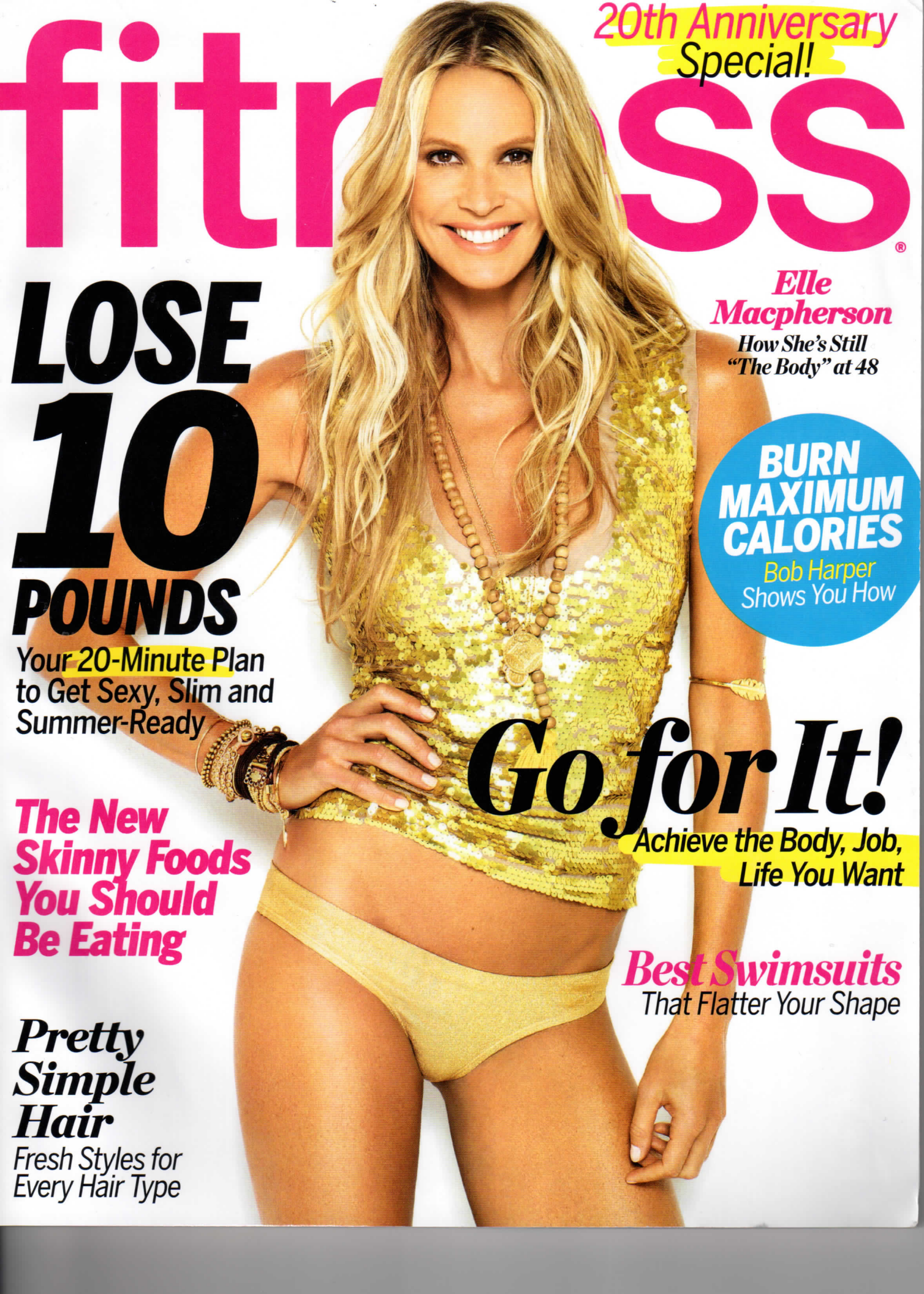
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HEALTHY EATING MADE EASY

Quit playing hunger games. The new rules of dieting will surprise you—and keep you slim and satisfied.

BY MELISSA DALY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN KANTOR

If you're anything like me, I'm betting this will sound familiar: You try to eat right. And you exercise regularly. But still those last five pounds don't want to budge. So what's up with that? Turns out, much of the conventional weight-loss wisdom is just plain wrong, many experts say. It's not about deprivation or getting more veggies or eliminating certain food groups from your diet. Instead it's about a smarter and more enjoyable way of eating every day that will give you energy, boost your mood and help you reach your happy weight and stay there. Here top nutritionists spill the new diet dos they swear by.

Find your balance.

Calories in, calories out. We've been told that dropping pounds or maintaining our weight rests solely on this simple equation. Wrong! "In reality, not all calories are created equal," says dietitian Ashley Koff, R.D., a coauthor of *Mom Energy* and a FITNESS advisory board member. "Quality is just as important as quantity." Here's why: Munching two 100-calorie packs of cookies for your midmorning snack gives you a total of two to three servings, or about 36 grams of carbs, and very little protein. Your body uses just 15 to 20 of those grams of carbs for energy, and unless you're highly active, it will probably store the rest, Koff explains. As a result, you end up gaining weight rather than losing it.

Stop the calorie obsession and focus more on balancing your nutrients. "Every time you eat, aim for unlimited amounts of nonstarchy vegetables and one serving each of carbs—whole grains, fruits or starchy vegetables, like carrots and corn—protein and healthy fat," Koff says. Consuming foods in every category gives your body a steady supply of energy all day with no fattening side effects. So instead of cookies for your prelunch snack, nosh on an apple and some nuts or vegetables and a little dip made from low-fat Greek yogurt.

Stop the endless grazing.

Some of us have done away with breakfast, lunch and dinner in favor of the six small meals many experts tout as the key to staving off hunger and losing weight. But this strategy can easily backfire if small meals creep into traditional-size ones or turn into all-day snacking. The trouble is, when you're nibbling a little bit here and there, it's hard to keep track of how much you're putting away. "Plus if you're not getting full at any given time, it sets you up to consume even more overall. There's something psychologically and physically satisfying about eating a complete meal and having that truly full feeling rather than just taking the edge off your appetite every hour or two," says Marjorie Nolan, R.D., a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. At meals, it's typical to have several different dishes, but grazers may munch on just one thing, like pretzels. That means you can down a whole bag and still walk away unsatisfied, Nolan explains.

Instead of picking at food all day, shoot for three meals and two snacks or five

"NOT ALL CALORIES ARE CREATED EQUAL. QUALITY IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS QUANTITY."

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mini meals. Be sure to combine a few tastes and textures at each sitting, like carrot sticks and whole-wheat crackers dipped in hummus, or half a sandwich. Plan small meals in advance so you aren't tempted by—or stuck with—whatever open bag happens to be within reach. And write down what you eat so you keep tabs on just how much you're consuming.

Stock your kitchen for success.

You can buy all the veggies you want, but that doesn't mean you're going to eat them, especially if they're hidden away in the produce drawer. "Healthy eating is about having the right foods ready and waiting for you," says nutritionist David Grotto, R.D., the author of *101 Foods That Could Save Your Life* and a FITNESS advisory board member. "Bust fruits and veggies out of crisper prison, wash them, cut them up and put them at the front of the center shelf in your fridge. You're more likely to eat whatever is directly in your line of sight." Keep the following foods on hand to make whipping up a healthy meal or snack easier than ordering takeout.

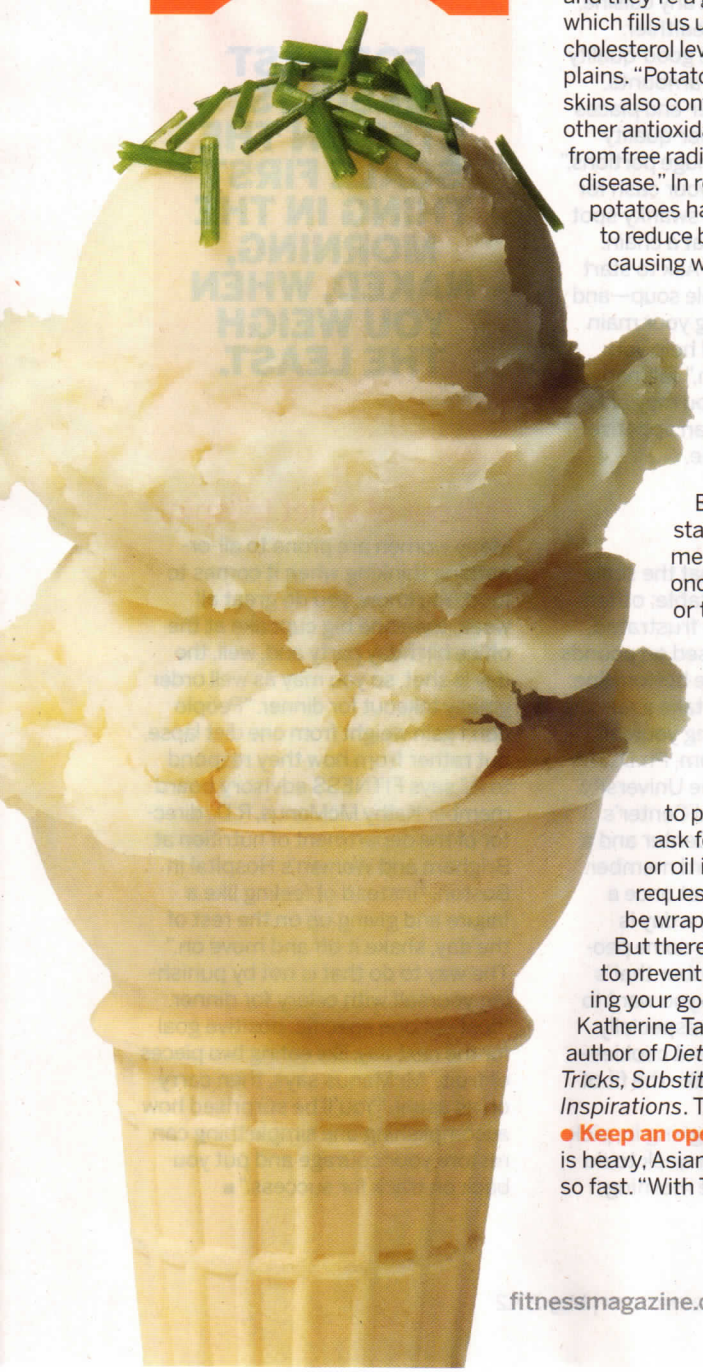
- **Milk** Research has shown that two glasses of nonfat milk after exercise helps you gain more muscle and lose more fat.
- **Full-fat cheese** Go for a little bit of the good stuff instead of too much of the skinnier version. "You'll end up eating more of the low-fat cheese if you're not fully satisfied by it," Grotto says.
- **Greek yogurt** "It has more protein than regular yogurt, and it's extra creamy. Use it in place of sour cream or crème fraîche in chilis, sauces, potatoes and dips," Grotto says.
- **Frozen vegetables** Just three minutes in the microwave and they're ready for you to add them to salads, soups or stir-fries or to munch on them for a snack with a little hummus or salsa.
- **Healthy frozen meals** Look for entrees of less than 400 calories, with at least three grams of fiber and less than 500 milligrams of sodium.
- **Low-sodium lunch meat** Eat it in sandwiches made from whole-grain bread, or roll it up with veggies and hummus in the middle.
- **Cleaned and portioned frozen fish fillets** "Once it's defrosted, salmon takes just minutes to prepare," Grotto says.
- **Canned beans** "Rinse and then put a handful into soups, stews and salads for protein and fiber galore," Grotto suggests.
- **Whole-grain cereal, crackers and pasta** Chose ones with at least five grams of protein and three grams of fiber. The protein will keep you feeling satisfied, and the fiber delivers long-lasting fullness.
- **Peanut butter** "It's packed with protein and antioxidants, especially resveratrol, which has been found to help fight cancer and heart disease," Grotto says.
- **Canola oil** This heart-healthy monounsaturated fat is the perfect choice for sautéing because it has a high smoking point. "Store it in the fridge, because oils become rancid when exposed to heat and air," Grotto advises.

Give yourself an afternoon treat.

Good news: It's healthier to hit the vending machine than to go hungry. The typical stretch between lunch and dinner is too long for blood sugar levels to remain stable without a calorie infusion, says nutritionist Dawn Jackson Blatner, R.D., a FITNESS advisory board member. Your best bet: "If you tend to get famished at 3 p.m., don't fight it, plan for it," she says. Keep healthy snacks like apples, almonds, string cheese and pears at the office and you won't have to scramble for something to eat.

If you didn't bring your own, no biggie, just choose wisely at the machine. "Sunflower seeds and peanuts are superhealthy, a chocolate chip granola bar is a smarter cocoa fix than a candy bar, and baked chips or popcorn is better than regular chips for a salty crunch," Blatner says. Pass up fruit snacks in favor of the real thing from the corner deli. Absolutely gotta have chocolate candy? Opt for a plain Hershey's bar or peanut M&M'S which are slightly lower in calories and saturated fat

POTATOES ARE NO LONGER OFF-LIMITS! THEY'RE LOADED WITH NUTRIENTS AND HELP KEEP YOU HEALTHY.



and sugar and have slightly more fiber and protein than other bars.

Eat more potatoes.

Sounds like diet blasphemy, right? During the low-carb craze, it was drummed into our heads that spuds packed on pounds, so we avoided them at all costs. But now the thinking has changed—and how! Potatoes are actually a nutrient powerhouse, says Elisa Zied, R.D., the author of *Nutrition at Your Fingertips*. "They're loaded with vitamin C and potassium, and they're a good source of fiber, which fills us up and helps keep cholesterol levels healthy," she explains. "Potatoes with red or purple skins also contain carotenoids and other antioxidants that fight damage from free radicals that can cause disease." In recent research, purple potatoes have also been shown to reduce blood pressure without causing weight gain.

Stop shunning spuds and start adding them to your plate. One medium potato (or a cup of diced or mashed) counts as one serving of vegetables. Because potatoes are starchy, round out your meal with a colorful second veggie, like broccoli or tomatoes.

Be a restaurant snob.

You already know to pick grilled over fried; ask for less cream, butter or oil in your food; and request that half your meal be wrapped in a doggie bag. But there are other smart ways to prevent dining out from blowing your good intentions, says Katherine Tallmadge, R.D., the author of *Diet Simple: 195 Mental Tricks, Substitutions, Habits & Inspirations*. Try her strategies:

- **Keep an open mind.** Italian food is heavy, Asian is light—right? Not so fast. "With Thai or Chinese,

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there's a lot of deep frying and also tons of oil in stir-fries," Tallmadge explains. Italian dishes like grilled fish or pasta primavera, though, tend to use less. Open to something new? "Try Vietnamese, which is full of grilled meats and vegetables, soups, and salads," Tallmadge says.

- **Go out to lunch.** "If you're going to indulge, do it midday rather than in the evening," Tallmadge advises. "That way, you can cut back at dinner to even out your calories for the day. Bonus: Lunch is usually cheaper, so you can afford a nicer place. Speaking of which . . .
- **Spend smarter.** With any cuisine, fancier often means healthier. "Higher-end places use good-quality ingredients in smaller amounts, while midlevel and lower-end places frequently overuse lower-quality meats and cheeses in huge portions," Tallmadge says. Save your cash for one outing a week to a swanky spot instead of three stops at a chain.
- **Split up your order.** Ask to start with a salad or vegetable soup—and eat it—before choosing your main course. "Doing this will help you make a better decision," Tallmadge says. In all likelihood, you may only be hungry enough for an appetizer rather than a full entrée.

Weigh in weekly.

Some experts claim that the scale keeps dieters accountable; others believe it makes them frustrated, demoralized and focused on pounds instead of wellness. The bottom line: How often you should take a reading comes down to knowing yourself, says Madelyn Fernstrom, Ph.D., the founding director of the University of Pittsburgh's Medical Center's Weight Management Center and a FITNESS advisory board member. "Research indicates that once a week is good and once a day is probably even better for some people. But if seeing a number that's even slightly off makes you want to throw up your hands—especially toward a box of Girl Scout cookies—use a different gauge, like the fit of your favorite jeans.

To benefit from weighing in, pick one day and time each week to do it, like first thing in the morning, when you're naked and after you've hit the bathroom, when most people typically weigh the least. If you don't like the readout, consider the reasons it might be up: Got your period? Had salty food for dinner last night? If none of those applies, look at where you stand for the month. "Plus or minus less than two pounds during the course of a month is essentially weight-neutral. You're doing great; you've discovered how to maintain," Fernstrom says.

FOR BEST RESULTS, STEP ON THE SCALE FIRST THING IN THE MORNING, NAKED, WHEN YOU WEIGH THE LEAST.

Pull out of a diet tailspin.

Many women are prone to all-or-nothing thinking when it comes to food. You know, you do great all week, then one big cupcake at the office birthday party and, well, the day is shot, so you may as well order greasy takeout for dinner. "People don't gain weight from one diet lapse, but rather from how they respond to it," says FITNESS advisory board member Kathy McManus, R.D., director of the department of nutrition at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. "Instead of feeling like a failure and giving up on the rest of the day, shake it off and move on." The way to do that is not by punishing yourself with celery for dinner. "Just set one specific, positive goal for the next day, like eating two pieces of fruit," McManus says, then carry on as usual. "You'll be surprised how accomplishing one simple thing can restore your courage and put you back on track for success." ■