

# Fat and Fertile

How to get pregnant in a bigger body

Nicola Salmon





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**This book is dedicated to every person who has been made to feel worth less because of their body.**

## **About the Author**

Nicola is a fat-positive and feminist fertility coach. She advocates for change in how fat women are treated on their fertility journey. She supports fat women (and others with disordered eating) who are struggling to get pregnant to find peace with their body, find their own version of health and finally escape the yo-yo dieting cycle.

Nicola is a qualified Fertility Coach, Acupuncturist and Naturopath. She initially trained to be a Clinical Scientist at King's College Hospital, London with a masters in Medical Engineering and Physics, before life took a strange turn and she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Nicola eventually found acupuncture was able to support her and she was so intrigued by how it worked that she spent four years training to be an Acupuncturist and Naturopath.

As Nicola was diagnosed with PCOS at 16, she was drawn to treating hormonal conditions and fertility. After starting her own family, Nicola started down the long path to making peace with food and her body and realised that people in bigger bodies were being completely discriminated against, with regards to fertility support.

Nicola now advocates for people in bigger bodies to receive the treatment that they are entitled to. She has written for *The Metro*, *Scary Mommy*, *The UnEdit*, *Fertility Road* and other publications.



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# Introduction

If you are in a bigger body and want to become a parent, the chances are that you have faced some problems. Maybe your doctor has dismissed your request for help and told you to "just lose weight." Maybe your friends and family have taken you aside and told you that they are concerned for your health. Maybe all you can think about is how you need to be healthier before you can become a mother.

After all, we are told time and time again that fat is unhealthy. We have been led to believe that getting pregnant when fat is a sin worse than death. There are so many myths around getting pregnant in a fat body.

**Myth One** - Getting pregnant will be impossible for you when you are in a larger body.

**Myth Two** - If you are lucky enough to get to past that first hurdle, then your pregnancy will be riddled with risks and illnesses that are caused by being fat.

Gestational diabetes, miscarriage, babies that are too big, high blood pressure - all problems that people in fat bodies are told to expect.

**Myth Three** - And once you've had your baby? Well, then your child is more likely to be at risk of a host of other problems.

So why on earth would you not want to lose weight? If this was the truth, if this is what the research shows, why would anyone get pregnant in a fat body?

## Introduction

I got pregnant in a fat body. Twice. The first time I was eaten up with guilt throughout my whole pregnancy. I planned to lose weight before I got pregnant, but you see, I thought I had time. I was told getting pregnant was going to be impossible for me, (myth one) so I thought I would have at least a year to find yet another diet to help me lose weight.

But my husband and I got pregnant quickly, and after the initial shock wore off, I was terrified. At first, I thought I had an ectopic pregnancy. Before each scan, I convinced myself that I was going to have a miscarriage. I was sure that I had gestational diabetes and that I would need a c section because my baby was too big. None of that came true. I had a completely unremarkable pregnancy (myth two). So why was I so worried at every turn? I truly believed that I didn't deserve this pregnancy and baby because I was fat.

This book is for you if you've ever felt that way and felt ashamed to tell people that you want to get pregnant because of your size.

This book is for you if you are terrified of talking to your doctor about getting pregnant or have had a horrific experience when you did.

This book is for you if you are looking for support in getting pregnant and have no idea where to turn next.

The truth is that support and resources beyond the "lose weight" advice is few and far between. In our culture, weight is seen as controllable. Most people believe that you could lose weight if you wanted to. We are told that if the diet fails, it is us that have failed. We weren't motivated enough or strict enough. We didn't have the will power to follow through, and that is a failing on our part.

But there is **ONE big assumption** that we are making here. That we can control our weight. There is a considerable body of research that shows that diets fail. It's not us that fails, diets fail. We know to the same confidence level

that we know that smoking causes lung cancer that restrictive diets do not work in the long term for 90%+ of people.

Take a deep breath and let that sink in. Diets do not work.

Every single weight loss strategy you took part in, set you up to fail. It was not your fault that you couldn't lose weight or maintain a weight deemed acceptable. You did not fail those diets. Those diets failed you.

People are profiting from this need that has been placed upon us to look a certain size. The dieting industry is worth \$70 billion in the US alone. Do you think we would need to spend this extortionate amount of money on diets if they worked?

Now I know you are probably going to be going through a whole heap of emotions right now, I know I did when I discovered this information. You might be feeling angry at the appalling way that we are being exploited by society. You might be in total disbelief and denial ready to throw this book straight in the bin. You might be rocked to the core with sadness and grief at all the time and energy spent chasing the unicorn of a perfect body, which never really existed.

Above all, you might feel hopeless. If you were told weight loss was your only option, and here I am telling you that weight loss is impossible, what the hell are you supposed to do now?

Stay with me, my love. In this book, I am going to share my story and show you the steps I take with my clients to move away from the scales and towards a healthy and happy pregnancy.

## Introduction

The biggest thing you can do right now is to show yourself some kindness. You cannot control what has happened in the past. You did your absolute best with what you knew at the time, and that is all anyone can ask.

You've got this, my love.

## Note about language

Through my journey, I have come to self-identify as fat. There are lots of words used to describe bigger bodies - fat, obese, overweight and plus size are the most common ones.

Some of these words are very problematic. Obese is the medicalised term identifying being fat as an illness and overweight implies that you are not a "normal" weight.

Many fat activists have worked tirelessly to embrace the descriptor fat as on it's own it means that you have a fat body, nothing more, nothing less. It is only because we have added meaning to what being fat means in our society that being fat is something to be avoided.

The word fat can be triggering if you have been bullied and abused with it so be gentle with yourself, but I would love to you to begin to question the language you use around your own body and how it benefits you.

Throughout the book, I use the word "woman/women" to identify people in bodies who have uteri, ovaries and vaginas and want to get pregnant in their body. I understand that not all people with a uterus identify with this word. This book is for all people with a uterus who want to become pregnant.

# Chapter 1 - How to stop trying to lose weight

This book was nearly never written.

Not because I'm not passionate about fertility and helping fat women. Not because fat women who want to get pregnant can't be helped. But because of me. I put off writing this book for over two years after I had decided to write it. Why? Because I was worried that if I wrote a book about being fat that it meant I would be fat forever. If I became the fat fertility coach, then being fat would be part of who I am and I would never be able to lose weight and therefore never be healthy and happy because it's been so entrenched in me that my worth is based on my weight.

I was too frightened to write this book because, in the end, it would mean I would never be happy. But what I came to realise was that I was completely wrong. It's not about what the weighing scales say. It's not about what your BMI is or how much fat you can measure around your waist.

By focusing on weight loss, we are perpetuating the story that women have to be a certain size to be healthy. We are continuing the myth that women are on this planet to look pretty and do as we're told. We do not have to accept that as our reality anymore.

So if you've picked this book up in the hope that it is (yet another) diet aimed at helping you lose weight to get pregnant, put it down again. But if you have an inkling that maybe, just maybe, losing weight is entirely the wrong thing to focus on when you're trying to get pregnant, then read on. Together we are

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going to unravel how you can get pregnant in a fat body and how this is going to change your entire life for the better.

### **Weight loss isn't the answer**

If you have ever looked at the research surrounding getting pregnant in a fat body, you will have been terrified. There are papers upon papers that show that the higher your BMI<sup>1</sup>, the more problems you face conceiving.

What you might not know is that there is also lots of research that shows that diets are not evidence-based medicine. Every time a doctor has asked you to lose weight, there has been little to no evidence that shows that losing weight will improve your condition or symptoms.

That's not to say that your doctors are trying to trick you. The evidence available shows that people with higher BMIs experience more problems in all areas of their health, including fertility, so why is this not the same thing?

The evidence shows that the higher your BMI, the higher your risks of ill health. This is not the same as showing that weight loss improves your condition. Jessica Campbell of Body Balance Nutrition and the Instagram account @haes\_studentdoctor did some digging into the research and found that even though many doctors state that just a 5% weight loss can improve fertility, there are no published dose-response studies demonstrating a relationship between weight loss and fertility. I.e. there are no studies that show if you lose X kg, then your chance of getting pregnant increases by X%.

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<sup>1</sup> BMI stands for Body Mass Index. BMI is a standard measure used in healthcare based on your height and weight. BMI has been wholly debunked as a meaningful indicator of health. BMI has no meaning when applied to individual health, as it was designed to look at trends in population health. You can learn more about BMI in some of the books I recommend in the Further Reading section at the back of the book.

Weight loss efforts often incorporate health-promoting behaviours such as drinking more water, eating more vegetables, moving your body more. These health-promoting behaviours may improve your condition, but that is very different than the weight loss improving your health.

In Linda Bacon's book "Health At Every Size", they started a revolution to highlight that healthy habits are far more valuable to our health than our BMI could ever be. The book started the HAES movement worldwide and the movement promotes social justice and support for people of all sizes. Finding practitioners who are aware of and align with the HAES principles can be so powerful for your health.

Although BMI and increased health issues increase together, this is a correlation, i.e. as one goes up, the other goes up. This is NOT causation; one is causing the other thing to happen. There is no evidence that fat causes health problems. Correlation is not causation. The reason that this correlation exists is based on two factors that are not taken into account during research for fat people.

## **Weight Bias**

The first of these two factors is called weight bias and is something you have likely experienced yourself if you live in a fat body. Weight bias means that if you are over a certain weight, there is a bias against you. Maybe you thought you were the only one who felt judged about your body after seeing your doctor? You may have blamed yourself and put it down to feeling "too sensitive". I promise you; you are not alone.

This is how weight bias works. Our healthcare professionals live in the same world that we do and are immersed in the same diet culture, where fat is bad and thin is best. When they train, they are taught that people in bigger bodies

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experience higher risks of serious illnesses, eat crap foods and don't look after their bodies.

We go and visit our doctor. They look at our body and tell us that we need to lose weight. No matter the reason we went in, the problem is our bodies and our weight. If we are lucky, they will say it kindly and offer us the latest dieting advice. If we are not so lucky, we will be mocked and shamed and leave the room in tears.

These visits cause two big problems, aside from the biggest problem of all, severely damaging our mental health. The first problem is that it leads to fat people avoiding their healthcare professionals. When you are made to feel like crap, it will take severe symptoms and desperation ever to want to go back there. The second problem is a delay in diagnosis from your doctor. If you are turned away and told to lose weight, it will probably be another six months before your doctor will perform diagnostic tests and find the root cause of your actual issue.

Both these problems lead to considerable delays in appropriate healthcare treatment for people in fat bodies. So guess what? These people have higher incidences of serious illnesses. Not because of the fat on their body, but because their diagnosis and treatment have been delayed and therefore their prognosis is worse. This is a scary thing to realise. But it's even more reason to begin to advocate for yourself with your doctors. To not shy away from the difficult conversations about your health and to expect respect from other human beings. See “Chapter 5 - How to advocate for your fat body” for more support with this.

## **Weight cycling**

The second reason why BMI and health risks increase is to do with our old friend yo-yo dieting. So many women in larger bodies have been yo-yo dieting

since before puberty. Going on increasingly restrictive diets over the years as the diets become less and less effective and their weight increases.

What impact does the constant restriction of calories have on our bodies? What impact does our weight constantly moving up and down have on our hormones and our fertility? The continuous weight increase and decrease are called weight cycling, and there is a considerable body of research that shows that weight cycling alongside weight bias causes higher risks for people in bigger bodies.

You cannot blame fat for the issues we see in the fertility world. There is a much bigger picture of the health of a fat woman than the inches of fat you see around her middle. But if you're reading this thinking: but that's me. I've yo-yo dieted my whole life. Have a ruined my fertility? Am I putting my pregnancy and unborn baby at risk if I try to get pregnant?

The great news is that the human body has an incredible capacity for healing. As soon as you move away from the utterly unnatural way that we have been treating our body through restrictive diet and punishing exercise, you are giving your body the chance to heal. You can literally change the way that your DNA expresses itself in your body through your actions and create an environment where you can have a healthy body, a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.....in your fat body.

Diets don't work

A diet is any form of eating where there is restriction involved. This goes way beyond joining a weight loss club or following a particular diet online. Diets are sneaky, and they can be found in many places where you might not think to look.

## How to stop trying to lose weight

Can't eat a particular food group? That's a diet.

Can't eat at certain times. That's a diet.

Can't eat two types of food together? Diet.

Clean dieting? Diet

So many of the new wellness trends are just diets in disguise. Any form of eating where you are following rules or external cues for what you eat or are trying to lose weight is a diet. Any time where you are demonising particular food groups or basing your worth on how well you can follow a way of eating is a diet.

Whenever we go on a diet, the physical and mental impact on our health far outweighs any benefits from the health-promoting behaviours we may follow on the diet. I'm not going to be diving into all the details about that research in this book. There are lots more books out already doing a great job of explaining the research behind this. You can find more resources in the further reading section at the back of this book, but right now I recommend grabbing the free e-book “Everything You’ve Been Told About Weight Loss Is Bullshit” by Louise Adams, MAPS and Fiona Willer, APD.<sup>2</sup>

In their e-book, Adams and Willer explain that “2-5 years after dieting, 95% of dieters are back to where they started, and about one to two thirds of people end up heavier than they were before they began! This fact is SO well known that it’s included as “Level A” evidence (meaning it’s the highest level of evidence possible in science) from the Australian National Health & Medical Research Council.”

There are no diets that will give you sustained weight loss without weight regain beyond two to five years. I know what you're thinking. You know this friend of a friend who did this diet. She lost so much weight and is still thin five

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<sup>2</sup> You can download “Everything You’ve Been Told About Weight Loss Is Bullshit” at <https://dietingisbs.carrd.co/>

years later. The question I want to ask you is "But at what cost?" What continually restricting rules is she setting herself around eating? How is she punishing herself with exercise every day to maintain that weight loss? This is the reality for so many women. We are told that we have to be constantly policing our bodies and our food intake to stay small.

When I read all the research behind diets, I wasn't surprised that they don't work, and I doubt that you're surprised either. This has been the reality of my life for the past 20 years. Why do we believe that we'll be healthier and happier when we are thinner? The world is built for thin people. People in fat bodies are seen as an anomaly and aren't taken into consideration when creating our environment. It is much harder to navigate the world in a fat body, and the fatter your body is, the harder it becomes.

I would describe myself as living in a small fat body. I can sometimes buy clothes on the high street, although the process is very triggering and the selection is often tiny. When I navigate public transport, I can squeeze my body into the seats, but that isn't the case for many people in bigger bodies.

It can be hard to go on an aeroplane in their ever-decreasing sized seats.

It can be impossible to find clothes that fit your body comfortably.

It can be challenging to navigate a shop with narrow aisles.

Simple things that people in small bodies don't even think about can become impossible for people in bigger bodies.

## What do you really want when you say that you want to lose weight?

Maybe you want to be able to live your life without having to think about if your body size is going to be an issue. Maybe you want healthcare that's not based on your size, but based on the actual health of your body. Maybe you want to feel healthier, stronger, more confident in your body? You want to get pregnant.

I want you to challenge your thinking. The things that you think you will get from losing weight, the ways that you want to feel in your body. How many of them can you get right now, in the body that you're in?

### Exercise

So let's get started. What things are you putting off for when you get skinny?

- Maybe it's a new job you only think you'll get when you have more confidence (aka a thinner body).
- Maybe you'll finally be able to wear clothes that feel like you.
- Maybe you want to take up some sports or new hobbies but are afraid of what people will think of you.
- Maybe just maybe you are putting off really trying to get pregnant until you are more healthy (aka society's version of healthy).

Grab a pen and paper or download the "Fat and Fertile" accompanying PDF that contains all the exercises from the book that you can fill in straight on your computer or print off.

Access the PDF at [nicolasalmon.co.uk/bookbonus](http://nicolasalmon.co.uk/bookbonus)

Write a list. What things would you do differently if you were thin?

Write down at least ten things although I'm sure you've got a list as long as your arm of things that you've been putting off.

Now take a long hard look at the list.

What things can you physically not do because of your fat? Label them A

What things are you not doing because you don't really believe you could do them. Label them B

What things are you doing because of what others might think? Label them C

Any other random excuses label D

Lots of Bs and Cs I bet!!

Your limiting beliefs about your body and about what other people think is holding you back (little secret- most people are so wrapped up in their own stuff that they probably aren't thinking about you)

What's the one thing on that list that you really want to do? What's the biggie?

How are you going to make that happen now? No ifs or buts. What do you need to do to make this thing happen in the next week? What action can you take today to get you one step closer to this goal? Your life is happening right now, with or without you. Don't let it pass you by because of what people might be thinking.

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Now onto that, pesky thought about needing to be healthier to get pregnant. Do you know what this is? It's your fat phobia in disguise. Healthier usually is code for skinnier. It is disguised as a helpful suggestion. We are all supposed to be healthy to get pregnant, right? Getting healthier is the responsible thing to do, the grown-up thing to do. Except that getting healthier is not your real intention.

Being healthy looks different for everyone. Being healthy means doing things that feel good for your body. Choosing foods that make you feel vibrant. Laughing. Moving in a way that makes you feel alive. Being healthy does not mean being thin and being fat does not mean you are unhealthy.

Every "get healthy" endeavour I ever made (until 2018) was a disguised attempt to lose weight. No matter what I told everyone else, I intended to get skinny so that it would be socially acceptable to society. Even now I'm not immune from this. Recently I've started CrossFit, a functional movement class combining gymnastics, weight lifting, and metabolic conditioning.

Let me paint you a picture. I was the chubby girl, panting in last place at cross country. I was the little girl shouted at ballet class because I couldn't sit on the floor, put my feet together and touch the floor with my knees. I couldn't climb the rope in gym class, and I never played sport out of choice. Exercise was not my strong suit.

For the first time, I've chosen to exercise to feel strong and look after my body. Hand on heart, my intention is to take the best care that I can of this body. But the thoughts still cross my mind.... Ooo am I starting to get skinnier? Maybe I'll be able to buy a whole new wardrobe in three months.... I wonder what my friends will say .... I regularly fell into that daydream of the weight loss transformation that everyone chases.

Then I have to snap myself out of it. That's not why I'm doing this. Be honest with yourself about your motivation and your intention. Are you trying to get healthy to lose weight? Are you trying to lose weight to get pregnant? The biggest question of all is, how have we strayed so far away from automatically making the healthiest choices for us? Regardless of our size, regardless of whether we are trying to get pregnant? Why isn't our motivation to take the best care of our bodies that we are able?

I have a few choice words to say about our culture, the advertisers, the patriarchy. But we still have a choice, and you can choose, today, to change paths. To begin to think about what the best thing for you is. The best thing for your body, the best thing for your mind and the best thing for your whole wellbeing? Because what's best for you is what's best for baby.

## **The effects of dieting**

Now if you've been around the dieting block once or twice, I'm sure you'll be aware of all the big diets out there. The diet industry is worth \$70 billion in the US alone. The big question is how it is sustainable? If the diets work, then why are we still fat? These programs create and maintain eating disorders. That's the blunt truth. The diet industry wants to keep us fat.

When you are on a diet, when you are restricting your food intake based on calories or points or syns or whatever fancy new term they use, you are creating a disordered pattern around food. You are no longer listening to your internal cues. When you are using language that creates a hierarchy around food you eat, you have a disordered eating issue.

Do you have "good foods" and "bad foods"? Do you "treat yourself" to food? Were you "naughty" the other day when you had a doughnut? It's not your fault. The language and the culture we have grown up in around food has contributed to this massively and should not be underestimated, but the diet industry is now

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intensifying these issues for pure profit. I'm sure these phrases will be very familiar to you.

"I've fallen off the wagon."

"I'll start again on Monday."

"I've failed now so I might as well eat this whole bar of chocolate and start again in the morning."

Who invented this so-called wagon? I'll let you in on a little secret .... there is no wagon. Your worth as a human does not depend on what food you put in your mouth. Your worthiness to be a mother does not depend on the number on those scales. I know it is tempting to keep trying to lose the weight and then you'll feel happy and healthy. I know that you think losing the weight will solve all your problems. That is the story we are fed time and time again. Every time you see another before and after picture, you think that could be me.

But this is the problem: When you start dieting with the intention of losing weight as fast as you can, you are punishing your body. To lose weight quickly, you are told to drastically reduce the calories or portions you are eating, exercise to an extreme degree or both. Both of these actions put your body under a lot of stress.

Reducing your calories significantly signals to your body that there is a famine, that there is not enough food available in your environment right now. After all, that is the only reason your food intake would've reduced in our ancestor's time. Your body instinctually diverts resources away from your reproductive system. If there were a famine, it would be an awful time to get pregnant for both you and baby. Your body is protecting you and keeping you safe.

The same goes for exercise. Excessive exercise signals to your body that you are in danger. In our ancestor's time, we would be running away from predators, and the continued stress of exercise on our bodies puts them into fight or flight response. The body primes the muscles, lungs and cardiovascular systems to move and shuts off digestion and reproduction. Again this is to ensure your survival and keep you safe.

Our bodies have not yet caught up with our 21st-century living. It doesn't understand the difference between famine and dieting or survival and triathlons. The tools we are using to improve our health are hindering our fertility. I hear that exasperated sigh. I know what you're thinking. WFT man!?!?! You've been doing this stuff your whole freaking life to try and reach this unobtainable goal. You've been doing everything you've been told, and it's still not good enough!

You've always been good enough. But now it's time to do things your way. It's time to listen to what your body needs and to heal your relationship with food and with your body. As they say, it's the only one you've got.

## **What would it mean if you stayed exactly as you are?**

Let me ask you a question, what would happen if you stayed exactly the same weight as you are now? How would you feel? What would it mean? When I first asked myself this question, my first feeling was panic! Shit! I thought if I stayed this size forever, what would I do? What does it really mean to be a fat woman, not trying to lose weight?

This was a completely alien concept as my whole identity has been based on being a fat woman trying to lose weight my entire life. It's the only vaguely socially acceptable way to live as a fat woman if you are at least trying to lose weight. You need to be able to spout off the latest way to are trying to get thin.

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What would it mean just to be a fat woman? I would buy clothes that fit me and look good now, instead of buying some that were slightly too small to "motivate" myself to lose weight. I would stop wasting so much energy on thinking about what foods to eat and how to move my body. There'd be no point if I were going to stay the same size. Instead of choosing what to eat and how to move my body based on what's going to make me skinnier, I would choose food and movement that make me feel good.

I would be free to do other things with all the excess energy I'd been wasting on losing weight. Think of all the minutes/hours/days you've wasted worrying about what food to eat, feeling guilty about the food you've already eaten and planning how you were going to lose weight. All that time in the future is now free to do epic things. Maybe you could learn a new language, do something creative, change the world - the possibilities of what you can do are endless.

Instead of focusing on losing weight to get pregnant, I would focus on making my body as healthy as possible to get pregnant. The thought that I'm too fat to get pregnant wouldn't even cross my mind. After all, your weight wouldn't be in your ability to change.

Doesn't that sound incredible?

Doesn't that sound a million times less stressful way to live? And all it takes is a mindset shift. You are moving away from focusing on losing weight to focusing on nourishing and loving your body now. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to stay the same size forever, but when you start to make decisions about your health and wellbeing from a place of love and nourishment, your body can only get healthier and happier.

Your size is entirely irrelevant to the conversation.

So what does that mean in the real world when you want to get pregnant?

It means that you can experiment with food (there is no good food and bad food - those are just labels that we've put on food) and find what works best for your body. Notice how food makes you feel, how it affects your mood, your energy, your digestive system, your sleep. Food can affect every part of your body, so begin to notice what foods make you feel great and what foods make you feel like crap.

Once you have this information, you can make informed decisions about what food you want to eat. That doesn't mean you never eat food that makes you feel crap, it means that you think - "yeah I'm going to feel a bit crap eating this food, but it tastes delicious, and that's what I choose right now for my mental health." It's a choice, and it's hard to make that choice when you have no idea what effect the food has on you. Your body is intelligent, and when you start to listen, you will know what foods your body needs and what it doesn't. You'll begin to notice when you feel hungry and when you are eating for other reasons like when you feel sad, angry or bored.

This is the foundation of a concept called Intuitive Eating. You can read more about this in "Intuitive Eating" Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch and "Just Eat It" by Dr Laura Thomas.

The fear is that you won't be able to control yourself around food. You've been taught that you can't be trusted with food, that you will eat and eat and eat until you make yourself sick. It's a choice. When you choose you to love your body now and look after it the best that you can, that behaviour will eventually not even occur to you. We know that bingeing is a biological response to starvation and deprivation. When you deprive yourself of foods and the energy that your body needs, it works so hard to survive and ensures that all you can think about is getting high-calorie food in your mouth ASAP.

## How to stop trying to lose weight

Maybe the biggest obstacle you'll encounter is others that are very uncomfortable with how you're choosing to live your life. They are uncomfortable because this thinking flies in the face of everything they've been taught. It shakes the foundations on which everything they know and believe about themselves lies on.

Jes Baker calls this “body currency”. In her blog post “Why People hate Tess Munster (and other happy fat people)”, she describes so eloquently why happy fat people are seen as such a problem.

“It goes like something this: we are taught as a society that IF we achieve the ideal body that we see in traditional media (and not before) we will then obtain love, worthiness, success and ultimately- happiness. Which is what we all want, right?

Because the vast majority of our culture buys into this, we have millions upon millions of people **investing everything they have** into achieving this ultimate goal. The goal being- thinness which *obviously* equals happiness, remember? (Note: other body "goals" also apply here, like able bodied/lighter skin color/cisgender appearance etc.) SO, they spend their lives in a perpetual state of self-loathing (its called inspiration!) while working their asses off to become that ideal. We, as Americans, sink billions of dollars into beauty products every year. Between the millions of us on diets, we gift the weight loss industry and other weight loss products over \$60 billion dollars as well. 14 million of us had cosmetic procedures in 2012 and yes, that number keeps growing. Perhaps we starve ourselves or maybe we just fixate on our calorie count like it determines our salvation. Maybe we make the gym our god. Whatever we choose individually, we as a country have made 'fixing our bodies' our main obsession and we let it consume our life. This happens for most of us whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. We live to give the quest towards impossible perfection (marketed as happiness) our all.

So THEN after all of this, when a fat chick- who *hasn't* done the work, who *hasn't* tried to fix her body, who *doesn't* have any interest in the gospel we so zealously believe in, *stands up and says*: I'M HAPPY! ...we freak the fuck out.

Because: that bitch just broke the rules. She just cut in front of us in line. She just unwittingly ripped us off. And she essentially made our lifetime of work totally meaningless.”<sup>3</sup>

When you change the game, it freaks people out. All of a sudden, they begin to question their choices, their beliefs, and their thoughts, and that's scary. You know that though because that's what we are doing here. Maybe they are ready for the change, or perhaps they're not. Either way, it's not your job to change them. It's not your job to convince them that your way is right and their way is wrong. You cannot change others. The only thing you're in charge of is your thoughts and actions. They might try and change you because you're making them feel so bloody awkward. They might shame you into thinking that your body isn't capable of getting pregnant (it is). They might make rude comments or snide remarks or talk about you behind your back. They might tell you what you eat or what you should or shouldn't wear.

In their own way, they are trying to help. Rightly or wrongly, they are trying to help you conform to our societies standards of what you should look like to be healthy and get pregnant. That doesn't mean you have to listen.

Acknowledge that they mean well but tell them to mind their own business. Be confident in the fact that every decision you're making is the best decision for your health, wellbeing and future family. Only you can make these decisions because only you know your body. Only you know the consequences of the

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<sup>3</sup> You can find the full blog post at <http://www.themilitantbaker.com/2015/01/why-people-hate-tess-munster-and-other.html> and read Jes' books, “Things No-one Will Tell Fat Girls” and “Landwhale: On Turing Insults Into Nicknames, Why Body Image Is Hard, and How Diets Can Kiss My Ass”.

## How to stop trying to lose weight

foods you eat, the way you move, the thoughts you think, and how you spend your time. The power is yours. So it's time to switch your thinking.

### **Exercise**

Grab a pen and paper or download the "Fat and Fertile" accompanying PDF that contains all the exercises from the book that you can fill in straight on your computer or print off. Access the PDF at [nicolasalmon.co.uk/bookbonus](http://nicolasalmon.co.uk/bookbonus)

Copy out the below words and sign the declaration.

I .....[insert your name]..... accept my body for exactly the way it is.

Every decision I make for my body will be one that nurtures me in some way. That will look different at different times, but I accept that my health and my body will change over my cycle and over the years.

I choose not to compare what my health looks like with others.

I choose to love my body unconditionally as I know that it is doing its best to keep me alive. I will trust that it knows best and listen to each sign and symptom so that I can learn to nourish it in the best possible way.

I choose to believe that my body is capable of incredible things, including getting pregnant, having a healthy pregnancy and giving birth to a healthy baby.

Nicola Salmon

I am doing the best that I can at this moment, and that is enough.

With love forever

.....[sign your name].....

## **Chapter 2 - Fertility support for fat people**

Going to the doctor as a fat person is a big deal. If you are living in a fat body, I'm sure you have some stories to tell about the poor treatment you have faced from medical professionals. Even if you can't think of any huge traumas, I bet you can think of many times when your weight was blamed for a completely unrelated illness, when your doctor assumed things about your diet and lifestyle based on your size or when you've felt completely ashamed when leaving the doctors office.

Most people wait 6-12 months of trying naturally to get pregnant before seeing their doctor. If you have already been to see your doctor with fertility questions, I hope that you got referred for some basic hormone tests and received some support. Sadly, this is not the case for most women. The typical story I hear from my clients is that they are told to come back in another 6-12 months once they've lost weight. No blood tests ordered. No questions about their diet or lifestyle. No basic health tests like blood pressure taken. The doctor wrongly assumes based on the body they see before them, that the person is unhealthy and cannot get pregnant due to their size.

If you're fat and go to the doctors seeking help to get pregnant, you will be told to lose weight. There is no doubt in the minds of doctors and researchers that losing weight will improve your chances of getting pregnant. Knowing what you know now, about how losing weight using diets is impossible and how fat isn't even the problem, you can see how completely messed up this system is.

Women are being made to feel utterly ashamed of their bodies for the fact that they are fat, and they cannot get pregnant. They are made to feel that it is 100% their fault that they cannot lose weight, even though we know that it's impossible to lose weight on diets and that the fact that they cannot get pregnant has nothing to do with their size.

Body size is typically categorised using Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is a basic measure based on your weight and height, which spits out a number. This number will tell you if you are "underweight" "normal" "overweight" "obese" and "morbidly obese." BMI was actually created to look at health trends in large groups of people, it was never intended or designed to be applied to individuals, so how are we now in a position where this number is being used to decide who is eligible for fertility support including IVF?

A BMI of 30 is often given as a threshold for basic testing and fertility support, but even women under this threshold are not immune to being shamed for their body size. If you've been given a label on the BMI scale, throw it out! It's bloody useless. It's time to start looking at your health differently. It's not about the numbers on the scale, on the tape measure or a chart. It's about how you feel when you wake up, how much energy you have and how happy you feel on a daily basis.

I live in the UK, and our healthcare is provided by the National Health Service (NHS). The NHS are given recommendations of what to provide as a service, but this is hugely determined by money and funding. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE– the agency that provides national guidance and advice about healthcare) states that every woman in the U.K. under 40 should have access to 3 rounds of IVF if they have not been able to have a baby after two years of unprotected sex.

In the guidelines, they state that:

## Fertility support for fat people

"Women should be informed that female BMI should ideally be in the range 19–30 before commencing assisted reproduction, and that a female BMI outside this range is likely to reduce the success of assisted reproduction procedures."

These guidelines themselves are based upon biased research into weight and fertility, but it's important to highlight that they are not restricting access to treatment based on BMI. It's up to individual areas to decide how to spend their budget. In most areas the available funding is one cycle at best – some don't offer any at all. This is a diabolical situation with couples being forced to sell their car, remortgage their houses and wrack up huge credit card bills to have a baby. Don't even get me started on the extortionate charges from many IVF clinics in the UK.

Another criteria placed on access to fertility treatment in the majority of areas is a BMI limit of 30. This is not a limit set by the NICE guidelines and the evidence that a BMI of 30 as a suitable restriction is insufficient. Private clinics in the UK also often pick an arbitrary BMI number as a barrier to fertility treatment. A BMI of 35 seems to be the maximum BMI for the majority of clinics. BMI gives no meaningful indication to the health of the individual and her likelihood of IVF being successful.

Research in 2010<sup>4</sup> showed that there was very limited evidence to support any of the arguments used to restrict IVF based on size.

They found insufficient evidence that shows any relationship between high BMI and reduced birth rates. They also saw no significant difference in miscarriage rates or other pregnancy complications with a high BMI.

Furthermore, none of this evidence begins to unravel the weight cycling and weight stigma faced by these women.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/25/4/815/700269>

The emphasis on BMI to determine your health is misleading.

Take me, for example.

I would describe my experience as a fat woman as being typical. I started being aware of food and dieting before puberty. I have been on upwards of 20 different diets, losing weight, then gaining even more weight. Spending all my time, energy and money focused on trying to become a socially acceptable size. I stopped eating fat, cut out the carbs, joined the gym, did a juice detox, tried the shakes, severely restricted my calories and portions, punished my body with exercise. Let me make this clear. This is normal for a fat woman to go through. I would go as far as to say that the majority of women in the western world experience this to some degree.

57% of women in the UK have been on a diet in the past year. This is what's messed up our fertility — the unrealistic expectations placed on us to be a certain size, to look a certain way. I am a very intelligent young(ish) woman, but I've spent my whole life obsessed with food. How can you account for that in a study? It's not that women are fat; it's that society has created a culture where these women have had to put their body through extreme circumstances to try and fit in. But they still blame themselves for not being able to lose weight.

The picture in the rest of the world sadly isn't much different. Fertility clinics all over the world use BMI to restrict access to fertility treatment.

## **What if I need to access treatment?**

It's completely understandable if you still feel you have to lose weight after reading this. After all, if you cannot get pregnant naturally and need fertility support, the system is set up so that you have to lose weight to access the treatment.

If you are able, find a doctor or clinic who can support you at your current size. They do exist, although they can be hard to come by. Research each clinic that you may be able to use. Find out what their policies are around supporting people of size.

If you are unable to switch doctor or clinic for whatever reason and need to lose weight to get treatment, please do not feel guilty. It is your body, and it is your choice. It is, however, important to fully understand the risks and benefits when you make your decision about what to do.

### **Benefits of losing weight for fertility treatment**

- Access fertility treatment that you need
- Reduction in weight bias faced by medical professionals
- Reduction in fat shaming from the rest of the world

### **Risks of losing weight for fertility treatment**

- Decreased quality of life whilst dieting
- Disordered eating patterns and increased risk of developing an eating disorder
- Weight (plus possibly more) will likely return when you stop dieting
- Other physical and mental side effects such as negative effects on your metabolism, depression, stress and increased risk of heart disease to name a few.

## The reality that fat people face

To better highlight the inequality that fat people face when seeking fertility treatment, I would like to share, with permission, some anonymous stories that others have shared with me. They will hopefully help you feel less alone in your experience, but you may find them triggering. Please take care of yourself first and foremost and feel free to skip if you cannot read them.

### **Elizabeth's Story** (name changed for identity protection)

I was diagnosed with PCOS at 16 and put on birth control to treat it until I was in my 20's. I developed White Coat Syndrome, and the thought of going to the doctor sent me into a huge episode. I only went when it was absolutely necessary. I stopped taking birth control, and my PCOS symptoms were out of control for about ten years.

I finally went back to my doctor in 2018 due to needing a PAP smear and uncontrolled high blood pressure diagnosed by my eye doctor on a checkup. At that doctor's appointment, we talked about my fertility and if my husband and I wanted to have children. I was already emotional from being at the doctor, so I said yes, and she referred me to a gynaecologist.

I went to see the gynaecologist in a month later and he said because of my age and the PCOS he wanted to refer me to a Fertility Specialist Clinic He prescribed me Metformin in the meantime to help with my PCOS.

During this waiting time to see the specialist, my doctor ordered a number of blood tests to make sure everything was ok with me since it had been so long since I'd had a health check. All my tests came back normal. I also got my period for the first time in a year and finally maybe felt some hope.

## Fertility support for fat people

In June, my husband and I went to see the fertility specialist, we felt hopeful, but also fearful as my BMI was very high at the time. When it was our turn to go in for our consult, the first thing the doctor said was, "so you want to get pregnant? Your BMI is over X<sup>5</sup>...that is really harmful", I started to cry uncontrollably as my worst fear just came true. I was fearful he is just going to look at my weight and shame me, and he did. As I said there bawling my eyes out, he continued to state that at my weight and how I was basically going to die in 10 years, and I would never carry a healthy pregnancy. I just cried more. My husband didn't know what to say and didn't say much at the time.

Because I have severe White Coat Syndrome I just froze, thinking over and over to myself I need to leave, this is toxic, but the fear I was going to die just kept coming. The doctor then told me I didn't get a period this past month because I don't ovulate and it's breakthrough bleeding because it lasted more than seven days and prescribed me Prevara to induce a period as he told me I probably had uterine cancer because I don't shed my lining every month. The doctor told me he recommended I get Gastric Bypass Surgery before I went down any road to try and have a baby. Because I was so upset, I just let him sign me up for the program, because if you qualify (which I did, based on my high blood pressure) it's a free surgery and program in Ontario. I left crying uncontrollably, thinking I was going to die, I had cancer, and I would never have a family of my own and completely inconsolable.

Once my husband and I got home, I was finally thinking more clearly, and I got mad. I called MY doctor to make an appointment as soon as I could to tell her what happened at the fertility doctor. My doctor apologized on behalf of that doctor, went over all my bloodwork numbers and reassured me that this doctor didn't know me, my lifestyle or anything about me and just looked at my weight and assumed a lot of wrong things. I went on to get an ultrasound done ordered by my doctor just to check and make sure everything was ok with my ovaries and uterus, and there was nothing, no cysts, no cancer .... NOTHING.

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<sup>5</sup> Numbers have been substituted to avoid triggering.

## Nicola Salmon

My doctor asked me if I wanted to see a dietitian, and the one in their office was great, so I agreed. I saw the dietitian at, and I left that appointment feeling amazing.

In a desperate attempt to do something, I started to eat an extremely low carb diet thinking that was the answer. When I dietitian saw she explained to me why that wasn't healthy and introduced me to the idea of Intuitive Eating and Health At Every Size, she also looked at my blood work and recommended a bunch of vitamin and supplements to try to help my PCOS.

I am happy to report a year later I haven't lost a pound, but I haven't missed a period since and they are a normal period of 6 days each time like clockwork. I still am on my blood pressure medication, but the medication helps, and I monitor at home, and it's all in a healthy range. My husband went for two sperm analysis, and both came back with low motility, so our fertility issues need a specialist. But due to the trauma I endured from the fertility doctor and talking with another friend of mine who endured the same fat shaming experience at her consultation at another clinic in our region years prior (only difference is she stood up for herself, and she now has twin boys from the results of a successful IUI), and never wanting to do anything too invasive in the first place, my husband and I decided to just keep trying naturally and also pursue adoption for have our family (but that is a whole other story).

I don't give up hope of a miracle happening one day, and I'll have my family naturally, and I know that my body will support it if it does happen, but it took a lot of trauma therapy and self-love to believe that of myself truly.

### **Anna's Story** (name changed for identity protection)

I am a test tube baby I was conceived via IVF in 1998. My mother had the same disease I do, PCOS. This has caused me to have little progesterone and an abnormally high level of testosterone. I have had multiple miscarriages during my young life. I do not necessarily want to have a baby at this moment. I have

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just come to the realization I may never be able to carry a baby to term. My last miscarriage was November last year.

Gaining all of this information has been a real eye opener for me at even this age. I know the problems I will likely face when I am completely ready to be a parent, and most of those issues will, in doctors opinions, revolve around my weight.

Even though my mom got weight loss surgery after she had me loosing over X lb and she still couldn't conceive, it was not her weight that caused her infertility. And doctors choose to overlook that!

### **Jasmine's story** (name changed for identity protection)

My experience for the past three years has been entirely geared towards me having to lose weight before even attempting to get pregnant.

My doctor constantly tried to force a weight loss drug on me to lose weight. I kept refusing. I have IBS as it is and definitely do not need another medication that makes me literally shit my pants.

When I went to him regarding the fact that I thought I had PCOS, he said no, he doesn't think so. After doing some more research myself, I went back and said I want to be tested for PCOS. His response was "I think you're just looking for an excuse not to lose weight but fine; we'll send you for blood tests."

Of course, my test came back and said my testosterone was off the charts, so he sent me for a scan which confirmed my ovaries had multiple cysts.

Once it was confirmed, nothing more was said. I wasn't offered any support or medication. Again, it was through my own research that I discovered Metformin, and I requested it. I had no advice or information from my doctors

about what PCOS meant for me. All I know is what I've learned myself through research and talking to others with it.

**Lisa's story** (name changed for identity protection)

While my doctor was sympathetic about my fertility issues, they couldn't refer me for anything fertility related. My husband, who has no weight problems, was able to get a couple of sperm tests with no problems. I asked around all the private clinics near me, but as my BMI is/was over 35, they wouldn't treat me. We decided to go to a clinic 2 hours away that was able to help us. Since my only problem is that I don't ovulate naturally, the consultant was astounded that the NHS wouldn't help with something she deemed as very easy to treat. We had a round of IVF, and it was successful, although I, unfortunately, had a missed miscarriage at eight weeks.

**Julie's story** (name changed for identity protection)

Today marks three years since I had a car crash that changed my life forever. I was five weeks pregnant. The crash caused me to miscarry over the next week following that day.

I've been told by four private doctors who are "not on anyone's side" that I'm so morbidly obese that I "would have miscarried anyway." That is fucking bullshit. What killed my children was a woman who thought her phone was more interesting than looking at the road. I'm hoping that I get the justice I deserve.

**Shilpa's story** (name changed for identity protection)

I've been through many many cycles of IVF and had two healthy pregnancies. We decided to try for a 3rd baby, and after a few cycles, became pregnant. I'd had a scan at almost seven weeks, and everything looked great, saw a heartbeat

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etc. we were so excited, but on my way home from the scan I started to bleed and proceeded to have a miscarriage.

I was devastated and returned to my clinic for a follow-up scan to see what was happening a few days later. Sadly they confirmed I had miscarried and wanted me to speak to the doctor after - mine was unavailable so I had to see a female doctor I had never seen before. We sat down in her office, and she looked on screen at my file and my history. She had nothing to say, and the only thing she did say was to tell me that since I'm morbidly obese, I shouldn't be surprised, and that would most likely be the reason why I miscarried. I was devastated and couldn't believe the lack of empathy she had.

It was so wrong to me that moments after confirming I had lost the baby I had been trying so hard for and was so overjoyed about, to be reminded of my weight and for her to assume that was a negative thing and the cause for my situation. I felt sick, but I couldn't escape and had to sit there and listen to this woman make assumptions about me and lecture me, and all I wanted was to break down and cry. It's been three years, and it still effects me. If anything it's given me so much more anxiety around these doctors because she basically said out loud all of the worst most horrible things I always feared these doctors were thinking.

### **Annette's story** (name changed for identity protection)

My husband and I have been trying for three years, and the attitudes of most health professionals has been awful. One of the worst examples was when we were referred to the fertility clinic. The sole focus was on my weight. There wasn't any questions about what my lifestyle is like. The consultant dressed it up as if she was doing me a favour, saying I deserve to lose weight to have a happy and healthy life, and if I wasn't going to lose weight to have a baby then I never would. She started off by saying "you know what I'm going to say, don't you?" I really wish that I'd played ignorant, just to make her feel as awkward as I felt, but instead I went bright red (I don't embarrass easily!) and

said “my weight..” My husband tried to jump to my defence - he tried to explain that I do exercise, that I have an eating disorder (I’ve suffered from bulimia and binge eating disorder on and off for most of my life, thankfully now I’m in recovery) and that I have PCOS which makes losing weight a lot harder, but she wasn’t interested at all. She even offered to refer me to Slimming World, even after my husband had told her about my eating disorder.

As soon as we got to the car, I burst into tears. I felt like a failure, and it’s put me off going back for any help.

Since then, I’ve lost around 2 and a half stone, and ironically it’s since I’ve stopped caring about how I look and instead focus on eating intuitively and exercising to feel good. I’m still overweight, and recently saw my GP who asked if I want referred to the fertility clinic (my husband and I have relocated to a different area so it would be a different clinic) and I told her my concerns. She said I should try and lose weight, and whilst she wasn’t as pushy about it as others have been, she certainly didn’t say “your weight doesn’t matter.”

What frustrates me the most is I’m 5’2, and because the NHS are strict about BMI, I’ve been told for my height I’d need to be between X and a half stone - X and a half stone to be the ideal weight. I can’t remember being that weight! Even when I was thin (my weight has always fluctuated), I was a UK size X/X, and had hips and a chubby tummy.

I just wish that to access fertility help, clinics and professionals would take an holistic approach rather than taking a look at a woman in a fat body and determine whether she deserves help or not.

## Chapter 3 - My quest for thinness

I can't remember a time when I wasn't conscious of my weight. Looking back at photos of me as a child, I looked like any other kid. Wading through photo albums, I really can't see at what point I started worrying about the way I looked. My first memory of being picked on for being fat was name-calling in the playground when I was about 8. I don't remember the specifics, just that feeling of not being like the other kids, singled out for being different. I can remember that awkward feeling inside of not being sure why I was different or what I could do about it.

I still remember vividly when food first became a "thing" for me. It all started with my after-school snacks. My sister and I went to our grandparents after school when my parents were at work, and they always had these delicious crisps in their cupboard. Even now, I can remember the pure pleasure I got from eating them. At some point when I was at primary school, my beloved crisps were swapped for a lower calorie option. I know that the intention behind this decision was from a place of love, but for me, that was the start of seeing food as good and bad. My sister still ate the crisps that I loved, but because of the way that my body was, that meant that I didn't deserve to eat the food that I liked so much.

These small changes in my diet eventually led to attending weight loss classes. My mum and I must have tried them all in an attempt to lose weight. "Dancing in the Moonlight" by Toploader (a great 90s classic pop song) was forever ruined for me by a dancing routine at a weight loss group.

Whether it was calories or points, picking a green day or a red day (WTF?), I remember food taking over my life. If I wasn't eating, I was thinking about what

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I was going to eat or what I couldn't eat. If I'd eaten something "off plan" then I was beating myself up mentally and trying to figure out how I could a) hide it b) counteract it with exercise or c) avoid eating later to make up for it.

Thinking about food was relentless. My mood was entirely dependent upon the number on the scale every morning, and on what sized clothes I could fit into. My confidence in my body was in shatters. I went to an all girl's high school, which on the whole, I loved. I started out there as a pretty confident, smart young woman. I was good at public speaking. I was generally a good student and made some great friends there.

It did nothing to help my confidence around boys, though. I can remember the first time a boy asked me out as if it was yesterday (which is pretty impressive considering I can't remember what happened yesterday!) Most days after school, all the kids from the local high schools would flock into the city centre (and when I say city, don't get impressed, it's tiny!) and hang out by the fountain or on the hall steps. This is where the cool kids hung out. One day, one boy (a friend of a friend I think) came over to me and asked me out (or some other lame phrase - this was pre-social media, and we'd only just got mobile phones, so social interaction was an entirely different ball game) This poor boy though, getting up the courage to ask out a girl he liked. The thing I remember most is my reaction. I laughed in his face. I couldn't stop myself. Not because he wasn't a nice looking lad, not because I thought he was an idiot, but because I thought it was so ridiculous that anyone would want to ask me out, that anyone would think that I was pretty or worth spending more time with. This wasn't a pity party, or a "woe is me" response. This was a genuine "oh my god you can't be serious" fit of hysterics. I honestly thought he was making fun of me.

Looking back at that now makes me so sad. That poor young woman who couldn't even believe that someone would find her attractive. That it was so absurd to her that someone would choose her, that she laughed in his face. I really wish I could go back and give her a big hug and tell her just how worthy she is of being loved. What makes me even sadder is that I had loving parents

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and good friends. My life was peachy on the outside, so I cannot even begin to imagine how hard it is for others whose lives weren't as privileged as mine.

It was at 16 that I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is a group of symptoms they lump together to explain a set of hormonal and metabolic changes. It's poorly understood even now and back then (a good 20 years ago) it was even less understood. When the doctor diagnosed me, she immediately followed up her diagnosis with the bombshell that I wouldn't be able to have kids. I had no idea then, but looking back now, it had a significant impact on my mental health. My grades at 16 were fantastic but then things started to slide, my A level results were good but not as good as they should have been and then at university I left with a "drinkers" degree of a 2:2. Somehow I still managed to get into a prestigious masters degree (I don't think they knew how to turn me away once they'd offered me a place) but I knew that I wasn't fulfilling my potential and I knew my health and my serious self-confidence issues were the reason why.

Luckily the doctor was wrong (more on this later), and I was able to have my two boys with ease, but it wasn't by losing weight or "curing" my PCOS. In fact, I was classed as high-risk during both my pregnancies due to my weight. And even after I'd had my children, I still wasn't happy with my body.

## The big realisation

After I'd had my babies, I half-heartedly tried a few other restrictive eating plans in the guise of eating healthily. I ate no sugar for six weeks - and promptly fell off the so-called wagon the following day. I tried intermittent fasting for a few months, but you know what, I was so fed up. I was already bloody exhausted from learning how to be a mum, the endless sleepless nights, and I just did not have the energy to put myself through dieting. I wanted to enjoy spending time with my kids, I didn't want to spend my time thinking about food, and I did not have the mental energy.

I looked back at my life, and all I saw was my years defined by which diet I was following at the time and what dress size I was. No matter what size I was (which varied hugely from size 12 to size 24), I was never happy, and I always saw myself as fat. The realisation smacked me in the face. My happiness did not depend on my size. If it did, I would have been much happier at the size 12 than at the size 24, but it didn't make a difference. I felt exactly the same, unhappy and unworthy. So if my happiness didn't depend on my weight, then what the hell was I doing with my life? Why was I wasting all my mental energy worrying about this shit every single day? What was the point? I wasn't getting thinner or healthier; I was getting fatter and more depressed.

I was sat waiting for a train one day about a year ago, and I found an old note on my phone. I'd written it four years earlier when I was on (another) diet. It was an exercise they got you to do right at the beginning of the diet to motivate you into losing weight, a list of all the things I could do when I lost weight.

This is what my list looked like:

- Wear skinny jeans tucked into knee-high boots
- Buy jeans that fit perfectly
- Go on a swing
- Wear a bikini

I saw this list and almost said out loud "what the actual fuck!" I don't need to wait to do all these things? Who the hell said I can't wear skinny jeans tucked into knee-high boots right now? Why the hell were these things only ok when I was a certain weight? What was I worried about? That I was going to be so heavy for the swing that I was going to break the swing and die of embarrassment? Maybe, but come on, why I am so worried about what other people think, that I'm not actually living my life?

## The pact

So that's when I made a pact with myself. I was not going to go on another diet, and I was never going to weigh myself ever again. Why?

The restrictive nature of dieting took over my whole life. I lived and breathed dieting. But that is not what I wanted for my life anymore. I didn't want to be obsessed with food, for it to take up my every waking moment and stress me out. I've got bigger stuff to do with my life than worry about that. And although I do still think about food, I probably think about it a quarter of the amount of time I used to now, compared with a few years ago. I don't beat myself up about eating a doughnut, maybe when I eat five but it's a journey, right?

The no scales thing has probably been even harder to give up. That number of the scale defined me. If it was going down, I was a good girl, and it made me feel good about myself but if it was going up or staying the same that meant I was awful and needed to beat myself up a bit more so that I could motivate myself to lose weight again.

After being defined by this number my whole life, when I gave it up, suddenly I had to find a new way to define myself. There was space to choose who I wanted to be. At the moment I'm choosing to put all my energy and passion into my business, maybe not the healthiest choice, but it's giving me an identity where I could get so easily lost in being "just" a mum. Right now, writing this book and working with fat women who want to start their families feels so much more important than losing weight.

If you could choose (and you can) how would you define yourself? If you could smash up the scales, cut out all the labels in your clothes, and forget all those infertility "labels" you've been given, how would you want to define who you are?

## Nicola Salmon

You are more than just a number. You are capable of incredible things. You get to choose what those things are and use your precious time and energy to do them. Don't waste your energy worrying about that number and what other people think about that number. Chances are there are so concerned about their own number that they don't even notice yours.

So you have a choice today. You have a choice every day. Are you going to be defined by that number on the scale or the labels you've attached to yourself? Or are you going to skip the weigh in today and instead choose to define yourself by your kick-ass achievements, your incredible goals or just the fact that right now you are inherently worthy of everything you want regardless of anything - your weight, your past, your job, your health, your decisions, your mental health, anything.

When weight loss is taken off the table, so many of my clients start taking steps to goals that really matter to them. They start taking better care of their bodies, feeling better in their daily lives and most importantly living their life, instead of putting it on hold for a time when they have lost weight.