

The Well Path

Lose 20 Pounds,
Reverse the Aging Process,
Change Your Life

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HARPER WAVE

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Introduction

I see naked people.

Lots of naked people. As a doctor, I see unclothed females of all ages, sizes, and shapes every day. Ninety-nine percent of them arrive at my office stressed out, frustrated, and exhausted. They tell me they've been trying everything under the sun to lose unwanted pounds and look younger, with no success.

Before the naked part of a consultation, I sit down with new patients to have a talk in my office. "How can I help you?" I ask.

Often, tears well in their eyes. I think it's an automatic reaction to the shame of feeling like a failure because the number on the scale or their appearance doesn't reflect the goals they've set for themselves. These are extremely high-functioning women. They are successful New York City career ladies and great moms with impeccable style, but this one simple thing completely undoes them. They are women who have the other areas of their lives "together," but they can't get a handle on their health. They try to hide their vulnerability, but as we talk it becomes difficult.

I encourage them to let it out. These women are already stretched beyond their breaking point. I've heard variations of "I've been dieting my whole life and can't lose weight" and "I work out like a fiend and still have cellulite" every day of my career. They've received the same message from every source available to them: To lose weight, you have to eat less and exercise more. They work so hard to follow this advice

with so much good intention and determination that I wish I could give them gold medals. In every other aspect of life, they succeed. But in this particular area, according to their own impossibly high standards, they fail and then they blame themselves.

The stakes are high. These women are fighting for their health and quality of life, for their ability to do their life's work, to be good role models for their children, and to be happy. They're trying to free themselves from the burden of excess weight, to slow down the aging process, and to decrease their odds of developing the diseases and conditions associated with being overweight and aging.

What they don't yet realize is that "trying everything" is precisely *why* "nothing works."

Let's define *everything*:

Chronic dieting and calorie restriction

Trying every new fad diet or exercise regimen, even if it doesn't feel good

Taking questionable supplements to shed pounds

Juice cleansing or detoxing on a regular basis

Exercising to exhaustion or injury or, the flip side, not working out hard enough to break a sweat

Living with the stress, anxiety, and depression of feeling like a failure

The emotional and physical toll of this struggle is enormous. With each new diet or exercise class, women start out with high expectations and wind up disappointed, frustrated, guilt-ridden, and ashamed when they don't get the results they want or when the results are not sustainable. One trip on this emotional roller coaster would be hard enough, but most of the women I meet have been on this ride for years, even decades.

But the toll isn't only emotional; it's also biological. Women unknowingly dismantle their healthy bodily functions—including their metabolism—by dieting and overexercising. In their attempt to “try everything” they undermine the delicate balance of their hormones—the body's chemical messengers that are involved in regulating everything from weight to skin elasticity to energy levels. In their quest to be strong, vibrant, and healthy, women who “try everything” create a weak and sick internal environment. Their bodies are eventually thrown so off-kilter that positive changes become next to impossible to make. All of their dutiful hours logged on the treadmill are a perfect metaphor for their efforts: They have truly been running in place, going nowhere fast.

As they get older, the panic volume goes up. “Losing weight in my twenties was so simple,” women often say. “But now, I'm stuck.” When they were younger, it was easier to lose weight for many reasons, but one was that their bodies weren't broken down yet by decades of inconsistent nutrition and exercise. The unfortunate irony is that the longer and harder they've been trying to lose weight, the more difficult it is for them to succeed. “I'm a mess, and I don't want to feel this way,” they tell me. “You're my last hope. I saw you use that fat-zapping laser machine on *Dr. Oz*, and I want to give it a try.”

I understand their desire for a “cure.” I have become well known for demonstrating aesthetic machines on TV, so new patients often hope these high-tech tools are the miracle solution to their weight-loss woes. But that's not how long-term weight loss works.

Technology can be a powerful tool, but it won't solve the problem of an imbalanced body or a yo-yo lifestyle. Treatments require a commitment of time and money, and they alone cannot solve the underlying issues that are causing weight gain or aging in the first place. As a first step, I suggest to my patients that they try my holistic strategies. They'll invest less time, get better results, and change the trajectory of their health and longevity. And the cost? Next to nothing.

They'll also bond with other women, gain tons of energy, eat fabulously, sleep like a dream, cure a host of bothersome problems, and

feel empowered by their proactivity. All without feeling deprived. They will achieve homeostasis—a state of optimal health where your whole body is in balance, humming along, every system working in perfect harmony with one another—as well as lose fat and slow the aging process from the inside out.

Nine out of ten women say, “I’ve *tried* every program out there already. I don’t even know what homeostasis means.” In their desperation, they just want something that works fast. My approach to wellness, they wrongly suspect, will be just another empty promise.

The Well Path, as I call it, is not a diet. I don’t believe in elimination or restrictive diets. I don’t even like to say (or type) the word *diet*. It’s been my personal and professional experience that when a woman says or thinks the D-word, she will gain five pounds by the end of the week.

So if it’s not a diet, what is it? The Well Path is a series of small steps that, cumulatively, move your body back into balance and allow you to thrive. Part of the Path does involve eating—but not eliminating. I believe in *adding* nutrients to food you like, not taking things away. “Nurify” is a much better word than “diet.” The Well Path gives you the tools you need to rebuild and strengthen your body and mind. The goal isn’t starvation, it’s homeostasis. Fat melts away and is replaced with healthy muscle. Energy soars. Depression and stress levels drop. Skin glows. Cells renew and regenerate faster than they die off, literally turning back the clock on aging.

Restrictive eaters are *not* in homeostasis.

Neither are compulsive exercisers, couch potatoes, insomniacs, or workaholics.

Signs that you’re not in homeostasis include the inability to sleep or poor quality sleep; constipation; loose bowels; bloating; cravings for caffeine and sweet, salty, and starchy food; late-night binge eating; excess abdominal fat; cellulite; dull skin tone; feeling stressed out; overwhelmed and exhausted; and being forgetful or having a sense that you are not as sharp as you used to be. When you’re not in homeostasis, you’re basically on life support. Your body is in a chronic

reactive, defensive state and is just doing what it needs to survive. It can't, and won't, thrive in constant crisis. My strategies are designed to change the body's internal environment from "stop" to "go," from sick to healthy, fat to lean, tired to energized.

Signs that you *are* in homeostasis are good quality sleep; easily falling and staying asleep; healthy daily bowel movements; no sugar or caffeine cravings; normal hunger pangs; decreasing abdominal fat; smooth and glowing skin; energy to spare; well managed stress; healthy libido; and sharper mental function, including improved memory.

Along with my diet and fitness obsessed patients, I see just as many woman who are lost in the ocean of conflicting information out there about health, aging, and weight. They don't know where to start a wellness plan, so they let it slide for years, gaining weight and losing their health in their inertia. No matter what shape my patients are in when they first set foot on the Well Path, they can typically expect to achieve homeostasis in about a month. Women who were on multiple medications and couldn't walk up a flight of stairs have been able to minimize their pills and hike up a mountain.

You can't get results like that with just a laser.

Any path to success in life and in health has to start with a strong desire to make real, lasting, positive changes. When you incorporate my sustainable, simple changes into your life, real change is possible. We're going to take it one step at a time, one meal at a time, one day at a time. It is as simple, and effective, as that.

My Story

Finding and stepping along a healthy path is how I live my life. I walk the walk, big-time. But it wasn't always that way.

When I look back at my life, I see it as a progression of taking one step at a time to reach where I am now. I grew up in Los Angeles. Although I have blond hair, I was far from a California Girl prototype—I was always on the chubby side. I'm pretty sure hot dogs and

bologna were a major staple of my childhood. From elementary school on, weight was a constant battle for me, and I remember the first crush I ever had told me that I was too fat for him to like me. The pain of that comment is still familiar even thirty-three years later. I had other struggles, too. Although I had parents who loved and supported me, I always felt like I didn't fit in because I wasn't pretty, thin, smart, or talented enough. My parents didn't have a lot of financial resources, so I worked my own way through college and medical school doing phone sales and waitressing, eventually becoming a doctor specializing in family health.

My life goal had always been to help women reach their full potential. Overcoming obstacles had (has) been the struggle of my own life, and if I could help others with theirs, that would be my definition of success. I joined a medical practice and started working with women and children, often advising them how to lose excess weight. I can count on two hands what I learned about nutrition in medical school, but I stuck with the standard message: Eat less, exercise more. Four words that have doomed countless weight-loss efforts over the past few decades.

Well, it didn't work for my patients or for me. Again and again, I saw the proof in practice: Diets were stressful and depressing and caused my patients to gain more weight over time. I knew that if my patients could free themselves of the obsessive distraction of diet plans and the emotional devastation of chronic failure, they'd be happier, healthier, and more successful in every aspect of their lives. I started to develop sustainable, successful strategies for weight loss and wellness and test them out with my patients—this was the foundation for The Well Path.

During this period of my life, I was living in Seattle. I had fallen in love, married, and had my daughter, Olivia. Professionally, I was thriving and in the midst of developing a wellness center for women. But on the eve of signing a long-term lease for my future business, I stopped and took stock. It had always been a dream of mine to

live and work in New York City. If I signed that Seattle lease, there was no turning back. The very next day, I found a real estate ad in a wrongly delivered *New York Times* that read, “Day spa for sale, Upper East Side.” I flew across the country and walked sixty blocks up Madison Avenue on a beautiful spring day to find a dump. A dump with potential.

One look was enough. I had found my new wellness center. A generous friend loaned me the money to buy it. Six weeks later, in May of 2001, I moved to New York City with my husband and my eighteen-month-old daughter. I established my practice and had another child, Sam. It seemed great on paper: two kids, Upper East Side medical practice, happily married. But our marriage was not a happy one, and eventually we separated. A bitter, ugly divorce and custody battle followed. I poured my heart into my children and my soul into my work, and eventually gave up, peacefully, on finding another mate after a few years of dating disappointments.

And then I met the man who’d change my mind about getting married again.

Dave was ten years my junior and an amazing stepfather. We decided to have a child together, and I got pregnant with Cole at forty-two after two miscarriages and a tubal pregnancy. Not only was my body a mess from all the hormonal ups and downs, I was considered a high-risk pregnancy and my doctor advised me to take it easy. For nine months I barely moved and ate way too much. My son Cole should have been named Ben or Jerry! My net gain from that pregnancy was sixty pounds.

I lost almost no weight after Cole was born, I was out of shape, and I felt powerless against the pounds on the scale. Every time I tried to imagine what it would take to get rid of the weight, I thought, “There’s just no way.” Despite having coached many patients in my same position, it still felt like an overwhelming challenge. Until that moment, I hadn’t really known what it was like to be at the bottom of a weight-loss mountain and not being able to see the top.

I would have to apply my methods to my own situation, including the strategy of keeping my head down and watching my feet take one step at a time.

Every time I caught myself looking for the endpoint and feeling overwhelmed, I reminded myself that I don't have to lose sixty pounds today. I only had to have a nice lunch, take a walk later, spend time with friends and family, and enjoy life. I didn't panic. I stayed on the path and I kept moving forward. Six months later, I had lost it all and was fit and full of vitality.

When I look back at what it took to get there, I am amazed at how simple it was. The series of small steps started out with one meal. Then it was one exercise class. Then it was a whole day, a whole week, whatever I could handle doing. If I tried something drastic and unsustainable, I could feel myself wanting to quit. So I took a deep breath and refocused on taking one step, one meal, one class, to get back on the path to the top of the mountain. Anything can be achieved when you break it up into small, simple components that can be sustained and integrated into your daily life.

This personal experience helped me further hone the Well Path. I know for a fact that losing twenty or more pounds is a matter of keeping your head down and taking small steps, one at a time. Climb your hill (not someone else's) doing things you like, and you'll arrive at homeostasis with a smile of pride on your face. Take rests. Soak up the sun. Smell the flowers. Bring other people along as you go. Losing weight and reversing the aging process can be *fun*. People laugh at me when I say this, but only at first. After they've been on the Path for a while, they laugh with knowing relief, not skepticism.

No matter where you are on your journey right now, you are capable of greatness. No matter what shape you're in, you can return to the natural state of optimal functioning you were intrinsically designed for. You can work with your body instead of against it. Perpetually cycling between expectation and disappointment distracts women from

reaching higher goals, and from succeeding at their life's work, whatever that might be.

My higher goal, my life's work, is to help women prioritize their health and well-being so they can achieve *their* higher-goals and succeed at *their* life's work. Nothing can stop a woman who is healthy, energized, and confident. Everyone benefits when you feel good: the kids, your partner, your colleagues and community. In my twenty-four years of practicing both traditional and alternative medicine, I have guided hundreds of women along this clear, brightly lit Path to wellness. Before you read any of my specific directions, know that the only thing you have to cut out of your life is fear of failing. No more insane dieting, cleansing, suffering, and churning away on an elliptical to nowhere. That dark period of your life is over. Time now to heal from the inside out, feel better, look *amazing*, live longer, and finally get rid of the extra weight.

PART ONE

The Truth about Weight Loss and Aging

1.

What Prevents Change

The very first, biggest step on the Well Path is making the decision to change. It's not easy to put aside the habits you've become used to and to reframe the way you think about health and weight loss. So before we get you started on a new path, I want to take a moment to help you understand why your previous path isn't working. Most of us have accepted certain beliefs about our health—the headlines you see plastered on magazines and websites that influence the choices you make at the grocery store, in the kitchen, at the gym, at work. But many of these messages are misunderstood or simply false. Instead of helping you lose weight and increase vitality, they turn out to be change blockers. So let's start with a little myth busting.

Change Blocker #1: Dieting Is Healthy

Many of my patients have been D-wording since they were teenagers and have never experienced how amazing it feels to have a balanced body in homeostasis. Their eating has been disordered—chronic deprivation *is* an eating disorder—since adolescence. They are stuck in a pattern of behavior that is so ingrained they don't feel right unless they're dieting, even though dieting makes them unhappy. Which means: They don't feel right unless they're unhappy.

Many of my patients diet out of habit. They're not doing it because it works—if it did, they wouldn't need to diet for years on end. A lot of the women I see in my practice follow an eating plan because without it they would feel untethered. They want the structure. They feel better when someone else tells them what they can and can't eat, when their eating is tightly controlled by rules. Nothing gives them more anxiety than feeling out of control. On the surface, diets seem to offer control. But when they fail—usually in a no-holds-barred binge—these women feel more out of control than ever. Soon they're consumed with shame and guilt over their “failure” and start looking for a new system to help them control themselves.

I appreciate that having a course of action can be motivating. On the Well Path, you will be on course. But the action you'll take is NOT restricting food. It's taking positive, self-loving steps that will gradually shift your appetite so that you begin to crave nutrient-dense food. It's not that you aren't “allowed” to have less healthy foods. You can have them. But you won't want them.

Five Types of Eaters

Everyone has their own habits when it comes to food, but I've found over the years that many of my patients tend to fit into one of the five categories below. Each eating “type” is also clearly aligned with certain psychological and emotional types. Which type are you?

The Food Eliminator. Anyone who follows rules like “no carbs/no fat/no gluten/no white food/no solid food/no fruit/nothing cavemen didn't eat.” Elimination is always appealing to dieters because it gives them a simple regimen, a food or food group to draw an X over. The problem is, cutting out any food group is not optimal from a nutritional standpoint. We need it all—carbs, fat, protein, fiber, fruit—to stay healthy, lose fat, and grow muscle. If you eat 5,000 calories of protein, for example, you will still feel hungry because your body *is* hungry for other nutrients. Also, if you are left

with options that are unsatisfying or get boring fast, it makes the forbidden fruit all the more tempting.

The Out-of-the-Box Eater. Now that so-called healthy, low-calorie food is widely available in packaged form, some women rely on frozen or prepared meals for the bulk of their calories. This type of eating is the main culprit of late-night binging. Your body demands nutrients. If you haven't supplied them throughout the day because all you've been eating is packaged cereal bars or frozen low-fat lasagna, your brain will override your willpower and force you to eat until it gets what it wants.

The Meal Skipper. Too busy to eat. Not hungry in the morning. Too tired to cook dinner. The Meal Skipper might eat healthfully, but the erratic timing of her meals causes her metabolism to slow down. If your body doesn't get food regularly, it will, by default, go into starvation mode and hold on to energy stores for dear life.

The Overeater. Many of my patients fall into this category. They know what's good for them, including healthy fats, home cooking, and keeping a regular eating schedule. They just eat too much of the good stuff. It's about quality *and* quantity. They bake ten flour-free cookies and eat all of them. Or they drizzle tons of olive oil on a salad or smother it with chopped nuts.

The Diet Cycler. These women leap from one restrictive plan to the next. They are always on a diet or planning the next one. Most of the diets deprive the body of food groups and or nutrients and disrupt the metabolism and endocrine function. Their bodies never get the chance to recover before they're onto the next plan. The logistical nightmare of trying to remember the rules of whatever plan they're on is so consuming that the diet cycler's life shrinks down to the size of a single plate. After she rebels against her self-imposed rules, she blames herself for failing instead of blaming the true culprit—the diet itself.

Do you recognize yourself in one or more of these eating types? If so, you're not alone. The first step is to be aware of your particular style, and keep an eye out when bad tendencies sneak up on you. The only healthy "type" of eater is someone who is mindful about her choices, responds to the messages her body is sending, eats when hungry and stops when full, and enjoys every bite. Within weeks on the Well Path, my patients' eating habits are transformed. The elimination and obsession and unhealthy habits are replaced with genuine curiosity about nutrition and a love for food that feeds their cells and fuels their metabolism.

Change Blocker #2: Magic Bullets Are Real

Hope is more powerful than failure. For this reason, it's easy to sell a miracle pill or product to desperate people. You intuitively know that no ingredient exists that will make weight drop off your body effortlessly without changing your eating habits or lifestyle. The quick fix dream won't die because it's a compelling fantasy. Who wouldn't want to drop ten pounds overnight?

A supplement or ingredient won't make you confident, thin, or strong. But restoring your health, one step at a time, will change your body and mind so profoundly it will *feel* like magic. The magic bullet doesn't exist.

Change Blocker #3: If You Lost Ten Pounds, Then You'd Be Happy

The number on the scale doesn't mean anything. It doesn't tell you how fit you are, how much muscle you have, how energetic you are, or how well you've gotten through the day without going nuts. I often ask patients, "When you get to that dream number, how will your life change exactly?" Will they have a new apartment? A new husband? Better kids? A better job? Smaller bills? Usually, they don't even know

the answer. They have an amorphous idea about having more confidence and feeling better about themselves if they hit their goal.

I ask, “Would you feel confident and better about yourself if you ate well every day and were stronger and happier?”

They nod, of course. Happiness and health is not measured in pounds, inches, or sizes. The benefits of good health and wellness are comprehensive and multidimensional. On a diet, there is only one measure of success—a smaller number—that doesn’t take your overall wellness into account. On the Well Path, there are many ways to succeed.

Change Blocker #4: Losing Weight Has to Hurt

The conventional wisdom is that in order to lose weight and get in shape, you have to suffer. No pain no gain, right?

Wrong. Change is sustainable only if you enjoy making it. Most women are so caught up in the struggle to lose weight—keeping their eyes focused on the prize—that they pride themselves on their ability to overcome discomfort. If you asked them, “Is your diet joyful?” they’d laugh until they cried into their fat-free yogurt. As humans, we’re hardwired to shut down metabolically during deprivation, and to rebel against pain. When our bodies can’t take deprivation and pain anymore, we go *hard* in the other direction and eat to excess. We’re also hardwired to replenish lost stores of energy (meaning fat) after depleting them. But when we move and are fueled properly *and consistently*, our bodies become metabolically efficient, making weight loss a pleasure.

Change Blocker #5: Weight Loss Is Mind over Matter

Despite the number of books, TV shows, and articles that suggest otherwise, you can’t override your body’s needs. Instead of trying to be the boss of your body and telling it what to do, here’s a radical idea:

Listen to it. Your body is constantly trying to communicate with you. Sometimes it might say, “That’s enough sitting for today. You need to move and get some fresh air.” Other times it might subtly suggest that you drink some water, or go to bed early. These messages aren’t always communicated in obvious ways—like when you’re ravenously hungry. The clues might be subtle, such as a craving for a certain food to signal a vitamin deficiency, a slight change in skin pallor, or a minor cramp or dull pain.

The great tragedy of being on a diet, pushing yourself beyond your limits with exercise, or mindlessly eating unhealthy food is losing touch with that internal sensitivity to what your body actually needs. The rare patient takes the time to be quiet and listen to their body. Most ignore their body’s signal for nutrition, work out past their limits, and overconsume empty calories. Exhausted and out of balance, they react by drinking too much coffee, grabbing a candy bar for a quick source of energy, or purge out of guilt.

On the Well Path, you will stop ignoring and start listening. Your body knows better than you what it needs for optimal functioning. Stop needing to be in charge. That won’t help you reach homeostasis. All of the stress, control, disappointment, shame, and guilt are what got you here. Having fun, eating well, and listening to your body will get you where you want to go.

Change Blocker #6: Failure Is All Your Fault

Dieting makes you gain weight. Excessive exercise makes you weak. Overeating makes you fat. The impact of chronic stress, starvation, and bingeing over the years will eventually ruin your ability to lose weight and accelerate the aging process. It’s heartbreaking to see how hard women work to no avail. And then they blame themselves.

Self-abusing thoughts like “I eat like a pig” and “I have no discipline” only make matters worse. You are not a failure for rebelling against a diet. The nature of your body is to seek out food when it even

gets a whiff of deprivation, real or imagined. You are not to blame for eating a piece of cake. Cake is just cake. It's not a recrimination of your entire life.

I advise my patients to stop setting themselves up for failure. Their destructive habits are “outside in” thinking. It's the messed-up belief that if you're thin, you're somehow more valuable. “Inside out” thinking means your outsides will shine radiantly when you're healthy on the inside.

Our bodies should function exquisitely. We were designed to be in balance and to chug along like a well-oiled machine. But we've altered our physiology by adapting to myths that are constructed for profit and sold to us at a dear price. Dieting misconceptions—the rules many women live by—are actually Change Blockers that, long-term, are detrimental to your health, and to your weight.

Manipulating your nature is not the way to thrive.

The eat less/exercise more model slows fat metabolism, accelerates aging, and causes hormonal imbalance. I'll explain the science of that in the next three chapters.

The Only “Do” and “Don't” You'll Ever Need

I get so annoyed when I scroll through my Facebook newsfeed and see a dozen articles from various magazines and blogs with titles like “Ten Exercises to Get a Bikini Butt.” I'm just like everyone else. I think, *I'd like a Bikini Butt*, whatever that is, and I click through. The suggestions are nothing new, but in my head I add them to the list of things to try. I see another list for “Eights Tricks for a Flat Belly.” At the end of the day, I've got 200 new things to do. I get so much anxiety reading these articles, like I've got to learn it all and do it all. I've tagged a bunch of them (because I feel the pressure to do them), and guess what? I have never done any of them.

I have my own list of Don'ts and Dos for you to "like":

The only Don't you'll ever need: Don't feel pressured to read and execute the advice in those articles. Doing the eight or ten or twenty tricks and tips to improve an isolated muscle group is trees-not-forest thinking. Your health is bigger than your butt (no matter how big it might be). Just doing squats and kickbacks won't rebalance hormones, stoke cellular repair, or wake up a sleepy metabolism.

The only Do you'll ever need: Do go outside and play. To access the forest of your health, take a long walk in the forest, or wherever you prefer, with a close friend. Spending a pleasant afternoon in nature with people or alone at peace will trigger a multitude of positive physiological changes that improve your health holistically. And if a few mountains lure you to climb them, you might just notice some changes in your tush.
