

Interview: Evelyn Tribole, author of "Intuitive Eating," and Steven Hawks discuss the No Diet Diet

1,388 words

7 December 2005

NBC News: Today

English

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MATT LAUER, co-host:

We're back at 42 after the hour. The new year's quickly approaching; if you're like a lot of people, you probably want to lose a little weight. But what if you could drop the pounds while still eating your favorite foods? The idea is called intuitive eating, and a new study suggests the No Diet Diet may be a healthy alternative to counting calories. Evelyn Tribole is co-author of the bestselling book "Intuitive Eating." And Steven Hawks lost 50 pounds following the plan.

Evelyn, Steve, good to see you both.

Mr. STEVEN HAWKS (Lost 50 Pounds on the No Diet Diet): Thank you.

Ms. EVELYN TRIBOLE ("Intuitive Eating"): Hi.

LAUER: Give me the crib notes here, what is the No Diet Diet exactly?

Ms. TRIBOLE: Bottom line: it's about you becoming the expert of your own body. Knowing when you're hungry, and--and probably the most surprising thing is that you can have permission to eat anything you want. And that shocks my patients, they say, 'You're a nutritionist, how can you say that?' But when you know you can eat whatever you want, you--and you're in touch with hunger and fullness, these foods suddenly don't become magical.

LAUER: And when you say "whatever you want," take a look at the table here, we're talking about things like cookies and M&Ms and Fritos and chocolate-covered almonds and ice cream over there. Is the idea that if you have this around you and you have constant access to it, you don't crave it anymore?

Ms. TRIBOLE: Absolutely. Because then you get to ask, 'Hm, do I really want this? Do I want this now? Is this taste bud worth it? Does it meet my expectations?' And now you're not eating it on the sly or having to say, 'Oh, my God, this is the last time I get to have this' and having the last supper, and now you're eating huge quantities of it.

LAUER: All right. Not only are you someone who's tried this diet, you teach nutrition, too, don't you?

Mr. HAWKS: That's right, yeah.

LAUER: Your history in terms of weight: you've always had a struggle with your weight, you remember being called Fatty as a kid.

Ms. TRIBOLE: Oh.

Mr. HAWKS: That's right.

LAUER: You got up to, what, 220 pounds?

Mr. HAWKS: Yeah. Yeah.

LAUER: And have now lost 50 pounds on this. Why do you think intuitive eating works?

Mr. HAWKS: I was a long-term dieter, unsuccessful, I'd lose weight dieting, gain weight back. And I came across this idea a number of years ago, and I decided I've got nothing to lose, so I'm going to give it a shot. And tried it. It takes a lot of effort, actually, it look--doesn't look like it takes a lot of effort, it takes a lot of effort to become aware of what your body's telling you that it wants. And this is one of my strategies for doing that.

LAUER: So the--one of the ideas is eat when you're hungry, don't eat when you're full. But isn't it true, both of you being in the business, that some of these foods are the kind of foods where you eat them, they make you feel full for a second, and then

they make you feel hungry very quickly after?

Ms. TRIBOLE: Well, two things: no, they don't make you feel quickly hungry afterwards unless maybe that--that's you; but number one, it requires being mindful, and we are so stressed out, so on the go, and sometimes what happens is you get home from work, you haven't had anything to eat in six hours, 'Oh, my God, brownies.' So instead of having brownies for a snack, it becomes your meal. So if your meal hungry, we need to be looking at something you can eat for a meal, and then you have the brownies because now it's more about taste.

LAUER: This worked for you. Would you recommend it as a--as a nutritionist? Would you recommend it to other people?

Mr. HAWKS: I do all the time.

LAUER: All right. Let me read you what Duke University Diet and Fitness Center wrote to us. They said this: "Encouraging people to surround themselves with junk food"--this would all qualify--"sounds like a very risky strategy. We believe that given such encouragement, many individuals are likely to worsen their weight problem and compromise their health."

Mr. HAWKS: The response to that is if you're a dieter, as I have been, and I'm exposed--I had all kinds of food--food rules, 'I couldn't have this in my home,' but--and so as a dieter, surround me with that and I'm going to--I'm going to overeat all the time. As an intuitive eater, I can be surrounded by it. This isn't a--I'm not tempted by this at all because I can have this whenever I want.

LAUER: But aren't there some people, Evelyn, who are going to surround them--they're going to fill the cabinets with this stuff, and you know what they're going to do? They're going to just eat it and eat it and eat it.

Ms. TRIBOLE: Well, that's my number one, you need to be the expert of your body, which also includes knowing when you're vulnerable; if you're too hungry, too tired, too stressed out, haven't had enough sleep, then, yeah, there's a good chance you will overeat. And if you have been a chronic dieter, this might be overwhelming and, in that case, you might want to just start with one food, have permission to eat it, and then you'll be surprised how, by doing this, it loses its appeal.

LAUER: How long did it take for this stuff to lose its appeal for you when you had complete access to it? Or gave yourself complete access to it?

Mr. HAWKS: It was a process of probably a year for me to really get into this.

LAUER: And now when you look at this, and these are some of your power foods right here, how do you feel?

Mr. HAWKS: I'm surrounded by this all the time, so it doesn't bother me.

LAUER: And it doesn't bother you a bit. After a while, when you stop having cravings for this because it's all around you, do you start craving things like vegetables and yogurt?

Mr. HAWKS: Well--and that's the--that's the key to intuitive eating is not surround yourself just with junk food, it's surround yourself with all types of food so that when you realize what you're hungry for, it's there, and you can have it.

LAUER: All right.

Ms. TRIBOLE: You have permission to eat anything, and it makes you the expert. It's also taking the morality out of eating and having a healthy relationship with food.

LAUER: And by the way, it's not--it's not like a diet that you go off of.

Mr. HAWKS: No.

Ms. TRIBOLE: No. And by the...

LAUER: This is now how you live your life.

Mr. HAWKS: That's what's--that's what's good about it, it's sustainable.

Ms. TRIBOLE: And you still want to be eating healthy, it's just that these foods are permissible, and so then it doesn't become a last supper eating fest every time you see it.

LAUER: Evelyn Tribole and Steven Hawks, guys, nice to have you here. Thanks very much.

Ms. TRIBOLE: Thank you.

Mr. HAWKS: Thank you.

LAUER: And coming up next on TODAY: if "Rudolph" is a family tradition in your house, you've got lots of good company. We're not talking Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and Vixen, we're going to look at why the old school holiday classics are as popular as ever, right after this.

