

SLIM-DOWN STRATEGIES

# Your secret weapons for weight loss

How to get friends and family to help you stick to your get-slim goals.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN



● A good friend can make you laugh, cry, and, according to research, get fat. Who can forget the study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that showed if a friend is obese, your own fat odds go up 57 percent—a finding that resulted in newspapers splashing, “Obesity ... socially contagious!” But what was underreported in all the hoopla was what the heck you’re supposed to do about it.

The key: Stop blaming others and take charge, says Madelyn Fernstrom, PhD, director of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Weight Management Center. “Sabotage is everywhere,” she says. “It’s never going to stop, so you need to find ways to stick up for yourself.” Check out these common diet

saboteurs and how you can stop them from encouraging you to eat more.

## The food pusher

**>>> Trademark line:** “I made these chocolate chip cookies just for you!”

**>>> What’s going on:** The pusher, often a mother or doting friend, uses food to show her love. (How about a hug instead?)

**>>> Do this:** If a food peddler offers you a treat, try to postpone rather than deny, suggests Denver-based weight-loss specialist Linda Spangle, RN, author of *100 Days of Weight Loss: The Secret to Being Successful on Any Diet Plan*. “Say, ‘Not just yet. I’m going to wait a little while,’” Spangle advises. “Somehow that’s more comfortable than saying—or hearing yourself say—‘No, I’m on a diet.’”



## The critic

**>>> Trademark line:** “Just order the lasagna! You’ve been on a diet forever!”

**>>> What’s going on:** If she’s having trouble counting calories herself, this may be jealousy over your dedication.

**>>> Do this:** Brush all of her sneaky, insensitive comments off your newly toned shoulders. Try responding with a friendly but I’m-in-charge, “Sorry, but what I really don’t want is that cheese settling on my hips forever! You support me, right?”



## The enabler

**>>> Trademark line:** “C’mon, let’s go for a doughnut run!”

**>>> What’s going on:** If pigging out used to be a bonding thing for you and your girlfriend, your calorie-counting may be seen by here as a threat to your friendship.

**>>> Do this:** Take the fat out your relationship without spoiling the spontaneous fun. Try: “What about a shopping spree instead? There’s this new boutique I want to check out. Meet me there in half an hour?” It’s up to you to find ways to spend time together without indulging in food. ●

## BFF = Be fit (not fat) forever

Thinking thin is contagious, says Nicholas Christakis, MD, PhD, co-author of research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*—so if you start on a health kick, your friends might, too. Find a “body buddy,” someone with a similar weight-loss goal, and the two of you can help each other stay on track, says Julia Cameron, author of *The Writing Diet: Write Yourself Right-Size*.