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NOT FOR SALE

Solving the

WEIGHT LOSS PUZZLE

Maybe your latest blood test wasn't great, or your waistband fits more snugly than you'd like. Here's what the experts want you to know about setting reasonable goals for keeping excess weight from adding up.

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WEIGHT LOSS GOALS

as the kidneys and the spleen, produces chemicals that damage blood vessels, affects blood sugar levels, and increases the risk of conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. If you store fat around your belly, it's crucial to maintain a healthy weight.



SETTING THE RIGHT GOAL

Healthy bodies come in different sizes, so you and your doc should discuss your objectives. "If you're dealing with rising blood sugar or blood pressure, these things are fixable," says Dr Cheskin. For instance, you don't have to fit into the pants you wore before you had kids, but you can discuss what amount of weight loss would help you achieve your goal of lowering your blood pressure.

Be proactive. "Maybe you don't have any health complications now. But for people who are overweight, there's a higher risk of developing metabolic problems such as diabetes or high cholesterol and biomechanical issues like joint pain," says weight management expert Dr Eduardo Grunvald. "We want to reduce health risks so that prediabetes doesn't become diabetes, for example."

Sometimes healthcare providers use body mass index (BMI), a ratio of weight to height, to determine whether you should lose weight, but BMI is not an accurate gauge of overall health. If you'd like to move away from BMI, you can ask your doctor to avoid weight conversations and use other markers, such as blood pressure and cholesterol, to evaluate your health risks.

STEP 1 TRACK YOUR HEALTH

In order to adopt better-for-you behaviours, you first need to figure out where you are right now.

● LOG YOUR HABITS

Maybe you've been having large-portioned restaurant meals every week. Or perhaps you're walking less than you think. Keeping a food and fitness journal can help you see what you're actually doing versus what you believe you've been doing. It can be a little tedious, but it raises your awareness of your choices, says Dr Cheskin.

● LOOK IN YOUR MEDICINE CABINET

Many medications, including some antidepressants, beta blockers for blood pressure, and gabapentin for pain, can affect weight, says Dr Grunvald. If you and your doctor have gauged that your weight is unhealthy, ask about alternatives to meds that may cause weight gain or make it harder to lose excess kilos.

● IF YOU USE A SCALE, BUY THE RIGHT ONE

Look for an inexpensive bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA) device, which measures the rate at which a painless electrical current travels through various tissues (more slowly through fat, faster through lean tissue). "If your weight hasn't changed, say, because you have retained some water, you may get frustrated," Dr Dhurandhar says. "This tool shows you how much fat you've lost, even if your bodyweight hasn't changed."

● STOP NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

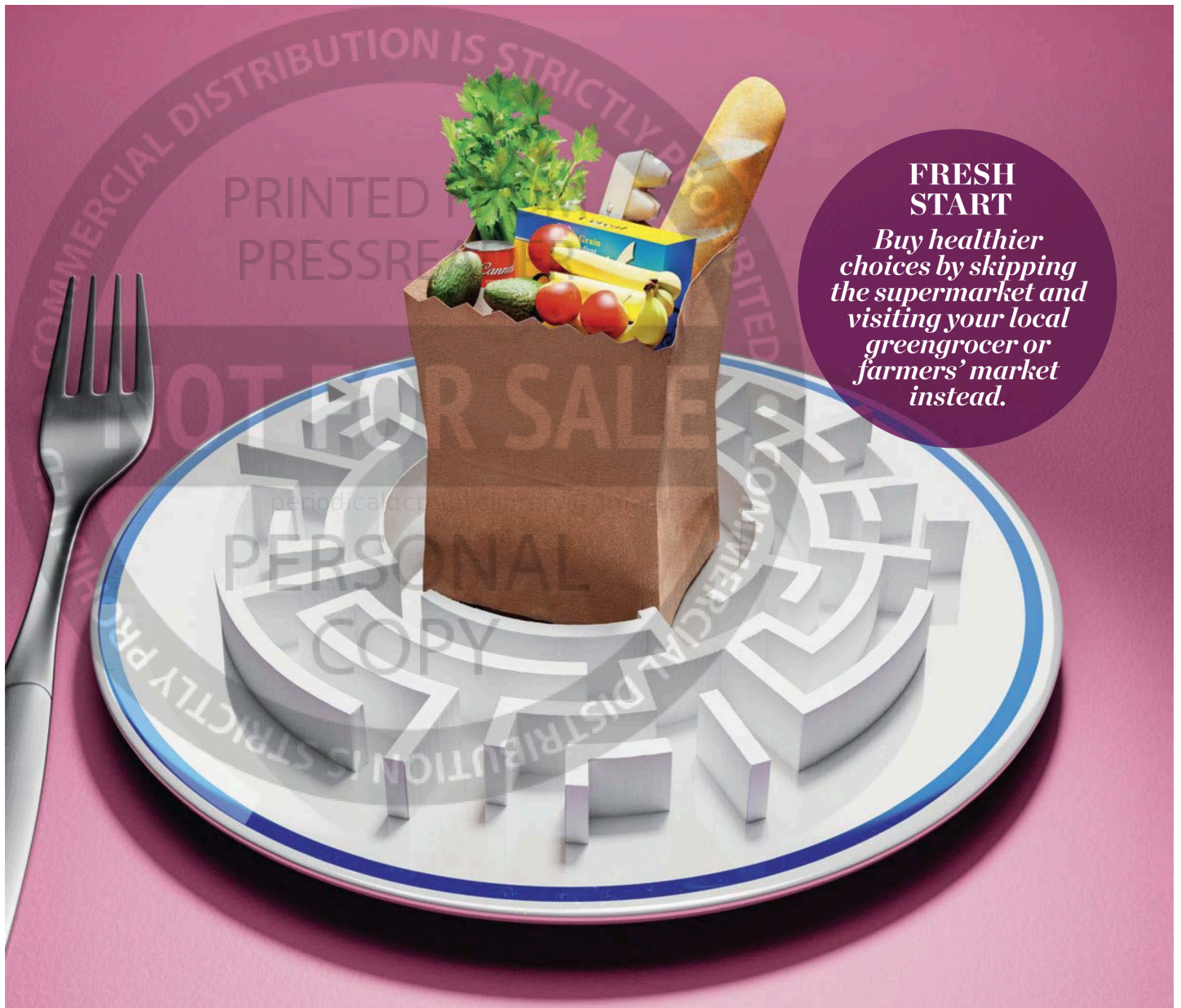
The topic of weight is often loaded with self-judgement. Check those feelings at the door. "If you think you could do better, don't moralise it. You're not a bad person," says psychology professor Dr Charlotte Markey. "This belief that we can modify our body shape to be anything, especially as we age, is not realistic. The perspective should instead be: what health behaviours can we control?"

STEP 2 CONSIDER WHAT YOU PUT ON YOUR PLATE

Obsessing over food can be harmful, but being mindful of what you eat and making healthy choices is essential for wellness in general as well as a way to avoid unwanted kilos.

● FORGET ABOUT MAGIC-SOUNDING DIETS

Diets that promise miraculous results may seem like a good way to jump-start weight loss, but they target our vulnerabilities and often tout claims with no scientific backing. "We want to believe in them for an easy fix. There is nothing wrong with expecting one, but there's a lot of quackery," says Dr Dhurandhar. It's fine to follow a reasonable plan such as the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), which limits foods that are high in saturated fat and sodium, or the ever-popular



FRESH START

Buy healthier choices by skipping the supermarket and visiting your local greengrocer or farmers' market instead.

Mediterranean diet, which focuses on plant-based foods and limits red meat and sweets, says Dr Cheskin. But avoid any extreme diet, such as one that eliminates all refined carbs, because it's not a long-term fix.

● START SMALL

Everyone wants instant success, but you'll set yourself up for failure if you're too restrictive. "The research is clear that drastic diets don't work – we don't like to be deprived," says Dr Markey. A couple of small modifications are easier to stick with. So, instead of, say, cutting out all sugar and alcohol, decide to have dessert once a week, or perhaps enjoy only a weekend glass of wine.

● KEEP IT EFFORTLESS

You need to make it easy on yourself, says Dr Grunvald. Put a bowl of peeled oranges in the fridge so you'll grab those instead of chips. Roast several veggies on Sunday so you'll simply have to reheat them to serve with weeknight

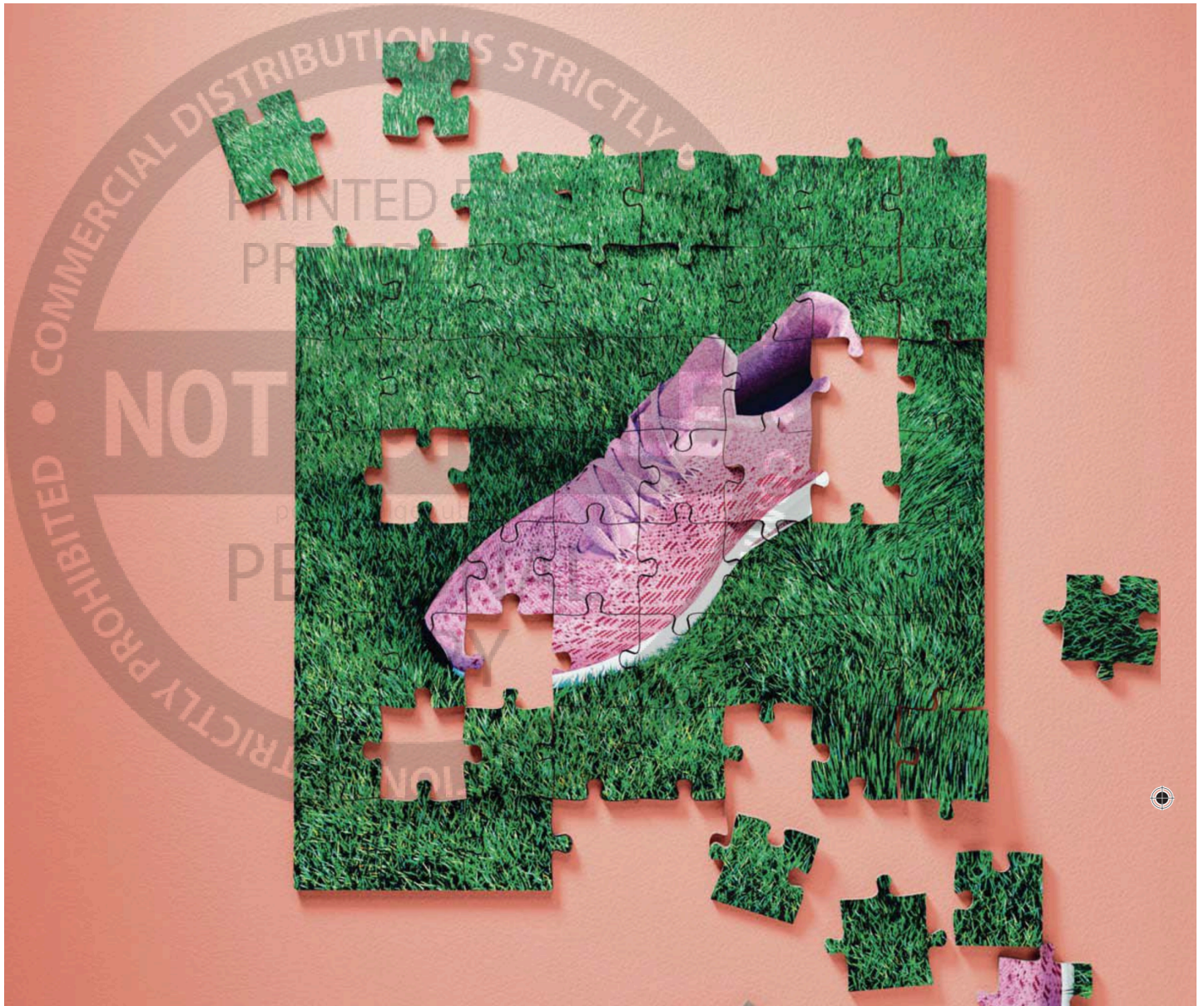
dinners. If you know you'll down a whole bag of peanuts in one sitting, buy single servings instead. And order groceries online to save time and avoid impulse purchases.

● MAKE MEALS SPECIAL

Put a tablecloth on your kitchen table with a nice candle or centerpiece. Then, when you have a snack or a meal, sit down at the table (not your desk or coffee table!), put your phone away and give your food the attention it deserves.

● LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

One of the more challenging aspects of weight maintenance or loss is learning how to tune in to your body, says Dr Cheskin. Ask yourself these questions when you eat: Am I hungry? Is this the best food choice? Do I need more, or do I just *want* more? This isn't about judgement; it's about being honest with yourself to figure out what triggers eating if you're not hungry. (Boredom? Anxiety? The fact that someone else is eating near you?) ▶



STEP 3

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU'RE MOVING

Regular exercise can help with everything from bone and joint health to blood pressure and blood sugar to your mental wellbeing.

● TRY NEW WORKOUTS

When it comes to physical activity, "break out of all-or-nothing thinking and embrace a more experimental mindset," says Lee Jordan, a master health coach and professor of kinesiology and integrative wellness. "Maybe start running twice a week and see how it goes. Or try two days of weight-bearing exercises (such as tennis, stair climbing or hiking). Then reassess. The best exercise is the one you'll do."

● STEP UP YOUR STEP GAME

Walking is one of the best activities for all ages and fitness levels. "You don't have to perspire to get benefits," says Dr Dhurandhar. "Weight-bearing activity, such as walking, maintains bone and muscle mass." Measure steps with a fitness tracker or a pedometer to stay mindful of how much total movement you're getting. Or try fast-paced intervals, which can burn up to 20 per cent more kilojoules. Choose an amount of time, a number of

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Why SLEEP matters

A growing body of research has shown that people who get too little sleep have a higher risk of weight gain and obesity. Sleep impacts hormones, such as ghrelin, leptin and cortisol, so you may feel hungrier and less full and be more likely to crave comforting foods when you're tired, says Dr Cheskin. It's also tougher to make sensible food choices when you're exhausted and cranky.

New findings indicate that sleep deprivation may also increase visceral fat accumulation. In a small study, young, healthy people ate more when sleep-deprived yet gained only a kilogram. "But when we measured visceral fat, it had increased 11 per cent," says study author Dr Virend Somers, a professor of cardiovascular medicine. "What we learnt is that looking at weight alone may cause you to underestimate the metabolic consequences of sleep deprivation."

How do you know if you're getting enough zzzs? If you wake up to an alarm instead of spontaneously, if you're sleepy when driving, or if you fall asleep when on the sofa watching TV, you probably need more sleep, Dr Somers says. Most adults require seven to nine hours per night. Try sticking to a bedtime routine and schedule, making your room dark and cool, and disconnecting from technology and bright lights at least an hour before bedtime.

steps, a distance to travel, or even a part of a song to listen to – bust your butt until you finish the interval, and then recover and repeat.

● FIND AN OUTLET FOR STRESS

Stress can derail healthy behaviours by causing us to crave sweets or alcohol or avoid physical activity, says Dr Cheskin. It also interrupts sleep (see box above). Find useful strategies that help you cope: Go outside and get moving, stay in and colour, take a bath, meditate, or call a friend and rant.

● THE BOTTOM LINE

Reframe your perspective and accept that bodies change with age. "There are changes, but we're lucky if we get the opportunity to grow older. So, be grateful for where you are," says Dr Markey. Staying at a healthy weight is a lifelong journey and not every technique works for everyone, so choose what's effective for you. By making small changes and becoming more mindful about eating, sleep and stress management, it's possible to outsmart significant extra weight. "Even if you gain weight over the next couple of decades but you make every effort to change the trajectory so it's 10 kilos instead of 20, that's a victory," says Dr Dhurandhar.

Did you
know?

Losing five to 10 per cent of your bodyweight during the first six months is considered healthy weight loss.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Help your children love their bodies

As parents and adults, we have the potential to shape how kids view themselves. "The goal is that our bodies are sources of strength, functionality and wonder," says Dr Markey. "Let's not socialise kids to think bodies are 'problems' that need to be fixed with diets." Get started with these tactics:

- ▶ Avoid comments such as "I feel fat"; this turns fat into a feeling, which it isn't.
- ▶ Make food fun by having kids help plan meals, shop and even cook.
- ▶ Let kids trust their own sense of hunger and fullness. No "clean plate club"!
- ▶ Don't moralise food by calling it "good" or "bad". All foods can be part of healthy eating.
- ▶ Find activities to enjoy together, like shooting hoops, hiking or chasing the dog around the backyard. 🐾