

THE NEW YORK TIMES NO. 1 BESTSELLER

the skinny rules

the simple weight-loss plan



BOB HARPER

FROM *THE BIGGEST LOSER USA*

WITH GREG CRITSER

About the Book

Losing weight has never been so easy!

With so many conflicting diets around, it's no wonder people find it hard to shed the pounds and keep them off. At last, here's a weight-loss plan that is clear, logical and easy - no gimmicks, no fads, just a no-nonsense way to get thin.

Bob Harper is a renowned fitness trainer and star of *The Biggest Loser USA*. He has used his vast knowledge of nutrition, weight-loss strategy and human nature to devise twenty simple principles to enable you to step into a newly thin lifestyle.

Skinny Rule 1:

Drink a Large Glass of Water Before Every Meal

Skinny Rule 2:

Don't Drink Your Calories

Skinny Rule 3:

Eat Protein at Every Meal - or Stay Hungry and Grouchy.

Bob also shows you how to integrate his rules into your lifestyle via menu plans and 90 delicious rule-abiding recipes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. If that wasn't enough, he offers tips for what to stock in your fridge and meals you can prepare ahead so you're not tempted to break the rules!

With Bob as your coach and mentor, you can - and will - lose weight. It's the surefire way to a thin new you.

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ALSO BY BOB HARPER

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the
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BOB HARPER

with Greg Critser

Conversion Chart

Oven Temperatures:

130°C = 250°F = Gas mark ½

150°C = 300°F = Gas mark 2

180°C = 350°F = Gas mark 4

190°C = 375°F = Gas mark 5

200°C = 400°F = Gas mark 6

220°C = 425°F = Gas mark 7

230°C = 450°F = Gas mark 8

Spoon Measures:

1 level tablespoon flour = 15g

1 heaped tablespoon flour = 28g

1 level tablespoon sugar = 28g

1 level tablespoon butter = 15g

American solid measures

1 cup rice US = 225g

1 cup flour US = 115g

1 cup butter US = 225g

1 stick butter US = 115g

1 cup dried fruit US = 225g

1 cup brown sugar US = 180g

1 cup granulated sugar US = 225g

Liquid measures

1 cup US = 275ml

1 pint US = 550ml

1 quart US = 900ml

INTRODUCTION

Eat What I Tweet!

SOMETIMES BIG IDEAS come from small places.

From, say, a tweet.

That's how this book came about.

I was on my way back from a taping of *The Biggest Loser* when I got a phone call. It was from Ben, the husband of Olivia, who won Season 11.

"I'm following you," he told me. Pretty sure he didn't mean he was stalking me, I still had to ask what on earth he was talking about.

"I'm following what you eat—your meals you post on Twitter."

Ben, like Olivia about 100 pounds overweight, went on to explain: "It's kind of my way to stay connected to Olivia. ... It's like being there with her." If you're not familiar with the concept of the show, let me explain a little: While taping the show—which is a contest to see who can lose the most weight—contestants are separated from their families and all their normal routines, so as to break all ties with their normal eating cues. Ben had been separated from his wife for weeks by this point, and following my tweets about what we were eating made him feel a little closer.

Some weeks later, at the season finale, Ben was on hand to watch and cheer for his wife, and he was noticeably thinner. He had lost about 100 pounds! We were so impressed that we put him on the show, both to share in his

wife's victory and to show off his own achievement. Later, he told us all how he did it, and why it worked.

"I just followed Bob. I watched his tweets. I listened to what he said *he* ate. I figured, how can I go wrong? This is what the *expert* is eating! And that decluttered everything. It made it incredibly clear to me what mattered and what mattered with my diet. It ... kind of gave me a set of rules."

Bang! *A set of rules.*

Anyone who's ever dieted knows exactly what Ben meant. Today, like never before, we are bombarded from every direction with health advice—about diet, nutrition, weight loss, exercise, organic or nonorganic, free range or corn-fed. Now add in the daily science and medical news, a lot of which sounds either stunningly obvious (not being obese = good) or ridiculously counter to what we *thought* was correct (fruit juice = not so good), and you've got a jumbo case of Clutter Brain.

Clutter Brain is what happens when you hear so much information about a subject that you can't make solid, reasonable decisions—in this case about what you should eat. It's incredibly paralyzing, and just about every dieter knows what often comes with Clutter Brain: anxiety. And you know what that means: exhaustion, depression, and then bingeing. What else—at least in my experience—relieves stress and anxiety better than, say, pie? A whole pie. Right? Which obviously counteracts the benefits of the advice you were trying to follow in the first place.

So, what if we eliminated the clutter? I began to think. What if I could come up with a list of simple, nonnegotiable rules that the average Jane or Joe can follow in daily life—rules you can always fall back on in a pinch, rules you can use not just when you are trying to lose weight, but for when you are trying to *stay* slender.

Skinny Rules!

I'm certainly not the first guy to say this, but in our modern, information-glutted world, rules matter more than

ever. Why? Because our external environment no longer seems to have any firm boundaries, any limits, or any positive cues about when to *stop* consuming *anything*. I mean, there is a reason that people get fat—it's easy and cheap to get high-calorie, tasty food. If you look at statistics, more Americans than ever are eating out (and eating enormous portions), eating bad fast food, drinking huge amounts of high-calorie sodas and “energy” waters, and microwaving endless plastic platters of “convenience” food. All of which, while easy, will also make you fat—fast.

But if you want to be right-sized in body, you've got to get rid of the supersize way of life. Whether you want to lose 20 pounds or 200, what the contestants on *The Biggest Loser* have learned—and taught me—holds true: you've got to make a break. You've got to divorce yourself from the past and find a different way of living. And you can never go back.

Once you accept that, and realize there is no finish line, then you've got a better chance of succeeding. Just like Ben, who not only dropped 100 pounds but, so far, has kept it off.

But wow, Bob, you say, all I want to do is drop 20 pounds!

No, I don't think so. C'mon. If “all” you want to do is drop 20 pounds, you'd surely have succeeded by now, given the glut of diet books out there, many of which are pretty good.

No. If you are sitting here reading a diet book by one of the trainers on *The Biggest Loser*, I think you ... kinda ... want ... something ... a little ... more ... than ... “just” dropping some weight.

You want to *keep* the weight off.

You want a way that makes sense in your real-world daily life.

Something convenient *and* healthy.

Something you can always fall back on.

Something permanent, nonnegotiable, and simple.

That's what I want to do with this book. Think of it as a rule book for your life as a healthy-weight person, a person who can enjoy delicious food in the right portions and be satisfied. Someone who can not only resist all the jumbo colas and supersized fries that get waved in front of our noses, but not even feel tempted by them!

Actually, this isn't *only* a rule book. Part I of the book is "The Skinny Rules"—the twenty principles you need to read, understand, and really try to live by. But then I've also created Part II, "The Skinny Way"—a day-by-day menu plan that will get you through the first thirty days of living by the rules. And Part III, "The Skinny Tools," houses the recipes and tips that you'll be called on to look at, cook, and consume! My intention is to take the guesswork out of losing weight for you. After the first thirty days on the program, you will have lost weight and you'll be more confident in eating and living according to my rules. By then you're likely not going to need all of the handholding I provide in this book. You will be on your way to a skinny life!

Don't get me wrong, it won't always be easy. "Easy" does not work. But it will be liberating. Remember what helped Ben: rules and clear instructions freed him from all the brain clutter. These principles let him make rational eating choices without being anxious.

That said, I'll have you know that I *do* have a heart. I get it that these rules are demanding, and that you don't have superhuman willpower (although you have a lot more than you think!). In the first thirty days especially, following all the rules may seem difficult. And depending on how much you have to lose or how you've been eating in the past, it may indeed be so! You are breaking old habits and building new ones, and that's tough. But back to my goodheartedness: I've devised what I like to call a "step-down method" for what most people feel are the handful of

most difficult rules. You'll find them marked with a little sign like this: 📉 These step-downs will help you move away from an old behavior and toward a new, healthy one a little at a time. Keep in mind that this intermediary step is meant to be temporary. Strive to live the rule all the way!

A NEW WAY TO THINK ABOUT DIETING

Feeling motivated to get started? Not quite so fast. Before we begin, we need to clear the deck of some big myths that might hold you in their sway. These myths are based on old dietary rules, even older nutritional science, and still older ways of thinking. In short, they persist—even though they don't work! My guess is that you'll see your own excuses, rationalizations, and assumptions below. But do yourself a favor and hear me out; understanding where you've been wrong or kidding yourself will help you lose weight for good this time.

**YOU
SAY:**

"All I have to do is exercise a lot, and the weight will come off."

I SAY:

Well, yes—if you've got about five hours to spare every day. That four-mile walk you take every morning? It burns about 350 calories—not even a small bag of fries at McDonald's. That hour of Pilates or yoga? Ditto—not even equal to a large chai latte at Starbucks.

Believe me, it took a lot to convince me of this. I used to believe I could beat anything off of you in the gym. But exercise alone without diet won't do it. (And remember, you don't have all the advantages of my *Biggest Loser* contestants, who have their own trainers for six hours a day and don't have to work around the logistics of everyday life while they are on the show.)

Don't take my word for it. Not long ago a group of Harvard researchers tracked 1,847 overweight men and women, some of whom just exercised, some of whom only dieted. The findings were clear and, for the exercise-deluded, sobering: *"Our results show that isolated aerobic¹ exercise is not an effective weight loss therapy in these patients."*

Got that? I mean, can 1,847 people be wrong?

YOU SAY: "I'm not going to weigh myself more than once a week because it will discourage me and then I will slip."

I SAY: I might once have told you the same thing; the last thing a dieter needs is to be putting him-or herself down all the time for not losing weight fast enough. Or getting depressed when confronted with the enormity of the task.

But that isn't what happens. It turns out that dieters can take the truth just fine, thank you. I recall one contestant telling me why she weighed herself every day: "Bob, I just need to see something real—a hard fact—and that motivates me. It can be depressing, but I've learned that I can take it." She, like Ben, using my tweets, needed something concrete to go on. Is there any science on the subject? Not tons, but when researchers at the Marshfield Clinic² in Wisconsin looked at 1,200 dieters, they found that "frequent *self-weighing* seemed to be most beneficial for obese individuals."

It's OK to weigh yourself often. You can take it. Not kidding.

YOU SAY: "It's all calories in, calories out. What else is there to say?"

I SAY: Well, as it turns out: a lot. Sure, you can't suspend the laws of physics, but you can eat foods that do more for your weight loss than other foods. Until recently there wasn't a lot of

research to support that claim; the idea that some calories were not as fattening as other calories was ridiculed. But after collecting data about large groups of people over several decades, we're slowly coming around to a new set of understandings.

The most convincing of these comes from Harvard's³ famed Nurses' Health Study (all women) and Health Professionals Follow-up Study (all men), which have been following 129,000 nurses and health professionals for two decades now. In 2011, the study's researchers decided to try answering one question: are some foods associated with weight loss even if, over time, we've been *increasing* our intake of them?

The answer stunned a lot of traditionalists. Predictably, increases in fruits and veggies were associated with weight loss, while caloric increases in potato chips were associated with weight gain. The shocker came in the less-intuitive items. Increases in nuts, whole grains, and—usefully for us, as you'll see later—yogurt were associated with substantial weight loss.

No one is quite sure why, but we can guess: these foods don't spike your blood sugar and insulin responses the way other foods do, so they don't make you hungry. Also—and you'll hear me go on and on about this later—they are not supersweet or supersalty foods. They don't tweak your psyche to expect those unhealthy extreme flavors you've been eating for so long. Low-fat and even whole-fat milk turn out to be a *lot* better than all those "healthy" fruit juices for which you're shelling out five bucks a pop. I'll tell you why later. In the meantime, you can take heart that your future eating habits won't be as narrow as you might have imagined.

I mean, how wrong could 129,000 nurses *be*?

YOU

"I'll just cut out all carbs or fat—it's that simple."

SAY:

I SAY:

And completely unrealistic. And, let's face it, kind of depressing. In fact, experience tells me that if you are following a diet that tells you to eliminate *an entire crucial nutrient category*—like carbs or fats—then you're in trouble. That's not something you can sustain; you are absolutely going to gain the weight back.

So cutting something out without replacing it—that won't work. I've had trainees tell me over and over, "You know, Bob, I'm Italian American. There's no way I will cut out lasagna completely. It's part of my family and it's a Sunday tradition. It's part of who I am." And I agree. What I am going to show you is how to eat those foods wisely—and I do not always mean itsy-bitsy portions, either!

YOU

SAY:

"If I don't eat, I'll lose weight: it's that simple."

I SAY:

No. One consistent finding over the years is that, for most people, you've got to eat to lose. Part of this is pure metabolism; to strain an old metaphor, you've got to get the engine going for the engine to use all the extra fuel that's hanging around your waist. Also: you're going to slip if you feel too deprived. And you've got to make breakfast *the* priority meal of the day, avoiding the next bad idea, which is ...

YOU

SAY:

"I'll just pick up something light on the way to work."

I SAY:

Like what? Some yogurt sprinkled with flax seed and acai berries? Uh-uh. *You* know what it's really going be: a bagel and cream cheese, *low-fat cream cheese*, of course, which has worked so well for you so far. So just get this out of your head. While the yogurt/flax seed/berries combo would be great, I'm guessing those ingredients are not in your cupboard at the moment, so in this book I'll give you something new to put in its place: lots of options for a great and satisfying

no-hassle breakfast. Remember, one of the key goals of *The Skinny Rules* is to put you back in control of your diet. We'll start with the first and most important meal of the day.

**YOU
SAY:
I SAY:**

"It's always bad to lose a lot of weight quickly."

The fact is, if you are otherwise healthy, a brief period of rapid weight loss while dieting is reasonably safe. Yes, there can be problems, the most troubling being gallstones; but these only happen in about 12 percent of extremely obese patients on very low calorie diets for long periods of time. I'm going to assume that doesn't describe you. If it does, go easy. But generally, if you take a multivitamin, hydrate, and make sure you get enough protein and potassium, you'll be fine. And when you look at the scale, you'll get that added psychological boost to keep going.

GET STARTED!

Now that we've dispensed with the ideas and excuses and rationalizations that I believe have held you back in the past, you're ready to go.

Let's treat this as an adventure.
You're going somewhere great!

PART I

THE SKINNY RULES

AS I WAS working on this book, a number of people who read parts over my shoulder said things like, “Wow, Bob. Those are tough. Don’t you think people will get discouraged? Can’t you make them just a little easier?”

Eventually, I just blurted out, “*I don’t want these rules to be liked, I want them to last!*” Furthermore, they aren’t that hard! They may be *new*, a.k.a. foreign, but they are not going to deprive you or confound you or leave you confused. I will make sure of that.

Here’s the deal: if you want to lose weight and stay thin, you’ve got to change your life, and that means changing some basic behaviors. I call them defaults—the behaviors that you have instinctively fallen back on when pressured, just as your computer does when it backs itself up. Automatic computer backup = good. Default behaviors = not so good. These defaults have to change.

What does this entail? It entails taking on a new—and, yes, sometimes rigid—set of rules that will, eventually, make perfect sense, but which at first require a leap of faith.

A leap of faith? Sure. You already do this in other areas of your life, be it the obvious (like religion) or the less obvious (say, in suggesting something totally outside the box at work). Or even taking classes for a profession you believe *may* be the way of the future. Taking a leap of faith requires simply having an open mind and a willing spirit.

Take that leap of faith with me. I know these rules are going to change your life for the better. After following the rules for a month—the time most experts agree is needed to form a new habit—I know that you’ll be making good food decisions easily (maybe even mindlessly!), you’ll have devised your own recipes using mine as your base, and you’ll have figured out what menu combinations make you the happiest.

So I have to ask you to proceed by *trusting my process*, even though it may feel foreign at first. Let's get started.

RULE 1

DRINK A LARGE GLASS OF WATER BEFORE EVERY MEAL—NO EXCUSES!

THIS HAS GOT to be the easiest rule there is. Which is a good place to start. But it's also one of the most important rules there is. You simply must stay hydrated. At a minimum I want you to drink a large glass of water before every meal. But I'd prefer that you drink at least five glasses of water a day, the first one within fifteen minutes of waking.

Now, do I really need to harass you about this? I do. Because during the process of losing weight, nothing is so crucial to your success. Water keeps your organs healthy while you're sweating, keeps food moving through the system, and makes you feel full.

Let me put this plainly: drinking water helps you lose weight. You can see this most vividly in very overweight children. Recently, a group of Israeli¹ researchers examined the resting energy expenditure (REE) of twenty-one obese children. REE refers to the rate at which you burn calories when you are sleeping, watching TV, or just simply sitting there and staring into space. The researchers gave the kids a large serving of cold water, then began measuring the REE every 10 minutes. The reaction was more robust than anticipated. Within 24 minutes, REE began increasing. By

57 minutes, REE had increased by 25 percent, and this effect lasted 40 minutes.

Did you get that? Just by drinking water, your body increases its burning of calories. The scientists estimated that, if you just do this, you'll burn off an extra three pounds over the next year.

That doesn't sound like a lot, but I'll take it. Won't you?

The contestants on *The Biggest Loser* are usually chronically dehydrated, and their collective experience shows another reason to drink lots of water. They are usually pretty big consumers of salt before they come on the show. They eat it unknowingly—in the fried and highly processed foods that are their usual mealtime fare and that helped make them so overweight in the first place—and knowingly; too many of them often add salt to whatever they are served. They are usually eating so much salt that they have begun to mess up the delicate mechanisms of chemical balance so vital to our bodies. When the kidneys are swamped with salt and without adequate liquids, you don't get enough potassium. That and other minerals are absolutely key to weight loss.

And as my private fitness clients have shown me, drinking more water helps in other physical ways as well. When they start conscientiously drinking lots of water, their workouts improve. They get less muscle fatigue, they recuperate faster, and they don't feel groggy in the afternoon.

SIMPLE HYDRATION TIPS

- Make it your premeal policy: drink a large glass of water before every meal. No excuses.
- End the day with preparation for a good start to the next: put a large, full glass of water on your bedstand

every night and drink it when you wake up, every morning.

- Get a little extra bang for your effort: mix a pitcher of water with a noncaloric vitamin and mineral supplement. I like ElectroMix (one little packet makes a quart), and having the pitcher all mixed and right in front of you will make it that much easier to pour yourself a glass when you open the fridge at every meal; I usually drink mine when I work out.
-

RULE 2

DON'T DRINK YOUR CALORIES

CALORIC BEVERAGES STEAL your health and they steal great food from you. That's right. They steal it because they are so heavily caloric themselves and will fill you up with all the wrong stuff. Think of the kinds of caloric beverages all around you.

SOFT DRINKS: As you heft one of those cans or buckets of sugar water to your mouth, consider that you are *actually eating the equivalent of what should be your entire lunch.*

I came to this rule while working on *TBL*. When I reviewed their pre-*TBL* meal plans I saw that most contestants were drinking Big Gulps or other massive jugs of soda that had 500 calories. Some people would nurse several of them during the day (that's upwards of 1,500 calories of soda a day!). Think of it this way: all that corn syrup? It's a bushel of corn! And remember, when factory farms want to fatten their cattle, what do they do? They feed them corn. So if you are drinking things with corn syrup, think about that. Are you a cow? No you are not.

Moreover, when you drink soda, you are ingesting what just about every legitimate medical authority in the world has named as suspect number one in today's sprawling diabetes epidemic. A friend of mine tells me that his teenage kids really got the message a few years ago when

their father was diagnosed. Now, when a family member asks for a soda, they cheerily reply: “Sure. What kind of diabetes do you want?”

Out of the mouths of babes.



If, like most Americans, you are used to drinking lots of liquid calories, cutting out soda might be a tough adjustment. But it’s essential that you kick your soda habit ASAP. If you’re a full-calorie soda drinker, you’re guzzling empty and unsatisfying calories. If you’re a diet/zero-calorie soda drinker, you haven’t dodged the problem. Hello?! You’re guzzling artificial sweeteners and, as you’ll hear again and again in this book, I don’t think highly of these at all. They only serve to whet your appetite for more sweet! Stop the madness. Kick the habit.

To help wean yourself from your soda habit, start experimenting with other flavored, noncaloric drinks that you can make yourself. Try seltzer water with lime or lemon juice. Stock up on unsweetened, naturally flavored herb teas. Make a quart or so at a time and keep it in the refrigerator to go with your afternoon snack. And there is my tried-and-true alternative—the “soda eliminator” described in [Rule 15](#). Check it out.

JUICES AND JUICE DRINKS: Most juices have exactly the same number of calories—and the same amount of simple sugars—as a cola. Oh, you’ll protest, but doesn’t the fiber in a “natural” juice obviate that problem? No. That’s just what you’ve been told. It is the same as drinking a soft drink. You want fruit? Eat fruit. The whole piece of fruit. Not the extracted and manipulated juice.

Yeah, well, juice smoothies are healthy, right? Maybe “healthy” if you order one with no preservatives or added sugar, but regardless, fruit smoothies that you haven’t made yourself (i.e., you have controlled the portions and know exactly what’s gone in it) will make you as fat as a Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade float—just like a 32-ounce soda.

ENERGY REPLACEMENT DRINKS: Well, yeah—if you’re training for a marathon. Otherwise, look at the label! A 20-ounce sports drink—let’s face it, that’s how much you’ll “need” to quench that big thirst—weighs in at 130 calories. Like a 12-ounce cola, but without the nifty zing of bubbles and caffeine. I’ve always seen drinks like these as particularly insidious, because they are, in our heads at least, deeply associated with sports, which are deeply associated with health and fitness. You have to break that connection.

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

Though the scientific jury is still out on whether there is a direct relationship between consuming artificial sweeteners and the urge to eat more sweet-tasting things, I know this from experience with clients, with *The Biggest Loser* contestants, and with myself: the more “sweet” you eat, the more you want it. Another way to put it: when you taste sweet (even the tiny-calorie, artificial kind), you are conditioning yourself to continue wanting and even craving that same sweetness. That continued craving isn’t going to help you lose weight—ever. The biggest favor you can do yourself is to leave your sweet consumption to your splurge meal and learn to keep sweet indulgences in perspective: they are treats, not everyday affairs.

A LATTE ON THE WAY TO THE GYM? Sorry. Milk also has a tanker-full of calories. True, coffee itself—which most of the world drinks without milk, by the way—is turning out to be a positive dietary element, although it's still unclear why and how much. I'll get back to that later, but for now, no lattes or chais, frappes, or mochas. If you must get something Euro, get a cappuccino, which contains very little milk (if made the right way), or even an Americano, in which you can better control the amount of milk. And if you must add milk, opt for the low-or no-fat varieties. No cream. No half and half. Whole milk? No again.

ALCOHOL: Although it might sound odd, if there's one source of liquid calories that warrants some leeway in my no-sweetened-beverage world, it's booze. Wine, particularly red wine, deserves a place on your shelf—and on your table. But not when you are trying to *lose* weight! Until you are at your goal weight, it's best to view alcohol the same way you would a Big Gulp. When you get to your goal, red wine is the thing. When you've kept to your goal, we'll talk beer.



In the same way I want you to step down from soda, I want you to immediately lay off the cream or half-and-half in your coffee. Don't even go for the whole milk. Step down, step away! Start putting 2% milk or nonfat (skim) milk in your coffee and ordering any coffee-based drink that way too. Today.

Now, why am I so down on liquid calories? Most of us know the basics: sugary drinks contain, uh, sugar, and sugar is made up of molecules that encourage the

formation of new fat cells, as well as keeping existing ones filled. This applies to *all* sugars, from “natural” ones like honey and juices, to the twin demon spawn of white sugar and high fructose corn syrup. Sugars drive up your blood sugar, which tells the pancreas to make more insulin, which makes you hungry, setting the whole process in motion again.

But what if I told you this: humans are *simply not built* to consume liquid calories.

Period.

That’s the growing consensus among nutritionists and medical researchers. In “A Short History of Beverages and How Our Body Treats Them,” obesity experts led by the preeminent Barry Popkin scrutinized our evolutionary history and tried to explain why our modern bodies handle them so poorly. Why, for example, do liquid calories make it difficult for our bodies to gauge when they are satisfied, or when to stop eating? After looking at the bodily effects of everything from beer to pop, they put forward a stunning conclusion:

“First,” they write, “humans may lack a physiological¹ basis for processing carbohydrate or alcoholic calories in beverages because only breast milk and water were available for the vast majority of our evolutionary history. Alternatives to those two beverages appeared in the human diet no more than 11,000 years ago, but *Homo sapiens* evolved between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago. Second, carbohydrate and alcohol-containing beverages may produce an incomplete satiation sequence which prevents us from becoming satiated on these beverages.”

Translation: when you drink lots of liquid calories, you’re fighting 200,000 years of human history!

You’re not going to win.

WHY I DRINK COFFEE