

Tackling the final weight loss hurdle

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It's hard to believe by looking at her, but the lean and toned Michelle Bridges actually considers herself to be "a bit of a foodie".

The trick to keeping those impulses in check is willpower, discipline and taking responsibility for what you put in your mouth, she says.

"I would love to smash a block of chocolate in front of the TV every night, and I'd love to go for coffee and order the caramel slice or the vanilla slice but I don't because I like to be healthy and I like to fit into my jeans," she says.

"I know that's just eating without any responsibility and actually eating like a child rather than eating like an adult."

It's an uncompromising attitude, but The Biggest Loser trainer says it works.

"Some people actually need that much of donk on the head to go, 'Oh my god, I'm out of control,'" she says.

Bridges has worked in the fitness industry for the past 18 years as a gym instructor and personal trainer. She has become a household name in Australia for helping significantly overweight contestants on The Biggest Loser reality television show.

In her latest book, she tackles one of the final hurdles in any weight loss attempt – losing the last five kilograms.

"I think most people just can't be bothered [to lose that last bit]," she says.

"It takes a fair bit of nous, determination, willpower and discipline to push out that last little hurdle, to get those last few kilos off. You've really got to want to do it."

The plateau that feels like a mountain peak

Tara Diversi, spokeswoman for the Dietitians Association of Australia, says as time goes on people can lose motivation and get a bit slack with their diet, causing weight loss to stall.

In other cases, the diet itself just isn't sustainable.

"Some diet plans have a different breakfast each day, it can be quite stressful, it's like having to decide what to wear versus wearing a uniform," Diversi says.

"Or the other situation is when you get sick of the type of foods you are eating, so you're not getting enough choice."

It is also much harder to lose the last five than the first five, she says.

Her advice: find a diet plan that works for you and stick with it; and keep upping the intensity of your workouts as your weight decreases.

"In every program you'll have a plateau, so some weeks you won't lose weight but the next week you'll lose a lot and it's not just from that one week, everything matters," she says.

Go hard or go home

In her book, Bridges sets a 30-day challenge to lose the weight. It's a tough ask, but she says it comes down to how badly you want it.

"It is interesting to say to yourself every now and again, 'I'd like to just see what I can do with my physicality, my health in a certain period of time'", she says.

The book includes a meal plan for the month - three meals a day plus snacks - exercises, recipes and a shopping list.

"I believe that in one month you can build some pretty good habits, even lifelong habits," she says.

Firing up the metabolism

Diet and exercise are an essential part of any weight-loss program and these can also play a big part in increasing metabolism.

On the food front, Bridges recommends eating regularly, drinking plenty of water and eating metabolism boosting foods especially raw fruit and vegetables such as lettuce, cucumber, apple and grapefruit.

One of the most common problems she comes across is people who eat very little during the day and binge once they get home. This leads to meals being skipped and slows down the metabolism.

"I'm definitely a believer in three main meals being enough to keep your engines burning, and definitely, definitely breakfast," she says.

In terms of exercise, Bridges recommends combining weight training with cardio.

"I reckon everyone should do something at least six days a week," she says.

"That doesn't necessarily mean you have to bust your butt every single day, but it's about building a habit. I brush my teeth every day, I make my bed every day, I do the dishes every day, I do a bit of exercise every day."

Mind over matter

Training the mind is just as important as training the body for keeping the weight off long term. If you don't get in the right head space, "the weight will come back on regardless of whether it took you 10 years to get it off or 10 minutes".

She rejects criticism that losing weight quickly under such a strict plan will lead to it being put back on once the program ends.

"Losing weight is a science, keeping weight off is a psychology and they are two completely different things," she says.

"When people bang on to me about if you take it off too quickly you'll put it back on just as quickly, I just don't agree with that."

Her mind training tips include having two television free nights a week and going for walk instead, going for a whole week without adding sugar to coffee (and switching to skim milk), and walking, running or cycling all or part of the way to work twice a week.

Longer term, it's about finding a balance.

"We need to have those days where we can let our hair down," she says.

"I'm a bit of a foodie, I love it myself, but I set myself up for success."

Losing the Last 5 Kilos by Michelle Bridges is published by Viking, \$29.95.



Michelle Bridges.