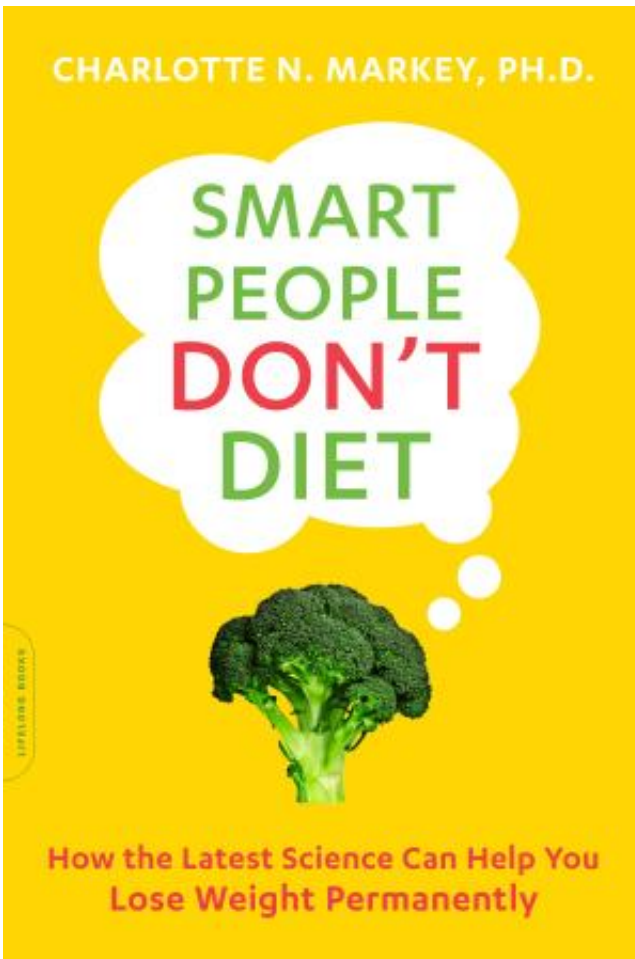


Psychology professor offers a different approach to weight management

December 5 2014, by Tom Mclaughlin



For many people, the joys of holiday traditions are coupled with the dreaded, annual battle of the bulge.

Like clockwork, the simmering questions arise: Should I watch my waistline, or indulge in the cornucopia of holiday treats and start my diet when the holidays are over? After all, that's what New Year's resolutions are for, right?

But wait: you can have your cake – and pumpkin pie – and eat it too, says Charlotte Markey, a professor of psychology at Rutgers University-Camden.

"Once people say that they can't have that [pumpkin pie](#), they will only want it more, and are still likely to eat it and to eat more of it," explains Markey. "We should enjoy the holiday rituals and the foods that go with those rituals. It's a cliché, but it works: if you want to get through the long haul of the holidays, don't try to cut out foods altogether, but keep them in balance or moderation."

Such practical advice is emblematic of the refreshingly different approach to weight management that Markey offers in her forthcoming book *Smart People Don't Diet*, due out on Dec. 30 from Da Capo Lifelong Books. Based on more than a century of research by scientists, doctors, nutritionists, and psychologists, the book addresses the underlying causes of weight gain and offers proven strategies for healthful, sustainable weight management. The book will also be accompanied by the SmartenFit mobile app, which allows users to keep tabs on food intake, set nutrition and health goals, and swap out foods for healthier alternatives.

Rather than relying on gimmicks and quick fixes, Markey offers a reasonable, accessible guide for adopting a healthy lifestyle as a long-term endeavor.

"From the very beginning of the book, I say that you have to be committed to healthier living forever," says Markey, a resident of

Swarthmore, Pa. "This isn't about losing five pounds this week for the wedding that you are going to on the weekend. Sure, you can try that, but research shows that you are just going to gain them back next week. This is about changing your life."

According to Markey, aside from being "a miserable experience," dieting rarely leads to the desired goal of losing weight. On the contrary, studies show that dieters often gain weight because most diets' intensity, restrictions, and short durations are ill-equipped to produce long-term results.

"The track record for dieting is terrible," says Markey, who teaches a psychology of eating course at Rutgers–Camden. "You may lose 20 pounds in the first month, but a year later, you are right back to where you started or may have even gained a few pounds."

Throughout the book, Markey offers simple strategies for altering bad eating habits. She explains that most people are habitual eaters, tending to crave the same foods time and again. Consequently, instead of "going cold turkey," she recommends substituting lower-calorie and lower-fat versions of the same beloved foods, thereby establishing better habits that can be easily maintained.

"It's not about making drastic changes," says Markey. "Instead of sitting down with a tub of ice cream with 500 calories, eat a healthier variety and a little less of it. Just by eliminating a couple hundred calories from that dessert can result in a 20-pound weight loss over the course of a year. If you are looking to lose 10 or 20 pounds, then you only need to switch out a few foods and give it enough time to make a difference."

In *Smart People Don't Diet*, Markey also addresses the psychological and physical aspects of weight management, dedicating entire chapters to research on body image and exercise. As Markey explains, there is a

cyclical nature to the way that mental and physical health feed off of one another. She affirms that a major aspect of having a positive body image is learning to be "a little bit more accepting and gentle with ourselves."

"None of us is perfect," says the Rutgers–Camden researcher. "You have to move away from the mindset that says you have to lose 40 pounds in order to be acceptable to yourself. Feel accomplished if you lose a couple pounds; that's a great place to start."

Markey notes that, although some strategies in the book might sound like "commonsense," if more people were aware of these sensible solutions then there wouldn't be a nationwide obesity epidemic and consumers wouldn't be ready to latch on to the latest weight-loss fads. Moreover, while the book isn't as prescriptive as other weight-loss guides, she adds, any plan that is too restrictive isn't a recipe for long-term success.

"A plan might tell you to eat only an apple and two pieces of bread," she says. "However, if you don't enjoy eating only that, you aren't going to do it for very long. You have to get away from the fads and start setting realistic goals."

Simply put, Markey says, get to know yourself and figure out a plan that works for you.

"As I like to say, 'We are all works in progress,'" says Markey. "It's not about dieting for a week. It's about eating smart for the rest of your life."

Markey received her doctorate in health and developmental psychology, with a focus on eating behaviors and body image, from the University of California–Riverside. She has been conducting research on eating, dieting, body image, and obesity risk for more than 15 years. She has also published more than 50 book chapters and journal articles in peer-reviewed journals, and has presented hundreds of presentations at

universities throughout the world.

Markey also pens a [blog](#) and writes regularly for ScienceofRelationships.com, focusing primarily on how romantic partners are relevant to individuals' eating behaviors, body image, and health.

In addition, Markey has been involved in community efforts to educate parents and children about healthy eating, [body image](#), and [weight management](#). A portion of the sales from Smart People Don't Diet will be donated to The Food Trust to fund programs that facilitate education about healthy eating for children.

Provided by Rutgers University

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