, fast, or mixed), then plan your menus with foods that are chemically correct for your type of metabolism. I also liked that his meal plans—lots of protein and limited carbs—reflected the current diet trend away from high-carb menus. Some experts now believe that the popular low-fat, high-carb diets have too many calories to promote weight loss. Plus, **Oz’s** regimen didn’t seem to have any impossible do-or-die rules to follow, so—with my sister’s words still ringing in my ears—I scheduled an appointment with him.

Meeting the Wizard Named Oz

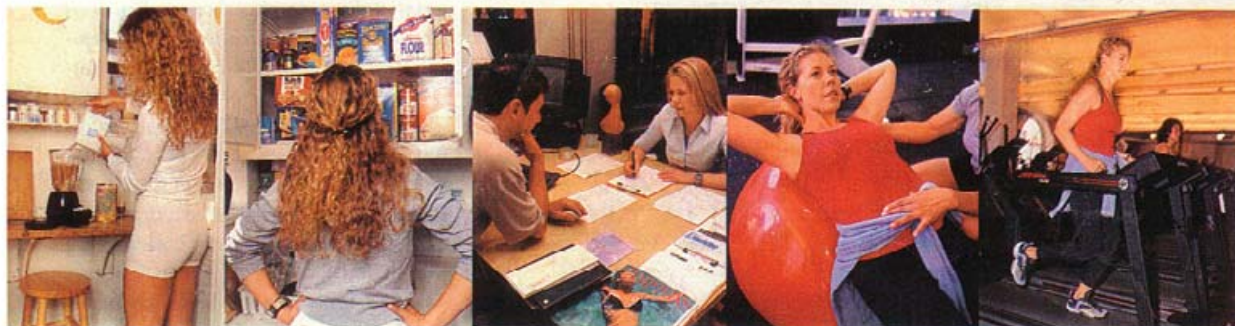
I thought **Oz** and I would chat for a little bit, he’d give me some magic advice, and I’d see him in a month or so. *Ha!* He quizzed me for an hour on my eating and drinking habits, my energy level, even my skin’s condition. He concluded not only that I could stand to lose a good 15 pounds but also that my killer menstrual cramps, undereye bags, and lack of energy were due to the way I ate. “If you want to become healthy and lean, you need to commit to that goal and see me no less than once a week for three months,” said **Oz**. I agreed on the spot.

My first assignment was to continue eating the way I normally do for two weeks but write everything down. Before I left his office, he gave me his test to figure out what type of fat burner I am (take a version of it for yourself; see page 319).

Clearing the Cupboards

Two weeks later, I handed my quiz to Oz. Apparently I fall into the slow-burner category, meaning my body burns off food at the same pace a turtle treks uphill. Then I turned over the food logs. He took one glance and said, "This is a disaster. Your body is flooded with all the wrong foods." *Ooops.* Guess he didn't approve of that huge cookie with iced coffee scribbled in every afternoon. My main problem was wheat gluten, which he claims acts like sludge, making it harder for my body to break down food. He advised me to stop eating all foods containing wheat immediately. Read: bread, pasta, cookies, cake, crackers, and pizza. On the bright side, I could eat nonwheat carbohydrates like potatoes, rice, and oatmeal, though the bulk of my diet was to be protein—chicken, fish, etc. I also had to cut out caffeine and high-fat foods completely and only have red meat a couple of times a month. Oh yeah...and I had to start working out three times a week.

Surprisingly, I walked out of his office still enthusiastic and committed. I went home that night determined to rid my cupboards of all wheat products so there would be no temptation.



Breaking Up With Bread

Swearing off bread was like ending things with a no-good boyfriend who you stayed with only for the amazing sex. Even if ditching it is the right thing to do, my body still wanted that high. Though I'd just had my Oz-approved chocolate protein shake, I'd pass a bagel shop in the morning and stand there practically salivating. But I soon learned how to make the diet work for me—I'd scoop up veggies and grilled chicken from a salad bar for lunch and since I was technically allowed to eat potatoes, I'd throw in a bag of chips.

The hardest hump of the day was around four, when my sugar-and-caffeine-combo craving would kick in—hard. One day when I just couldn't stand it anymore, I realized *Hey, M&Ms don't have wheat in them*, and ran to snag a bag. Of course, Oz noticed these chocolate breaks on the food logs that I was still keeping, but he never chided me about them. He said chocolate was better than cookies. Thank God! He also was great about some of my on-the-job food flubs: When Oz read one lunch entry (breaded chicken parmesan, fettucine alfredo, two brownies), he asked, "What happened?" I explained that at photo shoots, there's always an incredible spread of food. His response?

"Just because the trough is filled doesn't mean that you have to eat like the rest of the animals." His words hit home, as did his advice: "If you screw up, enjoy it and get back on track the next day." Which I did.

Revvng Up for New Routines

It was clear that my only option of jamming a workout into my crazy, hectic schedule was to do it in the morning, before my day started. Since I knew that I'd have trouble doing this on my own, I signed up for two 7:00 A.M. workouts a week with a trainer at Equinox, Bonnie Smith, who, I discovered, is absolutely obsessed with squats. She'd make me do hundreds of them. We also did boxing, lunges, isometrics, weight training, sit-ups, and "core training" with a huge round red ball you balance on to do *more* sit-ups. I would fit in my third workout on the weekends, usually some inline skating with my boyfriend, Stuart. I can't say we burned mega calories, but at least we were being active and having fun. As the weeks progressed, I was thrilled to notice less jiggle in my thighs, a thinner waistline, and defined triceps muscles.

Learning new diet and fitness tricks (from left): Instead of my beloved bagel breakfast, I got hooked on high-protein chocolate shakes; getting set to purge my cabinets of anything containing wheat; going over my food journals with Oz; core training to tone my abs; taking to the treadmill to boost my slow-burner metabolism; blading with my boyfriend, Stuart (far right).

Flushing the Final Fat

Two months into Oz's program, I had lost 10 pounds. My level of energy was outrageous, my complexion was clear—and no more menstrual cramps. I was amazed. Oz then announced that I was ready for the "fat flush" to drop the final five. I was supposed to eat nothing but protein and veggies and drink only water for a week. I lasted four days, lost three pounds, then had a glass of wine and declared that that was enough fat flushing for me. The final two pounds soon came off.

So, at the end of the three months, I had dropped the 15 pounds I set out to lose and shrunk to a size 8. I was so happy that I went out and bought a pair of stretchy turquoise pants. Having seen and felt the incredible effects of Oz's plan, I'm determined to stick with it for as long as I can. And if I do slip up (like munching on my favorite movie combo: M&Ms sprinkled on top of popcorn), I know that I'll just have to do a couple more squats in the morning and get back on Oz's yellow brick road. ■