

# Your Personality Diet



## ESFP

**Extravert - Sensor - Feeler - Perceiver**

*Based on the internationally-recognized  
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®)*

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## Introduction

While researchers are busily studying possible causes of obesity—from genetic connections to environmental factors—have you ever thought that it could just be your personality type at the root of the problem? There are too many people today who are overweight or obese to attribute it to just one reason. Yet, with 16 possible personality types (according to the mother-daughter team of Isabel Myers and Katherine Briggs, developers of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®—also known as the MBTI®), maybe who we are has more to do with our gaining or losing weight than the causes researchers are studying.

This book may be just the answer for those of you who:

- Didn't lose weight on that last diet you tried
- Did lose weight but gained it back
- Weren't able to stick to the exercise program you started
- Never could get yourself started on an exercise program
- Let stressful situations in your life get to you and no matter how much you tried to relax, just couldn't
- Have habits you want to change but haven't found the right method to change.

I'm sure you could add to this list. I want to say to you up front—*You* have not failed. The approach you've taken failed you! Let me repeat that.

**"You have not failed.  
The approach you've taken failed you!"**

Keep that in mind as we search for what is the right way for you.

When you see people changing their habits successfully, you probably assume they are stronger than you, having a willpower and determination you lack. They seem to exude confidence. What they've got that you don't is the *right approach*, one that fits them like comfortable shoes. You, too, can have that confidence if you read on.

Many people may embark on a journey of losing weight and improving their lifestyle habits. However, not all of them can boast of arriving at their destination. As people get older and "wider," they longingly remember how good they used to look and how well their clothes

used to fit. They jokingly allude to some unknown phenomenon in their closet that is shrinking their clothes. They know all too well, when huffing and puffing up a flight of stairs, how out-of-shape they have become. When their friends nickname them “Spud” because of the couch potato they have become, they think about dusting off their athletic club membership card they haven’t used since they joined the year before.

Maybe you’re saying to yourself, “You wouldn’t believe how many times I have tried to lose weight and change my habits. If there was a new diet on the market, I was on it. If there was a new miracle food, I ate it. If there was a new piece of exercise equipment, I bought it. While I experienced some success with everything I tried, before I knew it, I was back to where I started.” Then there are some people who cannot even claim any level of success. “Put a donut in front of me and I’m a goner (and so is the donut!).” “I would get the latest book on how to relax, but then get stressed out for never getting around to reading it!” Sound familiar?

As a dietitian and nutrition consultant, I hear similar scenarios from many of my clients. They fervently want to change their habits so they can lose weight and improve their health. They know their bad habits are leading them down a road of destruction. When they look at themselves in the mirror every day, they assess their character in terms of their weight and berate themselves for “letting themselves go” like that. Of course, not looking good in their clothes is minor in comparison to what carrying around excess weight can do to their health. If they don’t already have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or blood sugars that are out of control, being overweight can lead to these conditions—and then on to the development of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and a host of other problems, including cancer. Yes, even cancer can come from being overweight, something most people don’t know about.

## Something’s Wrong Here

When I started out in my practice, I used to take a different approach when counseling my clients than I do now. My clients and I would discuss their goals and what they wanted to achieve, and after taking a medical and diet history, I would develop an eating and exercise plan for them. They would also get a weekly assignment to help them incorporate the new knowledge they were receiving. At the end of two to three months, my clients were normally well on their way to achieving their goals. They would continue with me for some months to make sure they could maintain what they had accomplished. After that, it was time for them to go it on their own.

When some of my clients were back on my doorstep nine months to a year later, I found it puzzling and disconcerting. They shared with me how good they had been at first, practicing everything they had learned. But slowly they found themselves falling back into their old habits. I felt badly for them and wondered what had gone wrong. Why were *these* people having problems when my other clients were maintaining their weight loss with their new lifestyle habits?

I questioned what had gone wrong. Did the *approach* I had taken with my clients fail them in some way? Or did these people fail themselves? While under my care, they fully participated in the process and achieved their goals. One would assume, then, that the approach taken was beneficial. But something was happening when they were on their own. What was it?

When we look at the track record of the weight-loss industry as a whole, the rate of relapse is staggering. The easy excuse is to blame the individuals, and conclude that they are

simply “weak-willed”. However, you have to ask yourself why anyone would go through all the effort and struggles to achieve a health goal (such as losing weight or lowering blood cholesterol), and then, once the goal is reached, let it slip away. I realized that something deeper must be causing the problem.

When my returning clients and I tried to analyze what had gone wrong, one common theme appeared: It seemed they had looked at the goals they set as *end points*. Once the goal was achieved, they felt they could give up the method they had used to get there. This often felt like a great relief because, in order to reach their goals, they had relied on sheer willpower—with all its connotations of self-denial and strict self-control. Not wanting to let me down or embarrass themselves, they did what it took to reach their goal and get that proverbial gold star—and then collapsed!

Willpower takes a diligence most of us cannot maintain. It’s a short-term Band-Aid® that can eventually backfire, sending people retreating to their old habits with a vengeance. If *you* have tried using willpower, you know the feeling of sacrificing, of giving something up, but missing it all the more. Finally, under the strain of being on your guard every moment and worrying you will return to your old ways, you inevitably do. Using willpower often results in your sabotaging all your good work.

Reminding myself that not all of my clients were reverting to their old ways, I had to ask: “What was working for some of them—enabling them to maintain their new approach to eating, exercise and stress reduction—that was *not* working for the others?”

## An Interesting Discovery

As luck would have it, about the same time some of my clients were returning to me, I was introduced to *psychological type*. It was developed by the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, and later elaborated by two housewives, Isabel Myers and her mother, Katharine Briggs, who had been studying Jung’s theories for some time. What interested them was how we use our mind, our values, and our feelings in the everyday business of living. With so much information available for the taking and so many decisions to make every day, something within us must be guiding us in the process. They saw this guiding force to be our personality, with its many facets coloring our lives and influencing our behaviors. In order to find out what those facets were, Myers and Briggs developed a questionnaire, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) based on Jung’s work. Using it, they were able to group people into sixteen different types according to their characteristics and values.

Psychological type, also referred to as personality type, has been used for a long time to help people discover appropriate career paths and improve their communication and relationship skills. To the best of my knowledge, the MBTI® has never been used to help people change their lifestyle habits and, in turn, to lose weight, lower blood cholesterol, stabilize their blood sugars, reduce their risk of disease, increase their energy and generally, feel their best. With that in mind, I started to explore, from the perspective of psychological type, the reason some clients were returning.

It dawned on me that the health and weight-loss program I gave all of my clients worked for the successful ones simply because it *matched their personality*. They were able to comfortably make changes that were compatible with their type and then maintain those changes.

Those who had experienced relapse had failed because the program was not a good fit with their personalities.

In the course of helping an individual with their health goals, healthcare professionals tend to tailor the program to that person's physical needs by adjusting calorie levels, teaching about appropriate food choices, and proposing some sort of exercise regimen that fits the individual's capability. However, the basic weekly approach or plan used to make the necessary changes is usually typically the same for everyone (for example, telling each person to keep a daily food and exercise diary). If your personality favors the approach, the chances are you will achieve your goals. If not, you're back to blaming yourself for being a failure.

Once I made personality typing part of my practice, I realized that "one plan does not fit all." Due to our differing personality types, not everyone feels comfortable keeping food diaries, hanging pictures on the refrigerator of how they want to look when they have lost weight, keeping track of the number of fat grams they are eating, or scheduling an appointment with themselves each day to relax. Some people can't take that much structure, while others can. Some people need greater variety in their choices than others. Some people want to be shown the way, while others need to do it their own way.

## What Is The Right Plan?

If you were to do a survey of the people with a healthy lifestyle, you would find that they are not all doing the same thing. They don't eat the same things or exercise the same way. To paraphrase the title of the Frank Sinatra song, "they do it their way." And that way is by using their personality to make the choices that are right for them. Now, you too, can do it *your way* with the help of this book. There is a right approach for you. You will find out what your personality type is and how it has contributed to:

- Eating for the wrong reasons
- Eating too much and not the right foods
- Avoiding exercise and opting for a sedentary lifestyle
- Letting stress run your life instead of you're being in control of your life.

The exciting part comes when you learn how to use the different components of your personality type to make a healthy lifestyle a habit. Then losing that extra weight, maintaining the loss, having more energy, and literally feeling like a new person will come naturally.

This is an approach that will last you a lifetime. It isn't a quick fix—it's a permanent fix. That's because you will be discovering ways to eat that work with *your* personality type, *your way* of life, *your* needs. You were born with your personality type and it will be with you until you die. Therefore, it just makes good sense to make changes to your habits in a way that is compatible with your personality. Then those changes are yours for the rest of your life. You will say about your new lifestyle approach, just as did Cinderella when she tried on the glass slipper, "It fits perfectly." (And don't forget, Cinderella lived happily ever after!)

## Chapter 1

**Know Where You're Headed and Why**

This could be your first attempt or your hundredth attempt to improve your lifestyle habits, but I'm confident it will be your last. This time you are going to do it differently. Hopefully you really feel ready this time. While motivation gives you the *why* for embarking on the journey, commitment gives you the *staying power* to see your journey to its end. It's the fuel to reach your goal. Your personality is the *vehicle* you will use to find the best means to get there.

Appreciate that this journey you're about to start will take time. Change should be a gradual process. Overnight change is quickly followed by overnight relapse. It probably took you years to form the habits you have. Therefore, you need to give yourself time to become accustomed to new ways of doing things. Think about the piano player who must first learn the notes on the piano, then practice scales, before moving on to playing concertos. The more the pianist practices, the more comfortable he or she feels with the instrument and the more adept at playing it. Eventually, little thought need be given to the mechanics of playing. That is the way habit changes take place.

Keep in mind that while the destination of your journey is important, the journey itself is every bit as important. I suppose I could tell you exactly what to do, step-by-step, to reach your destination (and there may be some of you who would be very content with that). However, how prepared will you be if something comes along that I never addressed? Using your personality to determine what works for you is in keeping with an ancient Chinese saying that goes:

Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day.  
Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

As you learn to use your personality to make lifestyle habit changes, you will be feeding yourself for a lifetime. It should be an enjoyable and comfortable process. Otherwise, you're doomed from the start because you will be using willpower to get the job done.

**You Must Be Myth-taken****Myth #1: All It Takes Is Willpower**

Most people use methods to reach their goals that they would never consider doing for a lifetime. They figure that they can discontinue them once they arrive at their destination. That's why they are amenable to using willpower, accepting that—for a short while—they will be denying themselves certain things and having to be in absolute control of themselves. The less people perceive themselves able to change, the more strongly they employ willpower.



Using willpower implies that we have to avoid the “forbidden fruits”— which, by most people’s definition, includes everything they like that isn’t healthy. That would mean eliminating chocolate, ice cream, steak, butter, lazing around watching television, .... (I’m sure you could add to the list!) The problem with this thinking is that it won’t last a lifetime. I have to be honest with you. I’m not willing to give up chocolate for the rest of my life unless a doctor tells me I must. And now that researchers are finding that there may even be some health benefits to chocolate, how lucky for us chocolate lovers!

You may mistakenly believe that those who are able to avoid these forbidden fruits are naturally strong-willed while you, who may succumb to them, are weak-willed. It could well be that they have already made the difficult behavior change and so appear strong. You may feel weak because you have tried to change some behaviors and have failed. Once you learn how to use your personality to make decisions, nothing need be dubbed “forbidden” unless your doctor has told you to eliminate certain foods from your diet or to avoid certain exercise. Barring such medical prohibitions, you can make constructive decisions based on what you’ve already eaten for the day, what will fit into your daily nutrient allowances, if you plan to exercise to burn a few extra calories, and many other issues. When you do decide to have something, it definitely won’t be because you were weak-willed. While I believe that nothing should be off-limits, I do believe that everything should be done within a defined context of your needs, which we will discuss later.

People use willpower as a way of avoiding facing up to the reason for or cause of the bad habit. Instead, they impose something external that seems healthier (for example, a new diet plan); then they grit their teeth to make it work. I suppose they figure that if they use willpower long enough, the new behavior they’re practicing will replace the bad habit and become their new healthy habit. Sometimes that works. However, more often than not, their willpower crumbles and they revert to the old habit, feeling worse than when they started. Moreover, they still haven’t faced up to what caused the bad habit.

Jane was born shortly after the end of World War II. Her parents, having had to scrape by during the war, now could afford to put more food on the table, and give treats besides. If Jane didn’t eat everything on her plate, she was soundly reminded of how bad everything was during the war or how children were starving overseas. She inevitably developed “clean-the-plate” syndrome—not an easy habit to break. Now she’s an adult and yet she’s still cleaning her plate. Deciding it’s time to lose weight, she goes on a diet, using whatever willpower she can muster to leave something on her plate. Everything is going fine until one day something happens in her life that’s so stressful her willpower no longer works. Jane doesn’t care what the diet says; she eats everything on her plate. There—now she feels like her old self again, somehow figuring that her old self can handle this stress better than this make-believe person she seems to have become.

Do you see the problem here? Jane hadn’t dealt with the reason why she learned to clean her plate. She didn’t think about the fact that the times had changed. There was no longer the we-didn’t-have-it-and-now-we-do influence.

One of the main disadvantages of using willpower is that, instead of responding to the needs of your body, you’re implementing the dictates of some eating or exercise plan. Let’s say you’ve read or were told that you should not snack between meals. Three meals a day should be

more than sufficient food, so it says. Yet, you find that by mid-morning your stomach is growling. Your body is sending you a message, but you will “show it who is boss” and use willpower to get you through. Maybe you manage not to eat anything, but you make up for it at lunch time, stuffing yourself. With your body being such a smart machine, you really should take the time to listen to what it has to say. The conflict arises when your mind and emotions get involved in the process, so that you no longer react naturally to your bodily needs.

I believe people who want to lose weight end up yo-yo dieting for two reasons. Either they're using willpower to avoid eating certain foods and find they can't maintain that vigilance. Or the method they're using to lose weight isn't comfortable for them, so it isn't an approach they can follow the rest of their lives. I can't say it enough times, no one should ever “go on a diet.”

To go **ON** a diet means eventually going **OFF** a diet. The idea is to discover an effective way to eat that doesn't look, feel or taste like a diet.

This book will help you find a way that works with your personality, so the process of change is also the process of living. There is less likelihood of relapse when the way you changed has become a part of you, a natural and effortless approach.

It isn't willpower you need to employ in your pursuit of healthy habits. It's conscious awareness and the use of your personality type. It's keeping your eye on your target at all times. By constantly checking and rechecking your strategies and moves, making sure they are in line with your goal, you can reach your goal. Some people find that willpower makes them more conscious of what they're doing. Unfortunately, that usually lasts only until the rubber band of willpower stretches so tightly it breaks.

### **Myth #2: The Changes Will Never Last**

I'm sure that many of you are asking yourself why this time should be any different than all your other attempts at making changes. There could be many reasons why your previous attempts failed. Maybe you weren't ready the last time you tried to change your unhealthy lifestyle habits. Think back and ask yourself whether you tried changing because you wanted it or someone else wanted it for you. The only change that is going to endure is one you really want.

Another reason that you might think the change won't last is that previously you were attacking the symptoms of the problem, not the problem itself. For example, Stephanie had gained quite a bit of weight when she was going through an emotionally trying time with her boyfriend. She had turned to food for comfort. When she decided to lose the weight she had gained, not surprisingly, she failed. What needed fixing first was her relationship with her boyfriend.

Have you tried the “let's-do-this-quickly-and-get-it-over-with” approach? It rarely lasts. Little is learned in the process that you can use for the rest of your life. It could also be that the methods you have tried were not right for you. Just because they worked for someone else

doesn't mean they will work for you. You need to be losing weight according to your type not someone else's.

### **Myth #3: You Can Give Up a Goal Once You've Achieved It**

Many people who have set such goals as losing weight, lowering their blood cholesterol, or improving their energy level often believe that once they have achieved these goals, they can give them up. They figure they did what it takes to accomplish the feat and now, thank goodness, they can get on with their lives. However, this type of thinking sets people up for gaining back the weight, increasing their cholesterol, and so on. Before too long, they are setting the same goals. Their problem is simply that they are setting the wrong goals and thinking short-term instead of considering how they can make this change last a lifetime. Again, this can be a reflection of your personality type.

## **Maybe You're Setting the Wrong Goals**

Why do Americans insist on setting goals such as weight-loss, cholesterol reduction, and so forth? I'm not saying that being overweight, having high cholesterol, high blood pressure or any adverse health condition is a good thing or that, because you have these conditions, there is nothing you should do or can do about it. I'm just saying that these are the wrong goals, and that by setting them, people set themselves up to fail.

Think about why you bought this book. You must have some unhealthy lifestyle habits that you know are causing you problems and need replacing. What do you think would happen if you set and achieved the habits of healthy eating, healthy fitness, healthy attitude and overall healthy habits for life as your goals? I'll tell you. You would be able to lose weight, lower your cholesterol, control your blood sugar, decrease your risk for disease, have more energy, and feel better about yourself, along with a host of other healthy conditions. In this scenario, your weight, your blood cholesterol, your energy level, and so on just become measurements of how well you're succeeding with your new habits and how your body has responded to the changes. They are no longer end points.

These healthy habits are like a wheel (see Figure 1), because there is no beginning or end to them. You need to have all these habits working for you all of the time. Some of them you may already have. However, only when all of the spokes of the wheel (all the healthy habits) are present can the wheel of life turn smoothly.

## **What's Your Incentive for Changing?**

Everyone has their own reasons for changing, but most often it involves short-range thinking. "I have to get my cholesterol down by the time of my company physical.", "I bet my friend that I could cut out desserts for a month." The outcome of this kind of thinking is that once you have achieved the results, whatever efforts you used to get there no longer seem necessary. Take the example of Lucy, mother of the bride. Lucy wanted to lose weight so she would look good at her daughter's wedding. On the day of the wedding, everyone was congratulating her on the great job she had done. (They should only know the methods she used, from diet pills to fasting to grapefruit five times a day!) However, 6 months later, Lucy had regained all the weight she

had lost and then some. You see, once the wedding was over, so was the reason for her losing weight. Lucy was missing what I call a *life vision*.

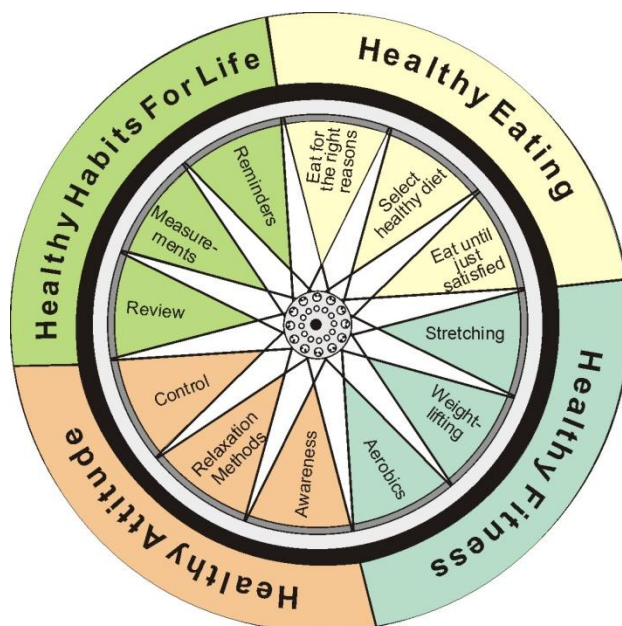


Figure 1  
Wheel of Healthy Habits

A *life vision* is the *why* or purpose, behind your efforts, what you see for yourself regarding your health that will last you a lifetime. It is measured in the amount of drive and motivation you have to see it happen. It is the eternal carrot held out in front of you that constantly pulls you forward towards something that is far bigger than individual goals or healthy habits.

If you were to say that your vision is to lose weight, I would ask you “Why? What is your reason for losing weight?” You might say “To fit into my clothes,” and I would tell you that isn’t a strong enough reason to last you a lifetime. (You can always get a larger size.) If you were to say that your vision is to lower your cholesterol to a normal level, I would again ask you “Why?” You might say “To avoid a heart attack.” With that comment, you are getting closer to making a vision statement, but not quite. I could again ask you “Why do you want to avoid a heart attack?”

As long as you can ask the question “Why?” in response to a stated health goal, you have not come up with a *life vision*. I’m hoping that you will come to the same conclusion or vision as I have for you: to improve the quality of your life and potentially extend the quantity or length of your life. That’s what I see as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. That should have enough pulling power to get you to change and to maintain that change. When you have a complete Wheel of Healthy Habits headed toward a *life vision*, you are literally whirring along. (See Figure 2)

A *life vision* is for the long-term and needs to be the guiding force for the rest of your life. What if Lucy had set as her vision to be as healthy as possible so she would be around to enjoy her grandchildren? Losing weight would have been only one objective or measurement among many to reach that vision.

Think about what you want your *life vision* to be. Make it something that will continually draw you forward through the coming years. Write it down on a piece of paper and put it away in a safe place (not so safe that you forget where you put it!) Every so often you should look at it to see how you're doing in your pursuit of your vision.



Figure 2  
Road to Optimum Health

Note: As you read this book, there will be pages that ask you to fill in blanks or make checkmarks. Because this is an electronic book, what I suggest you do is print out those particular pages so you can take advantage of the interactivity of this