



Single AND Hungry

a realistic guide to
food and *self-love*

Alina Z

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AND
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DEDICATION

To world peace and ultimately to you, my dear reader, because ...

*“If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.*

*If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.*

*If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.*

*If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.*

*If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.”*

— Lao-Tsu

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“The light at the end of the tunnel may be you.”

— Aerosmith, Amazing

INTRODUCTION

“Turn your wounds into wisdom.”

— Oprah Winfrey

Have you ever noticed that when you fall in love, you get so excited about the object of your affection, that sometimes you forget to eat? Life is grand and there seems to be an abundance of energy and joy everywhere.

Conversely, when you are single, you may feel lonely and crave sweetness, excitement and comfort because you are not getting it from another person. Often you find that the easiest way to soothe your loneliness is with food.

I remember when my marriage came to an end in 2007. The first time it hit me that I was alone I just started crying and couldn't stop. The tears and pain scared me so much that I drove straight to the Cheesecake Factory near my house, got a seat at the bar counter and drowned my loneliness in a cheesecake, side of ice cream and a mango Margarita.

This perfect combination of dairy, sugar and alcohol calmed me down, boosted my mood and relieved the pain. It tasted amazing and I was hooked. For the next ten years, that combination would be my drug of choice. Dairy has always had a very calming effect on me and it was only years later that I found out it had been scientifically proven that dairy can have a similar effect on the brain as heroin or morphine! Combine that with alcohol and sugar, which can naturally give us a “high” and boost serotonin, and you have the perfect legal addiction.

Unfortunately just like any drug, food has its side effects and can also change the size of one's thighs and stomach after too many hits. And then things get even worse.

This larger thigh size can alter your mind and make you think that you are not worthy of being loved and that you don't deserve the goodness of life when you don't look perfect. Now, not only do you think that you will be, or already are, rejected by others, you also feel rejected by yourself.

Rejection of any kind can cause a deep heartache, so you use food to numb the pain, causing a perfect vicious cycle:

“YOU EAT TO MAKE YOURSELF FEEL BETTER”

and

“YOU FEEL EVEN WORSE ABOUT YOURSELF AFTER YOU EAT”

What I realize now is that when we feel conflicted about ourselves, we can take counterintuitive actions and one of those actions is to go on a diet. It is counterintuitive because when you are feeling rejected and lonely, the last thing you should do is restrict and punish yourself. That just creates more rejection and separation.

We should be loving ourselves fully with delicious body-loving foods, but instead we are taught to punish our bodies with diets -- and we all know how that goes.

For example, I found that whenever I felt fat and pushed myself to go on a diet, I suddenly started compulsively overeating. I would even eat things I didn't even like that much. I'd justify my actions by believing that I deserved one “last meal” before my dietary execution.

Maybe that's why they put the word “die” in “diet”? And before you die, you want to feel freedom to do whatever you want, even if it's self-destructive. So as I would dig into my “last meal,” I would think: “I deserve this!”

When you are alone and don't have anyone adoring you, it is easy to lose yourself and forget about loving your body, mind and soul. It is easy to turn to food for comfort and love.

Chances are that you can relate to some part of this story, which is why you picked up this book. Maybe it's because you want to lose weight and finally

fill that void in the bottom of your stomach that has been nagging you for a long time.

You may have tried many different diets and read all the self-help books you could find, but somehow, you think that this one will finally change something. Perhaps this book will provide the elusive answers to your questions and help you live happily ever after since this book is the only one that promises to provide a realist guide for change and self-love.

You made the right decision.

I know how painful it can be to exist in a world of dietary restrictions, self-abuse, self-indulgences and self-judgments.

I may not know your personal story, but as I heard somebody say, “If we all got together in a circle and shared our deepest fears, we would be amazed at our lack of creativity.” To some degree, we are all wired in a similar pattern and the fact that you are reading this now tells me that you and I are not too different. We both struggled with insecurities and we both sought answers. In this book, I want to share with you what worked for me. And if I can do it, so can you.

Time and again in my own life—as well as through my work with clients as a board-certified health coach—I’ve seen what happens if we don’t allow ourselves to love our bodies, minds and souls fully. This self-rejection and deprivation can start eating us up inside; it can try to eat up the whole world of food, and it can create destructive tendencies.

In the worst of times, the complex relationship we have between food and self-love produces darkness, uncertainty and self-loathing. In the best of times, a healthy sense of self — coupled with a day-to-day diet that brings out the best in us — can energize and inspire us.

Having been on the food rollercoaster for many years, I know all about the highs and lows of emotional eating. However it wasn’t until I was in my 30s that I started to make the connection between food and self-love. Let me give you a little background story.

I grew up in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Up until about age seven, I couldn't have been more outgoing. I was one of those kids who would strike up a conversation with just about anyone. People often commented that they never saw me without a smile on my face. And why not? I felt unconditional love from my family. When I failed at something, I learned the lesson and moved forward without self-doubt. I could be myself without repercussions.

Unfortunately, in Russia, there is a saying: "If you are smiling without a reason, you must be an idiot!" Riggghht...

So, I learned that little lesson as I entered the real world in the first grade. I never really understood its impact until I started my own spiritual journey several years ago. As I went back through my own childhood, key pieces started to emerge and the elusive puzzle began unravelling.

For children growing up in Saint Petersburg, conformity was the golden rule. Kids used to make fun of anyone who stood out. If you danced to the beat of your own drum—like I did heading into first grade—you were quickly ostracized. In fact, in those days, one of the worst things someone could say to you mockingly in Russia was: "What are you, the best? What are you, the smartest?"

Being accepted meant that you had to blend in with the masses. I was by no means the smartest, but I was the new girl who started first grade on April 2nd and caught up with the other students in two weeks. So that alone made me different. Even typing this right now, the voice in my head tells me that sharing this with you will probably make you dislike me and that you won't play with me at recess. I mean... really?

Somewhere early in those school days, I must have picked up on this. I subconsciously planted a seed that dictated that in order to be "loved" by my classmates, I had to blend in instead of being true to myself. In my mind, I thought that if I came to class as the Alina that my family knew, my new friends wouldn't like me. They would only accept me if I changed. Little did I know that by going down this road, I also was undermining my upbringing—and setting the table for future conflict between food and feelings.

Up until I was 27, the need to blend in didn't bother me. It felt like second nature. By that time I was rather successful in life and had a great job as a VP of Marketing for one of the largest catering companies in the country. But when I separated from my husband, it really hit me — I felt alone because I didn't think anyone could truly understand and love me as I was. I hid in my marriage because my ex-husband loved me, but in all honesty I never felt truly understood, because I was never fully myself.

That's the reason I cried and drove to that Cheesecake Factory after the breakup. Ever since I was a kid I was playing a certain role so that I could fit in and be loved, yet it still didn't bring me happiness. Because I didn't fully love and accept myself, I felt alone.

Unfortunately, my job only worsened my newly found addiction. The challenge with being a VP of Marketing for a food company was that it required me to write about food, talk about food, promote food and eat food much more than I was used to. Almost every day I got to indulge in decadent meals which turned into an even stronger desire for the a daily dose of chocolate, sugar and dairy. As a result, I gained some extra weight.

I remember standing in the dressing room of the H&M store in Georgetown a few months after the Cheesecake Factory extravaganza. I looked at my reflection in the mirror and suddenly, an overwhelming feeling of guilt and shame came over me. I noticed that I had a fat roll on my waist.

I felt terrible in that moment and swore that I would go on a diet immediately, if not sooner. That desire to punish myself made me sad — and what do I do when I feel sad? I cheer myself up! So I decided to buy a treat—a Starbucks® berry coffee cake. I rationalized that if I was already fat, then I might as well enjoy this cake today and start my diet tomorrow. Does that scenario sound familiar?

How many times have you done the same thing just to find yourself starting a vicious cycle of dieting and rebelling?

This is what it usually looks like:

1. You think that you need to lose weight and look “perfect” in order to be loved and feel happy.
2. You start chasing happiness by trying to lose weight.
3. You feel unhappy because dieting and hating yourself sucks.
4. You lose a few pounds, yet you don’t feel happy. Hmm...
5. Because you have been so miserable on this diet, you decide to “treat” yourself by going off the wagon for a meal ... or two ... ok, three.
6. You gain the weight right back, feel unloved, unhappy and alone.
7. You go back to step one.

So what does self-love have to do with getting out of this diet hamster wheel? Sometimes it may look like it’s self-love that actually gets us in trouble. After all, it’s because we love ourselves so much that we treat ourselves to that yummy food that packs on the pounds, right?

Actually, no. But more on this later.

Over the years, I’ve worked with countless clients who aspire to lead healthier lives. That may seem like a good idea on the surface, but the alarming thing about such decision was the reason behind it. What I discovered was that nearly all of my clients felt like they were not good enough as they were and therefore they needed to go on a diet to change themselves. They didn’t want to on a diet out of love for their bodies, they did so out of shame of being at their current size and weight.

What I have also discovered is that most of them have been haunted by something from their childhood—an incident at school, angry words from a parent, teasing from a sibling, or even a really traumatic experience—that left them feeling alone and unloved.

Instead of dealing with it, what do we do? We create a story that makes the

other person right, makes us wrong and allows us to avoid confronting that emotion. “If I do this—if I’m this kind of person—I won’t be loved. So I better not do it.” We glorify and justify the behaviors of others and downplay our own.

Maybe you’ve planted such a thought and kept it in your fertile mind without realizing its source. As time goes on, that tiny seed begins to sprout and bear fruit that’s connected to the way you look, feel and act. What you are dealing with today may be the result of a seed planted during your childhood!

But imagine how different the relationship between food and feelings could be if we changed the seeds that were planted early on and replaced them with new ones—if we eliminated the negative overtones and instead cultivated an inner dialogue of love and compassion?

And better yet, what if we realized that the seed of internal self-love is already in us?

What if you understood that the seeds that have sprouted in negative manifestations in our lives are just weeds that were blown from the outside world?

What if the only true seed that you were born with, and is truly you, is LOVE?

Imagine what it would feel like if we accepted and loved ourselves as we are, without feeling guilty for not fitting into someone else’s standards of beauty? What would we choose to eat then? How would we treat ourselves if we accepted the fact that we weren’t perfect (according to some theory), weren’t perfect by our, or anyone else’s, criteria, yet we were still good enough to be loved?

In 2010, I quit my full-time job and enrolled at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, the world’s largest nutrition school. At the time, I wanted only to lose weight and discover how to eat better. However, I ended up leaving the institute with realizations that had nothing to do with counting calories.

I learned that losing weight is not only about food, but also about the reasons for our food choices. Most importantly, I came to understand that these choices are connected to deeply rooted beliefs about our perceived self-worth.

Did I lose weight and live happily ever after? Nope.

Once I realized these simple truths, I discovered a whole new world to explore! I felt like the journey was just beginning then. Knowledge may be power, but it is in our action that life truly changes.

Over the years I have been (and still am) puzzled by how so many people, including myself, can treat their bodies with such disrespect by eating food or quantities of food that they know isn't good for them? Why do countless men and women say all the right things about eating well, living healthy, and losing weight, yet fail to practice what they preach?

In my work as a health coach, I began to recognize a pattern. Many of my clients, through our conversations about their lives and lifestyles, seemed to be searching for the same feelings of happiness and love that had been at the core of my roller coaster ride with weight and unhealthy eating habits.

If I could find the key that unlocked my understanding of food and feelings—the specifics of which I'll touch on later—why not share it with others?

That's why I decided to write this book. I'm not a professional therapist. And I'm not a physician. But I am a certified health coach who has been where so many of you are now. Because of that, I can tell you with complete conviction that success lies within. I firmly believe that if you love yourself unconditionally, then you will make the kinds of choices that lead to a healthy lifestyle.

It is both scary and relieving to know, isn't it?

People who aren't happy with themselves will fill the void in a variety of damaging ways—from gambling and overspending, to substance abuse and overeating.

The diet industry has made a fortune off the latter problem. It perpetuates the idea that the overweight person is not good enough the way he or she is—therefore it's time to change. It's an inherent negative that stays with the person dieting day and night.

If you're like me, you've probably strayed at some point during a diet. After such a failure, I would wake up the next morning disgusted and angry; I'd beat myself up over my failure and vow to do better. Others might react by feeding that feeling of failure. Either way, it's yet another hurdle to overcome.

The trick, as I've discovered through my journey, is going back to the root of the issue and pulling out the weeds.

Let me paint you a little picture: You are walking into a large garden in the middle of summer. If the garden has been taken care of by its owner, then chances are that plants are growing well, trees have ripe fruits and flowers are blooming.

If the gardener planted unwanted seeds, didn't know how to till the soil, pull the weeds, or water the plants, then chances are that the garden is in bad shape. There's likely no fruit on the branches. No tomatoes on the vine. No growth as far as the eye can see. And yes, you can simply mow the lawn to get rid of the weeds and make it look appropriate, but those suckers are going to find their way out over and over again.

Here's the thing about growth and abundance - it's not always visible to the naked eye. It starts well below the surface.

If as a child, you felt that for whatever reason you didn't deserve to be loved, then you may be craving to compensate by seeking emotional nourishment from food. On the other hand, if you understand that self-love is your birthright, then the food you choose will nourish your body in a positive way.

To start down this road to enlightenment, we need to plant the right ideas in our minds and hearts, nurture our bodies with the right food and water, give ourselves love and light, and take away the emotional and physical weeds

that have been unintentionally planted early on.

I know what it feels like to be inside a vicious cycle of eating, overeating and feeling bad. I know what it's like to feel like a fraud, to feel like you are not as good as everyone thinks you are. Trust me, it's possible to find your way out of the darkness of your mind and discover your true essence. It's my sincere hope that this book can help.

All love comes from within, and happy people often create more happiness for others.

Can you imagine what a better place the world would be if that love snowballed?

For now, let's concentrate on one person at a time. Starting with you.

It's time to accept your beauty, to take back your power, to truly satisfy your hunger and finally fall in love with yourself!

CHAPTER 1

Be The Apple of Your Own Eye

“Where there is love, there is life.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Do you remember the topic of deep self-love ever being taught in school? I don't. Instead, we learned about deep, passionate love for another person from Shakespeare, Austen, Byron, and countless others. Frankly, I still don't see how it was love that made Romeo and Juliet kill themselves. They didn't even test their relationship by putting Ikea furniture together; how did they know if they were compatible?

Anyway, we also learned that Freud had an interesting spin on the love we have for our parents. And we learned that “Love Hurts,” “Love Takes Time” and “Love is a Battlefield” from our rock and pop stars.

But more often than not, we were told that loving ourselves is selfish, that we shouldn't focus on our own needs.

I couldn't disagree more. If you aren't full of love for yourself, how can you teach anyone else how to love? How can you truly love another person when you are empty inside? Remember what flight attendants advise during the pre-flight instructions? In case of an emergency, put the oxygen mask on yourself first before placing one on your child. It's not that airlines hate kids. The reality is that if you don't help yourself first, then you'll never be in position to help someone else.

My own journey took a pivotal turn a few years ago when I learned a

life-altering lesson from my friend Donna. I already had knowledge about healthy food, and a solid understanding of what I should be eating and what foods I should be avoiding. Still, my actions weren't in line with my thoughts—and I couldn't figure out why.

Donna sparked something inside me when she shared the following story. She said that every time she passes by her reflection in the mirror, she says to her image: “Hello, gorgeous! Darn, girl, you look fine!”

When I heard this, I thought, “Wow, I could never do that! How can I make such a statement when I am clearly so imperfect?” All I could think about was how I needed to lose weight. At the moment, it was completely lost on me that Donna is not at all skinny—and yet, somehow, she was very happy.

I forgot about the conversation until a few months later when I was passing by a mirror. As I looked at myself without any makeup and messy hair, I thought: “Wow, you are so ugly!” A few minutes later, my heart started to hurt so much that I couldn't take a normal breath for about 30 minutes.

The incident shook me to my core. I had hurt myself—inflicted actual physical pain and heartache—simply by thinking negatively about my own looks. Why would I do such a thing?

It took a few years of self-reflection and practicing self-acceptance, but I'm happy to say that I'm learning more and more how to unconditionally love myself. The last time I passed by the mirror and I didn't look all dolled up, I thought: “Oh, you look so tired. You need to de-stress. Honey, darling, what would you like to do tonight?” I quickly answered to myself that I wanted to go to the sauna and off I went to relax.

Trust me, sometimes the fear and the negative thoughts are still there. I still judge myself, but the difference is that now it is my choice to listen to the judgment, be kind to myself and act out of self-love in response, instead of fear/shame/anger/doubt.

Pop culture bombards us with advertisements that speak to our passions. Passion for food. Passion for fitness. Passion for beauty. But there is no advertisement for loving yourself. Nor is there is a high school textbook on how to find self-acceptance.

I still remember paying big bucks for my Calculus book in high school and falling asleep over it. Ask me about anything from that book and I won't remember it. Wouldn't it be a better world if we knew how to subtract shame from our minds and add in self-confidence instead of doing exercises over X and Y?

Maybe one day. Maybe this book will be the textbook to teach the importance of self-love!

In my practice, I find that many people try to lose weight because they hate themselves as they are. They want to alter their bodies. In their mind, that skinny body will help them attain self-love and love from others.

But it doesn't work that way. We all know that real change starts from within.

As my friend Donna says, "the most important thing we all need to know is that we're exactly where we need to be. ...

"I've always loved myself, even during my issues with weight. ... Sometimes you may need to hold on to a few extra pounds because that's the armor that will get you through whatever the days bring. The scale doesn't matter as much as what's happening on the inside: your blood pressure, your glucose, your breathing, how you feel. There are many unhealthy skinny people out there. I would rather be complimented on how great my lab results look than how I fit into a smaller pair of jeans!

"This is a journey, and we're all finding our way."

As we begin this particular journey, we need to be clear regarding our direction and what we want to achieve. It's imperative, first off, to determine the reasons why we want to release weight. If you think that simply reaching a number on the scale will make you feel happy and loved, then think again.

If you've been at your perfect weight in the past, rewind back to that time. Were you content and happy back then? Chances are you weren't. If so, why would you think that anything will be different this time around? The only way that it will be different is if we begin feeling happy and loved NOW, regardless of the number on the scale.

The only way to find happiness—true happiness—at the end of this journey is by focusing on the honest reasons behind this process, reasons that include love and respect for our bodies and souls. Then the weight will follow.

Let's do that by writing down reasons for starting this journey in the first place. Examples can include "because I deserve to feel good," "because I love myself so much," "because I want to have more energy during the day," "because I deserve to feel light and free."

My biggest reason continues to be: "Health is EVERYTHING, and without health you can't truly enjoy life, have fun and help other people." In reality, you are part of the inspiration for doing what I do. So, thank you for reading this.

Now it's your turn.

Find reasons that speak to you and write them down below. Write as many as you can come up with.

You can write here, in a separate journal, on the sides of the paragraphs. This is your book—do what works for you.

REASONS WHY I WANT TO RELEASE EXTRA WEIGHT:

Now that you've acknowledged your reasons for releasing weight, let's think about the reasons for eating unhealthy foods and/or overeating healthy ones.

Are there reasons you want to stay the same and continue eating the way you do now?

What are the benefits of staying where you are at now?

For example, my friend Jake kept saying he wants to start eating healthy, go sugar-free and release weight—but every day he would give up and want to start “tomorrow.” Sound familiar? It does to me! There are always good reasons for our eating habits and overeating.

Jake's reason is pleasure. He is not happy in his life, his friends and family live far away, he doesn't have a girlfriend, he is not happy in his career, and his only pleasure in life right now is food. Why would someone in their right mind trade their only pleasure for anything else? We will find solutions to those dilemmas in later chapters, but right now we need to focus on the present.

The only way to see if you will get more out of eating healthy than out of eating unhealthy (but “fun”) foods is by comparing the reasons for your choices. Below, write down your reasons for wanting to stay the same, for wanting to eat the way you do now.

REASONS WHY I WANT TO EAT THE WAY I DO NOW:

Once you have the reasons for eating healthy and reasons for staying the same, compare them. Which ones are more valid? Do you see how you will get **MORE** out of eating healthy? Write more in your journal if you need to.

Don't be scared—we will create a new way of eating that works for you and makes you feel good. There will be no deprivation or stress, only joy and pleasure from eating delicious foods and feeling good!

CHAPTER 2

The Mind/Body Connection

“The rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind and the harmony of the soul create the symphony of life.”

— B.K.S. Iyengar

My grandmother, Klavdia, became her father’s caretaker when she was 8 years old. When she was 11, he died and her mom got remarried to a man with two teenage sons. New stepbrothers were very abusive and made Klavdia’s life hell, so at the age of 14, she left home and started to work in order to support herself.

At 18 she volunteered in the army and spent her early 20s in the resistance, protecting her city of Saint Petersburg, Russia, during the war. Then she spent much of her 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s shuttling back and forth between her bedroom and a hospital room as she had eleven major surgeries. Because of complications from liver and digestion issues, she was always in poor health and great pain—both physically and emotionally.

Her adult years, my mother recalls, were marked by feelings of disappointment, shame and bitter self-criticism—feelings that, I believe, affected her physically. Pain was a constant companion in Klavdia’s life. My mom still remembers her screaming out from pain.

And then something incredible happened. Sometime in her early 70s, my grandmother began showing signs of Alzheimer’s disease. Before long, she had virtually no recollection of her past. Her memories were gone—and

along with them, her pain. She spent her remaining years without much physical discomfort, as physically healthy as any of us ever remember seeing her. She lived to be 97 and only started to show really strong signs of decline closer to her death.

Still pretty good, right? She had Alzheimer's disease for 24 years and was in a hospital only once with pneumonia at the age of 91.

Miraculously, her body had healed itself. But as I've come to learn, it really wasn't a miracle at all.

When our body is functioning at its best, and we're complementing that by eating healthy and staying hydrated, our internal systems work automatically to extract necessary nutrients and nourishment. At the same time, our body shields us from harmful toxins by eliminating waste.

The same can't be said for our body when it comes to energy and emotions. There is no automatic safeguard to keep us from feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, heartache, pain, stress, self-criticism and negativity—nor is there an internal organ dedicated to eliminating the emotional toxins in our life. So what happens when we hold onto negative emotions and allow ourselves to be surrounded by negative energy? Doesn't that put our bodies at risk in a different way?

Absolutely.

It's well documented that people who don't effectively communicate their feelings, who hold onto those emotional toxins, actually can bring about physical ailments. My grandmother, in my opinion, was the perfect example. But she was hardly alone. According to WebMD.com, "43 percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress"; that negativity and tension can lead to physical ailments from high blood pressure and diabetes, to arthritis and asthma.

In her book "Dying to Be Me," Anita Moorjani shares that it was the fear

of showing her true spirit, and fear of not being accepted by her family and culture, that contributed to her cancer. Even though she tried fasting, raw foods, meditations and so many other things, the cancer kept growing and moving through her body. It was only after a Near Death Experience (NDE) that she realized the role that fear had played in her disease. Once she felt true unconditional love for herself and felt her magnificence, her body began to heal itself. In fact, according to her story, within three days of waking up from a coma and having the NDE, her lemon-sized tumors shrank seventy percent! Within weeks, the Stage 4 cancer had disappeared.

Almost everyone has feelings of sadness and of not being good enough or worthy enough. Everyone is dealing with something inside of them. EVERYONE. I love this saying: “Those people who say they have their shit together, are standing in it!”

And yes, it can be painful to deal with. But there’s no way to release the pain unless we first allow ourselves to feel it and move beyond it. If we don’t express our emotions, they can become as stagnant in the body as an undigested sandwich. You know what happens to a sandwich that goes stagnant in the body? It turns into poop! And if you don’t let it out, then it will stay inside. No wonder there is an expression “we are full of crap!”

Many of us are dealing with the emotional equivalent of that. We hold onto feelings from the past instead of processing and eliminating them from our bodies.

If you’re having trouble seeing the connection between emotions and the physical impact they can have on the body, think about it in simple terms:

Have you ever been so scared or so nervous that your skin turned pale? How about the time someone paid you a compliment—or the time you felt embarrassment—and your skin started to blush? In those moments, you experienced feelings that changed the way your blood was flowing. Now, imagine how other emotions can affect your digestion or your energy level. For example, when we don’t feel safe emotionally, our bodies may keep on extra weight as protection.

Dealing with emotions can be hard, so many of us tend to hide them. Unfortunately when emotions become stagnant and unexpressed, they can pile up and begin to cause us overwhelming pain. We can feel helpless and out of control. At times like that, I typically used overeating as a tool to release stress and make myself feel good. Did it work? Yes, but only for few minutes.

Jonathan can relate. In 2010, he returned to Miami Beach after serving in South Africa with the Peace Corps. He spoke four languages and had an impressive work résumé—but nobody would hire him.

“I was depressed,” he said. “It was a dark time. I ate lots of processed food and Chinese takeout to fill the void.”

Jonathan would go on to find his dream job—one that requires him to “travel and write and to stay in hotels and speak to doctors, patients, medical and business professionals and more.” But he was fifty pounds overweight when he took the job, the heaviest he had ever been.

Instead of brushing aside the period of depression after landing his job, Jonathan acknowledged it, dealt with it and, at the same time, changed his eating habits. With an assist from my program, he started incorporating green smoothies and juices into his diet. Instead of picking up pints of Ben & Jerry’s for late-night snacks, he substituted Greek yogurt mixed with blueberries. Instead of devouring pizzas, he cooked himself a healthy stir-fry.

“I lost the fifty pounds, and my energy level skyrocketed,” said Jonathan, now 31. “The newfound energy has not only helped me tackle multiple projects, but it has made me conscious of what I put in my body. In addition, it’s made my mind sharper, improved my romance level, made my skin glow and brightened my entire outlook.

“Depression can happen to anyone. Sometimes, life hurts. However, life does get better. In my case, eating the right foods helped to make the journey more enjoyable.”

I truly believe we need to look deeper into our emotional bodies and eliminate the waste by understanding and processing our emotional wounds.

If we know what affects our emotions, then we can change them. Here is how I how I look at it:

- 1. Facts and circumstances shape our thoughts and beliefs when we give them meaning**
- 2. Our thoughts and beliefs affect our feelings**
- 3. Our feelings affect our behavior**
- 4. Our behavior affects the results we obtain**

We have been conditioned to steer away from feelings of discomfort—and indeed, feeling our feelings can be quite uncomfortable. However, this is part of life. The more we avoid feelings of discomfort, the more they creep in and make our lives miserable.

By processing and eliminating your emotional waste, you can begin to see the world through a clearer lens. You will feel more love because your heart will open itself up to the abundance of the universe. You will feel an increase in your physical and emotional strength. And you'll feel compassion for those around you.

We are all connected, and as such we affect everything and everyone around us. Our individual healing can have a huge impact on others. It is a vital and magnanimous accomplishment. When we start loving ourselves enough to let go of the emotional pain from the past, we will open up the possibility of a more loving world.

To release your feelings of discomfort, anger, sadness, guilt, blame, shame and other troubling emotions, I suggest working with a professional therapist.

If that's a road you don't wish to pursue, for whatever reasons, then try en-

listing a trusted friend and doing the following exercise.

In your journal, make a list of all the hurtful moments in your life that you can think of.

Then, starting with the first item, write down exactly what happened and share your feelings about it.

Once complete, sit with your trusted friend and read aloud the stories behind the items on your list without stopping.

See what happens.

You may find that by verbalizing these stories you also release some of the bottled-up emotions associated with those episodes.

By feeling the old feelings in the present time, without physical danger and with the security of a close friend, you may find the lightness—in your body and in your heart—for which you have been searching.

CHAPTER 3

Dealing With Cravings

“All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn’t hurt.”

— Charles M. Schulz

As we’ve demonstrated in the first two chapters, there is clearly a connection between food and feelings. But the road to self-love, as well as to processing and eliminating emotional toxins, is paved with plenty of challenges when it comes to diet.

Even people like Jonathan (from the previous chapter) had to deal with unhealthy cravings in order to lose the fifty pounds he had gained.

So let’s take a moment to address this. Say you’re working on loving yourself more and discarding your emotional waste—but you just can’t get past that late-night craving for ice cream or pizza.

First of all, don’t panic. The good news is that you can teach yourself how not to act on every impulse and craving. It takes practice and time. And for the record, I once yelled at a friend who tried to prevent me from over eating a coconut cake out of boredom years ago. I simply didn’t think there was any other way to react to a craving other than to give into it. Duh!

Second, there is nothing wrong with indulging in comfort foods once in a while. Don’t beat yourself up over an occasional slice of your favorite cheesecake. Just know that, many times, we crave something beyond the actual item. I hope that this chapter will help you decode your cravings—and see how you can truly nourish yourself.

11 CAUSES OF CRAVINGS

(Some of which are inspired by the Institute for Integrative Nutrition)

1. EMOTIONS GONE WILD

For many people, cravings are directly related to feelings of dissatisfaction in other aspects of their lives: an unfulfilling relationship, boredom, family issues, a high-stress job, an empty spiritual life, a feeling of rebellion, a need for pleasure and joy. I believe that everyone has a voice that deserves to be expressed. Unfortunately, many people hit the mute button and internalize instead finding appropriate outlets for their emotions. Often, in those situations, food fills the emotional void.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: It's time to PLAY! What's that mean? You will learn more in the next chapter.

2. MAS AGUA

Being dehydrated can lead to mild hunger symptoms, which can develop into full-blown cravings. Before reaching for that bag of Doritos, try drinking sixteen ounces of water. If the craving still persists, check the other causes on this list.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Drink water! Personally, I prefer sparkling, but find what works best for YOU.

3. UNBALANCED MEALS

Certain foods are known to be heavier than others. Some can be too salty; many can be too sweet.

Our bodies don't order from the menu, but they do have to deal with the consequences of our dietary decisions—and, in doing so, our bodies strive, internally, to create a balance. In order for the body to reach its equilibrium, it will send signals in the form of cravings to let you know what it needs. For example, if you eat meat during a meal, your body may crave sweets

after, as it spends lots of energy on digestion and needs a boost of sugar.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Start noticing your cravings, their timing and their relation to your most recent meal. You may find that tweaking your diet can prevent cravings.

After I eat _____

I feel _____

4. THE FOUR SEASONS

Just like we change clothes as seasons change, we also need to adjust our diet to match different times of the year. For example, during the hot summer months we may crave cold ice cream because our bodies need to cool down. On the other hand, when it's snowing outside in January, it's natural to crave a hot, hearty bowl of soup.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Ask your body what is causing this craving and find loving seasonal foods to satisfy it.

In The Summer I Love To Eat/I Crave:

In The Fall I Love To Eat/I Crave:

In The Winter I Love To Eat/I Crave:

In The Spring I Love To Eat/I Crave:

5. LACK OF NUTRITION

The body knows when it isn't getting enough nutrients—and, in return, it lets you know. Eating too many cooked, processed foods can stress our bodies and rob them of energy, producing an urge for more food. Cravings for sugar and coffee are usually signals that your body needs more energy, because it didn't get enough nutrition from your meals.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Choose nutrient-rich foods to nourish your body. We will talk about different foods to prevent cravings later in this book.

Nutrient-rich foods that I love:

6. HORMONES

Hormonal changes for women can trigger all kinds of yearnings. Ladies, you all know what kind of cravings and mood swings they can create. But did you know that feminine energy naturally craves to feel full? This is why most women go on eating or shopping binges when they feel sad—they want to fill their stomachs or their closets.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Try new foods that satisfy your cravings in a healthy way. Look through my healthy recipes in the back of this book, as well as at AlinaZ.com, which are created specifically to replace typical unhealthy foods.

Go shopping for someone else and fill an empty space for someone who is in need. For example, buy some necessities to fill a couple of “blessing bags” and give them out to homeless people.

7. SELF-SABOTAGE

My personal journey has included several instances of self-sabotage due to my lack of self-worth and self-love—which, in turn, led to food cravings. Even when I realized that it was time to start loving myself as I am—to start allowing myself to be me—old fears would bubble up.

If I love myself enough to be me, what if no one else will love me? Before I started writing this book, I could hear the voices of fear: What if I allow my inspiration to come through and this book becomes popular? How scary would that be to stand out from the crowd?

I find that many women share similar fears; they are scared to be bright, to allow their light to shine, to allow themselves to blossom.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: In order to stop the cycle of craving foods that throw us out of balance, we need to address deeper issues and find the self-love that belongs to us by our birthright. Let's take our power back and love ourselves!

8. NEED FOR FREEDOM

From the time we were born, we had a certain curiosity about life. We wanted to discover the world, and we didn't like being told what to do. We wanted to feel free, and we still do. Unfortunately, diets and healthy eating can feel restrictive (if not done from love, but done from fear)—and when we feel like we are being told what to do, we want to rebel.

We want to say: “I want to do what I want! I'll show you! I am allowed to eat this!” So we eat to show the world that we can do and eat whatever we want.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Ask yourself which areas/activities make you feel the most constrained. Then either change that area/activity or change the way you look at it. For example, if a boring job makes you feel stuck—and you find yourself craving “forbidden” foods during the work day—then either consider looking for another career opportunity or remind yourself that this job is your choice and that you derive important benefits from it, such as income,

connections, vital experience that you need to land your next job, etc.

Focus on the benefits of that area/activity and get excited about what you have. Remember that you are free to do what you choose—and every choice has something good about it.

9. EVERYONE AROUND YOU (OR ON TV) IS EATING

This one is tough for many people, even those with deep knowledge of nutrition and strong willpower. If you ever started craving food because characters on the small screen were enjoying a meal, you're not alone. Marketing companies earn millions tempting us with food commercials. The same concept applies when we're out in public and we see people feasting on food that speaks to our weaknesses. My food weakness is ice cream; even though I know that dairy and sugar don't love back, I still crave it when I see people eating it.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE:

1. Try to avoid places where you know you will be tempted.
2. If you must be around food, eat something delicious and satisfying right before or bring your own tasty food with you.
3. Put the DVR to good use and record TV shows. Then watch them on your own time and skip the food commercials.
4. Use social media to follow people who inspire you and share photos of healthy and delicious foods that love you back.

10. THE NEED FOR SOMETHING NEW AND EXCITING

Neuroscientists have shown that we are programmed to crave new experiences and seek excitement. Even if we are happy with our lives, we still want to experience something different. Food is often an easy new addition—and thrill seeking can trigger the desire. I know when I was addicted to sugar, I needed my “hit.” Sugar was my drug of choice, my “high,” and I had to have it in order to add some kind of spark to an otherwise ordinary day.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Find a new activity to do every week. Go to new healthy restaurants you haven't been to. Check out a new meet-up group. Or try one of my recipes and experiment with new ones that I share every week on my social media.

11. THE NEED FOR INTIMACY

It is not often discussed in self-help or diet books, but I strongly believe that it is our need to be intimate, to be touched and to be loved that can create a craving for food. For example, according to TheAtlantic.com, chocolate can give you a brain orgasm! No wonder that our craving for physical intimacy can result in us reaching for food to do the trick.

SUGGESTION TO EXPLORE: Set time for yourself to enjoy your own body. Get intimate with yourself, learn what kind of thing bring you pleasure. One of my favorite things to play with is a pink quartz wand. According to NymphNYC.com, "Rose Quartz can aid in mending relationships, including the relationship you have with yourself. The transfer of Rose Quartz's nourishing energy allows you to experience the bliss of pure self-love and love for others. It creates a space for compassion to enter and grow, so you may appreciate and love your body and entire being. Understand all of your heart's desires and your deepest passions." How about exploring your body with a tool that can satisfy this craving better than any chocolate and ice cream can?

CRAVING-BUSTERS I WANT TO TRY:

CHAPTER 4

Pausing and PLAYing

“Sometimes you need to press pause to let everything sink in.”

— Sebastian Vettel

Even as we begin to understand the underlying causes of our cravings, some foods continue to hold us under their spell. Take carbohydrates, which, as many of you will agree, is the Darth Vader of temptations.

If it isn't a quick-fix chips at the gas station check-out counter or the gooey cheese pizza that Jane from accounting ordered for the entire office, it's the tray of deliciously decadent desserts that the waiter slowly rolls past us at our favorite restaurant—each item a devilish invitation to join the dark side.

I am starting to drool as I write this and am starting to crave chocolate. Coincidence? I think not.

So, how in the world can we ever let cravings go?

Inevitably, especially during the early part of an eating and lifestyle transformation, cravings are going to hit.

When they do, and you find yourself about to polish off a pizza, use the PLAY acronym to keep the urge at bay.

WHEN CRAVINGS HIT, IT'S TIME TO PLAY:

PAUSE: Stop whatever you are doing. That's all. Just pause and take a breath.

LISTEN: Listen to your body. Reflect on the situation from the outside looking in. What put you in this situation? How are you feeling at this particular moment? Do you feel physically hungry? What bubbles up to the surface when you allow your craving to exist? Do you simply want to dive into eating because you want to feel something on the emotional level? Pay attention to that feeling.

ASK: Be honest with yourself and ask the following questions:

- What am I really craving?
- Do I want to over-indulge or do I simply crave the taste and pleasure of a particular food?
- Would my action be loving to my body and my being?
- Will this action show me all the love I have for myself?
- Will it nurture my body and spirit?
- Will the food/action satisfy my true craving?

Say YES: It's time for a positive affirmation. Say YES to yourself and do what will make you feel truly loved and satisfied. What will it be? Get creative. Turn up the music, dance, smell beautiful flowers, light up a fragrant candle.

Call a friend to hear the voice of someone who cares about you. Make a list of activities that you are looking forward to doing. Do something to move you away from the unloving action on which you were about to embark. You will feel the answer come to you; from there, it's your choice. Whatever you do, know that your choice is a powerful and conscious decision.

Sometimes eating the whole cheesecake may seem like the only thing that can save your spirit from falling, even if your body won't like it. Trust me, I understand. In those moments, just observe the action and accept yourself as human.

Humans aren't perfect. We make mistakes. That's part of life, and it's OK.

As long as your actions were fully processed by your being, just know that with practice it will become easier and easier to make the best choices for your body and your spirit. Soon, it will become a habit.

Here is how it went just the other night:

Voice inside me: "I want a cookie and I want it now! NOW!"

PAUSE: "Ommmm...."

LISTEN: "OoooMmmmG!!!!.... This is not comfortable. I want a cookie, dang it! NOW!!!! I've been working all day, being responsible and all. Now I am tired and need a break, so I deserve a little sweet treat."

ASK: "What do I really want? Hmm..."

I want a cookie, didn't I just say that? Why do I want it all of a sudden? Because that's what I am craving, silly. I am free to have what I want. I am an adult. Don't tell me what to do."

If I really pay attention to myself here, I can feel that I really just want to be free to do what I want. I am craving FREEDOM!

What would be the most loving thing for me to do?

If I am truly craving freedom, I am giving myself freedom to BE. To be myself.

So, where am I not being myself?

Is it how I style my hair? How I dress? In my friendships? How I hold back and not say what I really mean? How I held back in saying I didn't love my friend's dress when she asked for my opinion?

Say YES: "I am going to say YES to being me today. I am saying YES to

allowing myself to be fully expressed (without harming myself or anyone else).”

Whew... that felt good. Without wasting time, I started to look online for hair inspirations and found a hairstyle that I connected with. I immediately styled my hair accordingly and right away felt happier, calmer, more connected to my inner self. And guess what? The cookie craving was gone. How could I even have thought of a cookie? I was so full of love for myself, there was no room for sweets.

Now it's your turn.

You don't have to strive for perfection. You don't have to fit someone else's image of what you should or shouldn't be like. Have faith in yourself and trust that your desire to feel good is stronger than the desire to react to or rebel against something that happened in the past.

One of my favorite quotes from the 2015 Disney Cinderella movie is by Cinderella's mother who says: "Have courage and be kind." I just want to add "to yourself, too!"

The goal, quite simply, is to choose the most kind and loving action toward yourself—and to feel good. Isn't it what you want in the first place?

If the act of pausing and listening to yourself feels selfish, then I recommend reciting this beautiful song as much as you can. I heard it at Michael Bernard Beckwith's Agape Center in Los Angeles.

*“I love myself so much
that I can love you so much
that you can love you so much
that you can start loving me”*

Try singing it out loud for three minutes (there are a couple of video recordings of this song on YouTube.com), repeating the words over and over again. If you need inspiration, check out Michael Bernard Beckwith's archives and live streaming of their services at <http://agapelive.com>.

CHAPTER 5

Return To Joy

“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.”

— Gautama Buddha

One of my favorite Disney movies, as it is for millions around the world, remains “Beauty and the Beast.” It’s a classic tale with a message that resonates to this day; a gorgeous girl falls in love with a beast because she can see something special in him—his beautiful spirit. Boys and girls are still taught to look past someone’s appearance and love people for who they are inside. At our best, humans have the capacity to do just that.

In my line of work, finding the best in the beast isn’t the problem for many women. It’s finding the best in themselves.

I have several clients who couldn’t be more beautiful inside and out, but, somehow, they just don’t love themselves. They struggle to stay afloat amid a sea of negativity, self-doubt and low self-worth.

Until recently, Danielle was one of those people. The 51-year-old from Boca Raton, FL., grew up in a family atmosphere full with hostility and resentment, so much so that she describes her primary responsibility as “keeping the peace.”

“It was chaotic,” she recalls. “I did the best I could to keep everyone around me smiling and happy. It took [a long time] for me to realize that I haven’t

been super kind to myself. I operated most of my life in a mode of pleasing others, which led to guilt. When I'm in that mode, I'm erratic with my own self-care—including what I put in my body.

“I'm working on making conscious and thoughtful decisions for myself. When I'm conscious and consistent, I notice I make better food choices. ... I'm finally realizing that it's OK to ask myself what I want and to satiate my own needs. Being the best person [I] can be starts here.”

I can relate to Danielle. Loving myself has never been easy. It took a long time for me to be able to say, yes, I love Alina. Even as I am writing these lines, a lingering doubt still wants to wash over me and ask “why?” Why I am worthy of self-love? Why in the world should I think that I am “great”?

To silence the doubt, I have to steel myself against the wave and ask, simply, “Why not?” Why can't I be great? Aren't we all great in our unique way? Aren't we all worthy of love?

One of my favorite quotes is from Henry Ford, who said: “Whether you think you can or you can't—either way you're right.” In his book “Spontaneous Healing of Belief,” Gregg Braden illustrates the same idea. With scientific support, he shows that just by observing an event and thinking of its future outcome, you actually can influence the atoms that are participating in that event.

Here is the good news: YOU are the one who chooses how to think. So why can't we see past our failings and focus on the positives? Why can't we see our own beauty, instead of the “beast” within?

I believe there is divinity in each and every one of us. It's our job to respect it and appreciate it. Let's nourish our spirit instead of diminishing it. Let's be our own best advocate instead of our own worst critic. We have the power to love or hate ourselves, and we can find reasons to go in either direction.

Why not choose the path that makes us feel good?

Trust me, I know this takes practice. But sometimes starting with baby steps can open the door just enough. I can remember standing in front of the mirror at a point in my life when I was making a conscious effort to turn my self-loathing into self-love. The problem was that I couldn't find anything I liked about my body.

And then a thought entered my head: Why don't I start focusing on specific features on which my friends compliment me? Like my hair. You know what? Yes, I have great hair. OK, that's one. What about my eyelashes? People have always talked about how nice they are. They're right! They are nice.

Baby steps.

From there, I focused on my skin. My strong fingernails. And here is where the magic happened: I started to find more and more little things that I loved about myself. Even though, in the beginning, I couldn't find the love for my entire body in one shot, at least I managed to kick-start the process. And that was the hardest part.

If it's equally hard for you to see how amazing you are, try seeing yourself as your friends see you. Write down five things that you know people like most about you. Focus on those features, and expand the list as you go along, adding five new items to the list each day and writing them down below or in a separate journal.

Allow yourself to let go of the idea of fitting into conventional beauty standards. To help with that, go online and look at paintings from centuries ago. Many masters painted beautiful women of all shapes and sizes. What is considered beautiful today is very different from what was beautiful just 40 years ago—and what will be beautiful 40 years from today.

If you are stuck and can't find more things you love based on the looks, dig deeper! Look at your body parts and find love for them based on what they DO for you.

For example, find love for your legs because they walk and get you places. I didn't realize how lucky I was to have strong legs until my knee started to hurt and I had to walk with the aid of a cane for several months.

If you can dance, walk and move freely, then love your thighs, your toes, your feet, your ankles, your calves, your knees, your inner thighs. Forget about conventional beauty. Focus on function.

PARTS OF MY BODY THAT I LOVE:

This simple exercise will be the small snowball of self-love that will begin to grow with each affirmation. One day, you will pass yourself in the mirror, smile, wink at yourself and say "Hello, Gorgeous!"

Still don't feel convinced?

Think about this...

Most of us are drawn to babies and small children because of their spontaneity and joyfulness. They don't have to impress us with their new car, their new house, their recent promotion or their recent plastic surgery. We're attracted to them for nothing more than who they are. Beautiful, innocent and full of potential.

Now, imagine being inside the maternity ward at your local hospital. You're looking through the window inside the room where the newborns are kept, babies, in some cases, only a few hours old. You're looking at them, studying their faces. Do you think, in that moment, without knowing anything about them, that you can determine which babies are destined to have wonderful lives and which are doomed to suffer?

Now, imagine that you are at the hospital where YOU were born. You're looking at yourself as a baby. What do you see? Do you think, in that moment, that you are worthy of having it all? I say you did. And guess what, you still do!

If you've ever seen the movie "Enchanted" with Amy Adams and Patrick Dempsey, you may recall the scene where Queen Narissa's henchman, Nathaniel, asks the prince: "Sire ... do you like yourself?" And Prince Edward shrugs and says, "What's not to like?"

That's the mind-set that helped to change the way I see myself. When you make the conscious decision that you're good enough to love, it's like flipping a switch. The choice is yours. Choose to love yourself. Why not?

It's time to stop hiding from your power and to start accepting your worthiness given to you by birthright.

In his book "Zero Limits," Joe Vitale, an inspirational speaker, implores us to choose powerful thinking instead of positive thinking. Joe explains that powerful thinking is your choice to think good thoughts because they make you feel good right away. Negative thinking, on the other hand, may not guarantee a certain future outcome—but it can guarantee unpleasant feelings in the NOW. And who wants to feel bad right now when tomorrow hasn't come yet anyway?

It doesn't mean that you shouldn't act and take care of what needs to be done. However, even if those actions may be unpleasant, you can still control your thoughts and powerfully choose to focus on what is good in your life.

Here is a spoiler alert: I already know what an amazing being you are—just by birthright you are simply magnificent!

YOU ARE ENOUGH.

YOU ALWAYS WERE ENOUGH.

AND YOU ARE WORTHY OF SELF-LOVE.

You may be thinking: “But Alina, you don’t know me. You don’t know about all the bad things I’ve done, all the horrible thoughts I’ve had, all the terrible things I’ve said since I was born with innocence! And just look at the size of my thighs today! How can I deserve loving myself?”

You are right, I don’t know the particulars. But **NOBODY** is perfect. We are human beings. Do you know people who have never made mistakes? Neither do I. To err is human, right? We all have faults, and we all fail at times. However, shaming yourself and feeling guilty is not the path to redemption. And it’s never going to make you happy.

This is your life we are talking about. It’s time to set boundaries on self-abuse with food or you will continue to live an unfulfilled life. And you don’t deserve that. It’s time to stop hiding from your power and to start accepting the worthiness given to you by birthright.

But before we do that, let’s acknowledge our negative past and honor that. We need to allow our failures to exist in the past and accept the fact that they did happen. We have to accept the fact that, as humans, we make mistakes. So, yes, we ate that entire tub of ice cream after a particularly stressful day at work. Yes, we binged on a bag of barbecue potato chips after fighting with our boyfriend.

Only when you accept yourself as you are—which is far from perfect—will you allow yourself to blossom and start feeling true happiness. I can tell you firsthand that it feels amazing to say: “Yes, I just ate two cookies too many, and they were delicious! I enjoyed every single morsel, and I still love myself. It’s not the end of the world, and next time I eat I will choose something

that will replenish and nourish my body.”

Try these exercises to help free yourself from a regular routine of self-bashing.

PART 1: On a separate page in your journal, write down all the things you think prevent you from feeling worthy, all the bad things you have done, thought and felt.

Once finished, read each one aloud and then take full responsibility of your actions by:

A) Accepting that you have done this particular act. It’s time to acknowledge the past for what it was. You tripped up. You used poor judgment. You made a mistake. It’s over, and it’s behind you. Make a commitment to not repeat the action. If you share this with a trusted friend that you know will accept you as you are, you will feel even better. There is beauty in transparency, and when you share yourself with others and see that you are loved even when you were “bad,” you will feel great lightness and strength at the same time.

B) If possible, do something to correct that action right now. Make a list of things that you can DO to redeem your mistake.

PART 2: In the space below or in your journal, write down all of the great things about your personality that you can think of.

Mention things that you do/did for other people that brighten up the day. If you get stuck, pick up the phone and call your closest friends to ask them what character traits they like about you. I am going to make a wild guess that your friends like you regardless of the size of your thighs.

Write some of the initial thought that comes up below, then write in your journal. Keep re-reading this list as many times per day as needed to remind yourself that you are an amazing being and indeed worth the self-love.

CHAPTER 6

Love vs. Fear

“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Anita Moorjani writes in her book “Dying to Be Me” that even though she had been eating all the right foods, staying vegetarian and practicing yoga, she still was diagnosed with cancer. It was as if she was running away from cancer just to bump into it. Her actions leading up to the diagnosis, she goes on to explain, were largely driven by fear. By giving the fears so much tangible energy, she not only fueled them—she made them stronger.

Fear-based issues come up time and again. Mary, a 38-year-old woman from Naples, Fla., struggled for much of her early adulthood with the notion of loving herself. She admits that part of it stemmed from her inability to—and her fear of—accepting herself as a gay woman. After years of working on herself, Mary lost the fear and began to love herself for who she is. Along the way, she noticed how much better in tune she was with her body when it came to her diet.

“I now take the time to really listen to what my body wants—and I give it what it needs,” Mary says.

When we eat anything at all, whether it is a brownie or an organic apple, we don’t just eat the molecules of food; we also eat the emotion that we

experience during that time. If we choose to have an apple simply because we are afraid of getting sick or fat, then the energy we are consuming with that apple is “fear of being fat.” If fat is on your mind, then fat is what you will get. I have known several “health nuts” who got sick even when eating a healthy organic, plant-based diet.

On the other hand, if you choose to have the apple because you love yourself so much that you want to treat your body to a feast of antioxidants, vitamins and enzymes, then the result of that same meal, based on my experiences, will be completely different.

I’m not alone in this contention. Researchers have conducted several studies that show a correlation between enjoyment levels and nutritional intake when it comes to dining. People who truly enjoy what they’re eating, according to the studies, get more nutrition out of the food compared to people who don’t enjoy the same exact meal for whatever reason.

However, it’s not just a matter of if we’re enjoying our food. Let’s step away to consider another piece of the puzzle.

No one logically wants to be in an abusive relationship. And yet, for so many women, the notion of dating a “bad boy” has a certain appeal. I’ve always felt that it’s not just because such men are “cool,” but it’s also because they don’t care—which, in turn, means that if you are with one, then you don’t have to care either.

To me, it’s the same with food: You know you shouldn’t eat certain things—but you like the thrill of “being bad.” You love the idea of “not caring.”

Why? Because not caring is the easy way out. For many people, eating healthy is just too stressful. It takes effort to be responsible. We have enough responsibility and stress in our day-to-day lives; why should the simple act of eating add to that? At the end of a long day, we just want to relax, unwind and not care when it comes to our food choices. We just want to say

“Oh, screw it!”, right?

So what happens? We want to be “bad.”

We go for fast food, sugary desserts, rich meals and salty snacks—and we think they make us feel good. Have you ever tried to rationalize a food choice with this kind of internal argument? “I do so many things for so many other people that I want to show myself some love with a fast-food burger and milkshake. I’ve been responsible all day long. It’s time to take care of me and NOT care. I want to release this tension. I want to feel good—and this burger/shake combo is doing the trick!”

Yep, I know how that feels. I’ve done that before.

Here’s the problem with that rationalization: The burger and the milkshake don’t love you. They are like the handsome suitors who shower you with all the right words—but who never back it up with the right actions. They don’t take care of you and instead can be pretty abusive.

That’s what processed foods do. It’s in their nature to get you excited and begging for more, but they deliver nothing in the way of substance. They are not relationship material.

What they do deliver is weight gain and potential health issues; those extra pounds are not that loving when it comes to your organs, joints and bones. While it’s true that, yes, you can love yourself at any weight because you are worth loving as you are, it’s also true that significant weight gain is an added stress on a variety of levels.

In addition to the extra weight, the choice to be “bad” brings another side effect. When you choose foods that don’t care about you—foods that aren’t nourishing—you’re saying that YOU don’t care about you. And if you don’t care about yourself, then why would you spend the time and effort to embark on a healthy diet?

Not only do these internal thoughts make you feel worse inside, others can pick up on this lack of self-love. If you don’t respect and value your own

body—and if it shows—then people may question whether or not they should love you? And if you start feeling unloved by other people, then it can start a painful spiral of events that can lead deeper into self-loathing.

One of my friends, Angelica, describes how she started to eat a lot of red meat in her early 30's while working at an Italian restaurant. She'd always been very active and in good shape. But before long, her once healthy eating habits had changed so dramatically that she gained 50 pounds.

“I've always been insecure even in my best shape, but when I gained weight it was the worst,” says Angelica, now 42. “I didn't love myself, I didn't feel attractive, and I didn't like what I saw when I looked in the mirror. I was miserable, and I was stuck.

“Attending the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (IIN) and experimenting with different dietary theories helped clear a path for me to begin the process of [losing the weight]. My relationship with food changed, and I began to take back control of my life. As part of that, I've learned to experiment with different foods—and actually see how they make me feel. It sounds like a lot of work, and maybe it is. In my case, it's been fun and exciting.

“I'm still working on embracing and accepting myself, but I've come a long way. I noticed that as my relationship with food changed, my relationships with people changed as well. As I have started to love myself, I've also started to make new friends that love me more than I thought was possible.”

This is where LOVE vs. FEAR comes in.

If you start choosing healthy foods because you LOVE yourself so much, not because you're just trying to be responsible, then all the stress melts away.

For me, the underlying fear (and former reason) for healthy eating was that if I didn't, then I wouldn't be skinny (fear). Which meant that I wouldn't be pretty. Which meant that I wouldn't be loved. Which meant I would be alone my whole life and die surrounded by rescue dogs. On another hand,

maybe that's not so bad?

Now I eat healthy foods because that's how I show myself love. I actually say to myself: "Honey, darling, what are you in the mood for? What would nourish your lovely self and make you feel good inside and out?"

And hey, if that's the internal dialog you develop and you do live with a bunch of awesome dogs (or cats) that you rescued, then maybe that is a pretty good life, after all. I would take that over an abusive relationship with someone else or even worse, an abusive relationship with myself.

Once you find the origin of your need to choose healthy foods, work on eliminating the fear associated with it (and the stress that comes with it) and replace those fears with deep self-love. See for yourself. Choose your meals and focus on the ways that those choices are loving and nurturing to your body.

Only YOU know which foods—not to mention which activities—make you feel good. So let's begin by making a list right now!

FOODS I LOVE TO EAT:

FOODS THAT MAKE ME FEEL GOOD:

Now, read through both lists above and see if you have the same foods on each one. Write those foods on the next page. If you don't have many that made both lists, then we will work on that!

FOODS THAT I LOVE AND THAT LOVE ME IN RETURN:

Don't feel scared that you will never get to eat foods that you love and that don't love you back.

While you may not want to have a relationship with those foods, you can still have an occasional affair with them. I call these foods my one-night-stand foods, my flings. Because hey, a girl can have a little affair with a slice of cheesecake once in a while.

FOODS I ENJOY, BUT ONLY WANT TO HAVE A FLING WITH:

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES I ENJOY & LOOK FORWARD TO:

*When you choose to eat foods that love you in return
and do activities that you enjoy, then you will see
a tremendous change in your well-being!*

To help you remember how different foods affect you, I invite you to try my unique association method. You see, when I was growing up, nothing was forbidden.

My mom allowed me to do anything I want. Anything! But, she would also inform me of what would happen if I did something.

For example, I was allowed to have the entire cake for my birthday, and I was also reminded that the cake would make me feel sick, if I didn't stick to just one slice, or maybe two.

I don't believe in deprivation or strong will.

I believe in FREEDOM and choices.

I believe in our OWN ability to choose what to eat.

The main thing that gets in a way is forgetting how certain foods actually make us feel. Daily TV commercials and social media posts make us think that food is all about happiness and joy as they show actors smiling.

Unfortunately they fail to show how they will make YOU feel, simply because they don't know you. Only YOU know your body and so it is up to you to remind yourself what makes you feel good or bad.

With that said, I want to offer you a simple project.

Z-TIP: Buy bright-colored sticky labels and write down simple reminders of what happens when you eat certain foods.

Then stick those labels on the jars, packages, food bags, etc. You can remind yourself that you feel great when you have ONE cookie, but more than that will make you feel tired, sad, sluggish, etc.

This way, when you are reaching for a box of cookies, you will be able to make a free choice.

Over time of practicing this technique, you will see that your desire for certain foods has lessened and that you don't have to rebel against anything, because foods are no longer forbidden.

CHAPTER 7

Letting Go and Cleaning House

*“It is important that we forgive ourselves for making mistakes.
We need to learn from our errors and move on.”*

— Steve Maraboli, from “Life, the Truth, and Being Free”

Earlier in the book, I introduced you to my friend Donna, who, at age 47, is at the point in her journey where wisdom has become a guiding light. When she says things like, “If you want love in your life, then it’s love that you have to give out.” She reminds me of a female Paul McCartney.

Her optimistic spirit, for me, is an inspiration—in part, because I know that her path to self-acceptance wasn’t easy.

As a young child, her own siblings teased her about being a bit heavy for her age. In later years, that would lead to severe bouts of bulimia and anorexia. “I tried using diet pills, I tried starvation,” she says. “And if I slipped up, I purged. It was terrible.” Adding insult to injury, Donna would then beat herself up for slipping—as well as for purging. With age came understanding, but it took an active search on her part for answers, and a willingness to open up to people on similar journeys.

Seeing Donna today—so grounded, so strong and so full of self-love—it’s hard to believe that she ever struggled with damaging thoughts and nonstop self-judgment. But the truth is that we all have items in our mental closet that we eventually need to toss out.

Like I shared earlier, I also used to struggle with thoughts of self-doubt that would leave me anxious and unsteady. But after my own soul-searching journey, I found an answer that helped me and that I hope will help you.

LIFE ACCORDING TO SHOPPING

Imagine this: You are shopping for new clothes at a department store and after rounding up all the items that you like, you head to the fitting room to try everything on. After figuring out what fits and what doesn't, you select the pieces you look best in and make your purchases. If something doesn't fit as well as you thought—or if the clothing is damaged in some way—you return it to the store.

Now, try this on for size: Why not use a similar return policy for our negative thoughts? We weren't born with them, right? No baby, at 6 months old, is criticizing her chubby belly. You didn't compare your stroller to your friend's at the playground, did you? Maybe parents do that, but babies sure don't. So, bad thoughts and judgments had to come from an outside source—family members, friends, classmates, co-workers, the media, etc...

Somewhere along your journey you observed something, overheard something, were told something—and you picked up that thought and you kept “wearing” it. But now you have a choice — you can re-examine that thought “outfit” and choose to either keep “wearing” it or take it back. No sale is ever final.

Without question, this is easier said than done. Most of us, as children, don't have the tools yet to reject a bad thought the moment it enters our world. And many adults spend a lifetime trying to escape or re-cast negativity that has directly or indirectly influenced big-picture and day-to-day choices.

But take it from me: It's never too late to return a negative thought. For years, the baggage from my own childhood weighed on me. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, I was afraid to be different, to be myself. In order to gain acceptance in my school I did what I could to fit in. I bought into that idea; I purchased that thought. And I wore it for the longest time. And boy, was it snug and uncomfortable!

Later on, as I began working more on my issues with self-love—and on myself in general—I realized the impact that this one childhood decision had on me. And I began addressing it. Granted, the imprint is deep, so I end up returning that thought in bits and pieces many times over and over again. But it's a process I'm willing to take on and practice.

After all, if you wore a pair of shoes that hurt your feet and left them swollen and blistered, would you keep them on and complain? Or would you get rid of them and put on a pair of shoes that made you feel good and look good?

It's time to ditch the shoes. It's time to eliminate the thoughts that prohibit you from getting the most out of your life. It's time to feel and appreciate the magnificence within!

Let's do an inventory of thoughts to find out where they came from and return the ones that no longer benefit you. To begin, think of habits, thought patterns or fears that you would like to let go.

Notice if you tend to get frustrated or upset at little things that others ignore. Is there a pattern? Maybe it is not the outside world that's affecting you? What if it is the discomfort of wearing a painful thought from the past and the pain gets triggered by events in the present time? Write those moments in your journal.

Once you identify one that you would like to work on, look back in time and see yourself when you didn't have that thought. Most likely you weren't born hating your thighs or thinking that you were stupid. Those thoughts and ideas were "purchased" from someone. When was the time that you didn't have that thought? What was that like then? What changed? When and where did you get it?

Use the receipt form that follows and feel free to make more copies to fill out as many as you'd like.

You can download a blank form from my website at:
www.AlinaZ.com/Book

RECEIPT FOR YOUR THOUGHTS
(Example)

DATE OF PURCHASE	ORIGIN
<i>1987, First Grade</i>	<i>Classmates</i>
THOUGHT DESCRIPTION: <i>That I wasn't good enough to be liked and had to change and be like everyone else in order to have friends.</i>	
REASON FOR RETURN: <i>This thought doesn't make me happy and I deserve to be happy. This is my life to live and I want to enjoy it without negativity</i>	
EXCHANGED FOR: <i>I am great the way I am and deserve to have friends to love me and accept me. Love and acceptance start with me and I choose to be me. I deserve to be loved as is. I am worthy of love from others and self-love. I am awesome! YES!</i>	
DATE OF RETURN	SIGNATURE
<i>June 23rd, 2013</i>	<i>Alina Z</i>

RECEIPT FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

DATE OF PURCHASE	ORIGIN
_____	_____
THOUGHT DESCRIPTION:	

REASON FOR RETURN: _____	

EXCHANGED FOR: _____	

DATE OF RETURN	SIGNATURE
_____	_____

Continue to remind yourself to “return” the thoughts that don’t fit. Print the pages out, post them where you can see them, and begin using statements that make you feel good as your daily affirmations. Read those out loud, preferably to your own reflection in the mirror. Just like clothes, thoughts fit us better after we use them over a period of time

Now that our return policy is in place, and our mental closet has more space, there clearly is room to add a few expectations, right? After all, change is on the way. It’s bound to happen sooner rather than later.

Not so fast.

In his book “Aleph,” Paulo Coelho references Chinese bamboo, which starts out by growing downward. You may not see visual evidence of vertical growth for five years, but underneath the surface a foundation is taking shape—one that, eventually, will shoot the bamboo skyward and several feet high in a very short time.

I started thinking about that passage in “Aleph” one night when I was wide awake in bed and wondering why the weight loss that I wanted so badly wasn’t happening at the speed of light. It dawned on me that what I saw with my eyes was deceiving, that there was plenty of change happening just below the surface. I had come a long way from where I started—and I was being way too hard on myself. The expectations in my mind were simply unrealistic.

The actress Goldie Hawn once said, “If we can just let go and trust that things will work out the way they’re supposed to, without trying to control the outcome, then we can begin to enjoy the moment more fully.”

I love that sentiment. And I embrace it. I wish I could embrace Goldie too.

The only loving thing for me to do, during this struggle with immediate

gratification (or lack thereof), was to relax and trust the journey. I was doing the work—going to workout classes, changing the way I ate, eliminating negative thoughts. Now, I needed to shift gears and enjoy the moment for what it was—instead of comparing it to my expectations.

Yes, I was eating healthy and clean, but was I enjoying it? Did I savor every bite at lunch or was I focusing on the idea that this lunch selection would make me skinny? The ironic thing is that what we focus on often becomes our reality; the universe is very friendly this way. So, when I focused on the process of getting skinny—and when each move I made revolved around that—the universe brought me more opportunities to practice. But getting there was never half the fun. Moreover, what was the payoff beyond the finish line?

To change this, I started shifting my focus from great expectations to pure joy of the moment. After all, aren't joy and happiness the main reasons why you want to be at your perfect weight? Aren't they the reasons you want to feel loved? So why not cultivate them now? Why not feel happy now? It is really a choice that you can make. NOW is the only thing that you will ever have. Today is yesterday's tomorrow. Now is when the magic happens, and you are the only one who gets to choose whether to feel happy or not.

You have a tremendous opportunity at each meal to select foods that will bring your spirit and your body the most satisfaction. And that's important. But once the choice is made, do yourself a favor—and savor. Revel in every single bite and absorb all the joy and pleasure from the food that is helping to change your life.

It's just one more way to let yourself truly satisfy your hunger.

I invite you to write a daily reminder of how you can shift into pure joy of the moment. Post reminders on post-its on your fridge, your office desk, your bathroom mirror. Set up calendar alerts on your smartphone. Whatever works best for you. Re-read your joy-shifting ideas each morning and start putting them into practice.

MY FAVORITE WAYS TO SHIFT INTO JOY:

(Some client favorites include: playing with their dogs, looking at baby photos, smelling fragrant candles and listening to inspiring music)

Here are my favorite inspirational songs that I listen to when I need a boost.

ALINA'S FAVORITE MOOD-SHIFTING SONGS:

“Speak Life,” TobyMac

“Everybody,” Ingrid Michaelson

“Flashdance: What A Feeling,” Irene Cara

“Dare to Live,” Andrea Bocelli

“It’s My Life,” Bon Jovi

“F---n’ Perfect,” Pink

“Roar,” Katy Perry

“When You Believe,” Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey

“Unwritten,” Natasha Bedingfield

“It’s Amazing,” Jem

“If You’re Going Through Hell,” Rodney Atkins

“Wild Motion (Set it Free),” Miami Horror

“We Weren’t Born to Follow,” Bon Jovi

“Nothing Else Matters,” Metallica

“I Will Survive,” Gloria Gaynor

“Here Comes the Sun,” The Beatles

“You Are Not Alone,” Michael Jackson

“I Am Alive,” Celine Dion

“I’m Ready To Listen,” Rickie Byars Beckwith

“Invisible,” Hunter Hayes

MY FAVORITE MOOD-SHIFTING SONGS:

CHAPTER 8

Nourishing the Spirit

“Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul.”

— Henry Ward Beecher

As important as it is to find a nutrition plan that empowers us—one that’s in harmony with the realization that we are worthy of self-love—it’s equally important to understand that food isn’t the only form of nourishment.

When my friend Ian began a raw vegan diet four years ago—a decision that would lead to him dropping more than 50 pounds—he quickly realized that charting a new life course meant more than a dramatic menu change.

“When I see chaos in my life, it’s a sign that something is out of balance,” says Ian, who is 34. “I manage my stress levels through meditation and exercise, as well as diet. The meditation provides me the balance I need to find solutions and peace. As a result, my eating pretty much stays on track regardless of what is going on.

“My advice is to always keep it simple. Be patient with yourself. Be curious. And have fun on your journey. If you try to force anything in life, it has the opposite effect.”

Ian tells me that, more than ever, he pays attention to the signals his body is sending. If he’s feeling down or unmotivated, it’s a sign that he needs more rest; he’ll keep activity levels to a minimum for a few days until he can recharge his batteries. If he’s over-stimulated by the technology that so dominates our lives, he’ll unplug. If he finds himself too caught up in his

own world, especially after immersing himself in work, he'll make time for friends and fun activities.

By understanding all the different ways that we can go hungry in life, Ian has learned to nourish himself beyond the edibles. I tell my clients all the time that this is an equally important part of a true Couture Nutrition® plan. In addition to finding foods that fit, we also need to find other outlets that fit—and empower.

Here are just a few suggestions that I've found personally rewarding:

FEASTING ON ACTIVITIES

Remember a time when you were passionately in love and everything seemed so much more exciting? When colors were brighter? When the slightest glance from your lover sent your heart racing?

Or how about when you were a child and your parents had to drag you home for dinner because you were having so much fun playing with your friends? In those moments, food probably was the last thing on your mind.

As humans, we're always looking for that next heaping helping of pleasure. When we don't find joy on a daily basis, we'll often reach for food in order to compensate.

To change this, we need to create a new habit—we need to be proactive when it comes to those nourishing periods of happiness. Think about positive relationships, fitness, spirituality, hobbies—something that captures your undivided attention and warms your spirit.

What puts a bounce in your step? Is it dancing? Getting out in the sun? Watching a funny movie? Playing a sport? Reading a good book? No matter the activity, when you fill your heart with joy, you'll be surprised to see how time flies by without you feeling hungry.

For many of my clients, exercise is a natural complement to healthy eating. But I'm always amazed at the excuses that people give me in the beginning

for not wanting to commit to even the easiest fitness regimen.

One time, a woman explained to me that she didn't have the willpower to stick to a healthy lifestyle. A few minutes after that comment, she stepped outside and had a smoke. This made me smile because, actually, she just demonstrated very strong willpower. Let me explain.

People often tell me that I must have strong willpower and discipline to eat healthy and workout. I believe smoking takes even more.

Think about this: You need to always remember to buy cigarettes, to make sure you have the lighter or the matches, to switch cigarettes and matches when you change purses. You have to search for appropriate spaces to smoke. Plus, cigarettes aren't cheap.

For what it costs to smoke two packs a week, ladies could have a few more pairs of Jimmy Choos in their closet in no time!

So why do people do it? Because they like the process of smoking.

The same applies to physical activities.

Find fitness classes that you will actually enjoy participating in. Discover sports that make you feel great in the moment. Don't settle for activities that you feel you "should" do, but secretly count the minutes till they are over.

Future results are not a lasting motivation. Being in the joy of the present moment, on the other hand, will keep you coming back for more.

HOBBIES/ACTIVITIES THAT I LOVE:

SHUT OFF THE TV

Television isn't exactly an ally when it comes to focusing on self-love and eating for your body's nourishment. Commercials are constantly seducing viewers with messages that glorify the very foods we want to avoid. Those fast-food tacos and burgers look delicious on the small screen, but we all know we'll pay for them later—in a big, big way.

Here's an easy way to avoid these temptations: Turn off the TV and head outside.

Look up to the sky, listen to the sounds of nature and feel yourself as a part of life's bigger picture. Find the inherent beauty in trees, leaves, plants, birds and clouds. Breathe in the oxygen, and let it give you its pure energy.

And when it is time to sit down to watch your favorite TV shows, then do what I do: Put the DVR to good use—and skip the commercials.

VISUALIZING

The process of visualization has been around for centuries, helping people achieve their goals. It's time to take advantage of this great tool to help you get your health back!

The easiest way to visualize is to take a few minutes each day and imagine your body changing inside. Visualize the process of letting go of stored fatty junk as if you are cleaning a very messy room. Don't panic when you walk into the room and see the mess. Instead, take out a trash can and start placing garbage and unnecessary items into it. Once the can is full, toss the waste into the dumpster outside. Imagine a truck picking it up and taking it away. Once you make enough trips to the trash bin, start straightening things up around the room. See it become cleaner, neater and more peaceful.

Now, imagine that your body is doing the exact same thing as it rids itself of stored toxins. Send lots of love to every cell and visualize yourself becoming lighter and healthier. Feel yourself doing all the things that you want to do with your newfound energy!

And if you feel good during those visualizations, then you just added a few minutes of happiness to your day. Isn't that already a great bargain?

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Many experts agree that the attitude of gratitude can help people relax, put them in a better mood and increase serotonin—the hormone that helps us feel happy. To set yourself up for the benefits of gratitude, make it a ritual every evening to write down five things for which you are grateful that day. It can be anything from, “The sun was shining today” or “I never thought blended frozen bananas could make such a delicious ice cream!” to “I complimented a stranger and clearly brightened her day!” or “I am so grateful for my eyes that can read these lines!” You may find more than five items; that's fine—just go with it.

Not only will you start feeling good about what you have, you also will be attracting more things to be grateful about in the future. Have you ever noticed how you start paying attention to cars everywhere when you are shopping for one? The same with gratitude. Once you start paying attention to things you are grateful for, you will start seeing more things to be happy about!

DAILY MEDITATION

My favorite way to practice mindfulness—and to avoid compulsive self-criticism or over-eating—is to create a daily habit of meditating. To be honest, when my parents first suggested that I give meditation a try, I became incredibly anxious and nervous.

The idea of sitting still, relaxing my body and attempting to find my inner peace sounded incredibly boring and unproductive.

It's a proven fact that meditation can significantly improve our health, our mood and our overall well-being. So why doesn't everyone make time to meditate?

For starters, it's not for everyone—and that's understandable. Just because I

like a certain song doesn't mean the rest of the world has to like it. However, there are people intrigued by the concept—people who probably would like meditation if they tried it. For many of them, it's a matter of that initial leap.

If you fall into that category, here's an idea that might help.

A NEW BREW OF MEDITATION

Every so often, when I know I'm going to do some shopping at the mall, I arrange to meet with my best friend at Starbucks®. We don't visit for long, but it's important for me to see her so we can catch up on one another's lives. I find it to be a simple and enjoyable way to relax.

It's not rocket science to chat with a friend. Friends provide a support system in our daily life, and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there are clear benefits to spending such quality time together. So why not look at meditation as “having Starbucks® with yourself?”

When you feel overwhelmed, tired, anxious and depleted, take 10-15 minutes out of your day (only 1 percent of your entire day) and catch up with yourself. The point of meditation is to slow down, become aware of the thoughts in your mind and the sensations in your body—and to remember that YOU are not YOUR thoughts. I think that a basic beginner's meditation is nothing more than listening to yourself as you would listen to your best friend. It's also a great way to release stress instead of reaching for food.

Meditation like this can be done anywhere that's convenient for you—in your own kitchen over a cup of coffee or tea in the morning, in the middle of the afternoon in a parking lot in your car, or anywhere else where you can just sit down and be with yourself for a few minutes. Even a quiet corner in an actual Starbucks®! Start by asking yourself, “How do you feel? How do your neck and

shoulders feel today? How are your arms? Stomach? Legs? Toes? Is there any tension that's bothering you? What's on your mind?"

Then, as a good friend would, you listen. You listen to whatever comes up in your mind and your body. You become AWARE of the sensations and the thoughts. And then you tell yourself that it's OK to have the thoughts that worry you. It's OK to have aches and pains. You remind yourself that you are not your thoughts.

You observe.

You soothe yourself with calmness of slow, deep breathing; everything will be OK.

You tell yourself that you love yourself, and you send love to each body part to release the tension and the pain.

This is not the time to find solutions; this is the time to be a good friend by just listening and sending love. Be there for yourself to let go of the negative thoughts, and then give positive affirmations about your self-worth that will inspire you throughout the day, just like a good friend would. Finally, thank yourself for taking time for a mental "Starbucks®" break, and move on with your day.

If our best friends deserve our attention in times of need, then there is no reason that we can't do the same for ourselves. After all, you have to live with yourself 24/7, so why not give YOU the love and attention that you deserve for 15 minutes a day?

By having "Starbucks®" with yourself, you become aware of what's going on inside your body and mind.

For me, this awareness is the essence of meditation.

And as you take time for this daily self-date, you will gradually discover that you are actually communicating and listening to the

divine presence in you. A friend of mine calls it a Date with the Divine!

Give it a try this week. Do it every day for at least for 10-15 minutes. I'm sure you will feel much calmer, relaxed and loved.

Z-TIP: If you don't have 15 minutes to spend on a full meditation, enjoy a couple of cigarette-free "smoking" breaks. Simply go outside for 5 minutes and take deep, relaxing breaths. If you need to keep your hands busy, alternate your thumb and pointing finger to close one nostril at a time as you inhale and exhale. It will take you double the time to take a breath, helping you relax even more.

CHAPTER 9

The Power of Choice

“He who controls others may be powerful, but he who has mastered himself is mightier still.”

— Lao-Tzu

The choice is yours. It’s all about **YOUR** choice and whether you **WANT** to feel good about yourself or not. We’ve discovered, throughout the pages of this book, that we were born without preconceived thoughts or lack of self-love. We may have picked up, tried on—and worn way too long—some thoughts and judgments that have added to our baggage.

But, deep down, we understand that we were **BORN TO BE LOVED**.

For many adults, it’s hard to escape the idea that, since our parents “created” us, they must have all the answers. In some ways, we feel we “belong” to them—which is why their words and actions affect us. Meanwhile, their words and actions were affected by their parents, who were affected by their parents. And so it goes—until, that is, we wake up to the truth.

The truth is simple.

You are more than the product of two adults.

You are a true miracle of nature; a living, breathing organism connected to and influenced by the world around you.

When you were a small child, you didn't understand that you could choose what to believe, so you trusted your parents and other people who you thought knew better. But we are not little kids anymore; it's time to own up to our power and take responsibility for our lives.

I love this quote from Steve Jobs: "Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you—and you can change it, you can influence it."

Judging by the amazing and creative life that Steve Jobs led, it's clear that this kind of thinking has great power.

The challenge is not only charting a new course; it's also avoiding detours. One day everything seems to be going well. Then, unexpectedly, you run into your ex. Or your friend makes an unpleasant comment about your outfit. Or someone curses you out for no reason, and your self-esteem takes a tumble. How do you stop the spiral of low self-worth and return to practicing the self-love and acceptance we've discussed?

At times like this, I want you to think about reversing roles and reflecting. Have you ever had a bad day that caused you to be unpleasant to someone for no reason? Have you ever run into someone you broke up with and knew that this person was still dealing with the heartbreak? Have you ever been unusually kind to a stranger just because you received some great news earlier?

Your actions toward others, more often than not, are based on how you feel inside—not on the actions of the receiver. If you feel good inside, you may be nicer to others—even when they're less than hospitable to you.

On the other hand, if you feel bad, you may be quick to project that—no matter how upbeat the mood is around you.

Remind yourself of this when you feel bad because of someone else's actions or thoughts. It's not personal. And it may not have anything to do with you.

You can stop the cycle when **YOU POWERFULLY CHOOSE** how you want to feel. Regardless of what happened or what is happening, choose to think and feel joy. Set boundaries on how much time you allow yourself to feel bad. Stop hiding from your own power to make yourself feel good.

Do something that will make you smile.

Better yet, feel joy for no reason—just like you did when you were an infant. You were born with that internal happiness and simply stopped practicing. It is time to return to your real self and feel joy again.

It all comes down to your daily **CHOICE**.

Choose the road that empowers. Make mindful decisions.

Remember the **PLAY** exercise in moments of weakness. Remind yourself just how amazing you are by simply being you, and then share that joy. Trust me, it's contagious.

Deep down inside we want to be loved.

The good news is that **YOU** are the only person who can choose to love yourself or not.

So start now by writing down **ONE** new action you want to take to make yourself feel loved every week.

Practice it for 7 days or 2 weeks and once it becomes a habit, revisit the book and pick one another one to master.

Just one change can lead to life-altering results.

That's all it takes to truly feel full and abundant.

NEW ACTIONS I WILL TAKE TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL LOVED:

CHAPTER 10

Food for Thought

“Anyone who eats three meals a day should understand why cookbooks outsell sex books three to one.”

— L.M. Boyd

In the previous chapter, I asked you to list the foods you love that love you back. Later in this book, you’ll find recipes for different comfort foods I’ve created that also have the potential to love you back. But you will need to “date” them to see how they make you feel.

The truth is that there is no one snack or entrée or food plan that delivers the same exact satisfaction across the board.

We all have different tastes—in more ways than one. The foods that have allowed me to feel satisfied probably will not be the same ones that help to empower you.

Then again, that’s also the good news when it comes to strengthening the relationship between food and feelings.

Choices abound.

To that end, let’s take a menu break and see how some of the people we’ve already referenced in the book—as well as some of my other clients—are charting their own positive courses when it comes to diet.

ANGELICA, 42, Fort Lauderdale, FL

Typical breakfast: Smoothie with non-dairy milk, bananas, spinach (or other leafy green), pineapple and, sometimes, almond butter

Typical lunch: Large salad (typically a spring mix) with zucchini or cucumber, avocado, tomato and “anything else I can throw in” with home-made dressing of red-wine vinegar or champagne vinegar and oil

Typical dinner: Portobello burger with a side of baked sweet potato fries or a side salad; or a veggie stir-fry meal (sometimes with marinated tofu)

CHLOE, 31, Los Angeles, CA

Typical breakfast: Flax flake cereal with almond milk; single serving of roasted Trader Joe’s almonds; banana—and, sometimes, an apple

Typical lunch / dinner: Decent salad with veggie protein source (soy meat or beans), avocado, and a veggie assortment, usually on a bed of kale

Typical snacks: Almond butter; apples; hummus with carrots or celery; dark cacao nibs from Trader Joe’s

IAN, 34, San Diego, CA

Typical breakfast: Lemon elixir & a fruit smoothie with super-foods

Typical lunch: Green juice and sometimes a big salad

Typical snacks (between meals): Green juice and fresh fruits; fruit smoothie with spinach or kale; beet juice or green juice

Typical dinner: Big salad with herbs, avocado, dulse, hemp seeds & EVOO

Before bed: Celery, cucumber, romaine and lemon juice to “help relax, calm the nervous system and prepare for sleep”

MARY, 38, Naples, FL

Typical breakfast: Green smoothie; oatmeal with coconut oil, walnuts, blueberries and cinnamon

Typical lunch: Big kale salad with raw veggies, sometimes with fish

Typical dinner: Sushi with brown rice if dining out; veggie stir-fry with fish, maybe some quinoa, if at home

Typical snack: Red Delicious apple; one green juice per day

TERRI, 55, Boca Raton, FL

Typical breakfast: One cup of coffee with low-fat creamer and one sugar-in-the-raw packet; Greek yogurt with granola

Typical lunch: Tuna or egg salad on a whole-grain wrap with lettuce

Typical dinner: Fish, seafood or a large meal salad; vegetables; sometimes a glass of red wine

Typical snacks: Handful of healthy chips; veggie sticks and low-calorie dip; pickles

ELANA, 31, Santa Monica, CA

Typical breakfast: A protein packed breakfast; egg whites with salsa or hot sauce and a banana

Typical lunch: Salad or soup

Typical dinner: “This is the smallest meal of my day. I stay away from carb-filled foods and gluten. Pasta is, at most, a small side item. My big cheat night is definitely Mexican. Chips and salsa and a cold beer ... That’s heaven!”

CHAPTER 11

Becoming Your Own Couture Nutrition® Designer

“I compare a pastry cook who makes good colifichets to a distinguished fashion designer, endowed with perfect taste, who can make charming things with very little material.”

—Marie-Antoine Carême

Diet books sometimes drive me crazy.

Ok, maybe not sometimes. Most of the time.

It’s not the actual diet that frustrates me; it’s the idea that this one approach can work for any individual from any background with any lifestyle and any number of personal challenges.

Imagine walking into a major fashion retailer with an intention to find perfectly tailored pieces—only to be told that the store carries nothing but one-size-fits-all clothing. Fortunately, we have couture fashion specific to individual body types and measurements.

So why shouldn’t we take the same approach to diets and nutrition?

We’ve worked in earlier chapters on finding the road to self-love; now it’s time to find foods that fit you best. In this chapter, we’ll learn how to become your own Couture Nutrition® Designer by creating a healthy and delicious diet that fits your body type and lifestyle.

Years ago, before I became Alina Z., Couture Nutrition® Designer, my diet typically looked something like this.

ALINA'S TYPICAL DAY IN THE PAST:

I was super “good” in the morning, eating a high-protein, low-calorie egg breakfast or Greek yogurt.

Then I would be very “good” for lunch, eating a salad with chicken breast.

By mid-afternoon, I would be so exhausted and undernourished from being “good” that I would throw in the towel and have chocolate, part of my major sugar addiction. And the rest of the day would go downhill from there.

I wasn't happy about my food choices, and I was equally frustrated with my weight and health. I struggled with acid reflux and anemia, and I frequently had a flu or cold. Did I mention I was often tired? No wonder, right?

In order to lose the weight, I naturally gravitated to my share of diets. You name it, I tried it. Like the Zone, where you segment meals into three groups: 30 percent fats, 40 percent carbohydrates and 30 percent protein.

Or Atkins, which balks at carbs and fruits. South Beach, where carbs are a no-no, but it's OK to eat some fruit.

Jillian Michaels, which follows a specific meal plan with lots of protein. The Joel Fuhrman diet, where you eat pounds of green veggies.

And The French Women Don't Get Fat diet—where you can eat anything you want ... but only a couple of bites of each food.

I even tried the master cleanse, drinking water with maple syrup, lemon juice and cayenne pepper for 10 days. Do you know how much weight I lost? ONE pound. One pound in ten days!

As for the rest of the diets, the scale didn't move at all. Meanwhile, I became more and more frustrated with the conflicting diet information. It was like opening the summer issue of “Vogue” and being overwhelmed by the

number of totally different looks.

Having graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York with a degree in design marketing, I knew fashion. I also knew exactly what I wanted to wear on a given day. I understood, for example, that color-blocking worked for me—and black-and-white motifs didn't.

And then it clicked: Why not combine my fashion experience with my nutrition knowledge and create a Couture Nutrition® approach tailored to healthy eating—one that recognizes, when it comes to a diet that empowers instead of frustrates, that one size does not fit all.

Over the years, I've learned a couple of valuable lessons about food:

- 1. Diets often don't work, in part, because participants don't like the food they're eating.**
- 2. Every healthy diet should include fruits and vegetables, but plain fruits and vegetables are boring to most people.**

I propose that we begin looking at fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and animal proteins in a way that's similar to how we view fashion. We know how we feel in certain clothes. We also should know how certain foods make us feel.

So let's start by drawing some parallels between food and fashion so that you get the idea.

As you learn to look at these ingredients in a different light—and understand how they make you feel—you'll be better able to create meals that fit you and your lifestyle.

FOOD ACCORDING TO FASHION

FRUITARIANS & WHITE SILK

Fruit is the fastest-moving food, and it doesn't stay in the system long, so it is great for cleaning out the body. However, if you practice this diet long-term, it can get expensive and hard to maintain, just like white silk. When I was a fruitarian, I found myself eating non-stop as a meal of five mangoes and two cups of berries doesn't tie you over for too long. Also, just as silk does little to keep you warm when it's cold outside, fruit does little to heat up the body. It's a wonderful idea on paper, but for me, personally, being fruitarian is not realistic to sustain year-round.

RAW VEGAN CUISINE & PURE COTTON

Raw vegan foods, like cotton, can come in different colors and textures, not to mention countless varieties. Just like cotton can be used to create jeans, T-shirts, skirts, pants, dresses and accessories, raw fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts can be used to create pretty much anything from pizzas and burritos to burgers and pasta. These dishes can be "layered" with spices to keep you warm on a chilly day, just as you might layer cotton clothing during a fall trip to Chicago. Also, because nuts are part of a raw vegan diet, this type of cuisine can keep you full and satisfied.

COOKED VEGAN FOODS & LIGHT CASHMERE

Sometimes when it's cold out, I just want to cuddle up in my cashmere sweater and get warm. For me, a bowl of warm cooked brown rice with beans and hot veggies has the same effect. Something comfortable and soft to warm up my system. When I think of cooked vegan food, I think of it as cashmere—inviting, pure and comforting.

ORGANIC COOKED ANIMAL PRODUCTS & WOOL

Animal proteins can be necessary for survival when other foods won't do. For example, people living in Alaska need animal proteins to brave the elements as much as they need their heavy wool sweaters.

On occasion, I'll eat some fish or seafood—or I may have an omelet with eggs from a local, cruelty-free, organic farm when I need something heavy and warm to keep my energy level stable. Just like I wear wool sweaters, I use these foods in small amounts and when my body needs them for my survival. I also bless my food and thank the animal for its sacrifice.

PROCESSED ANIMAL PRODUCTS & HEAVY DUTY COAT

To me, hormone-filled, steroid-pumped and conventionally farmed animal proteins compare to army coats—they are processed, they are heavy, and they don't make anyone feel good.

They may be necessary for survival in certain situations, like a war, but not something you would want to wear if you had other choices. Yes, acrylic may be cheaper than wool and conventional meat is less expensive than organic. In those cases, I suggest focusing on quality versus quantity. If you're on a budget, I recommend buying less animal protein and adding more beans, nuts and seeds to your diet, to offset the expense. When you do buy meat, choose only organic and humanely-raised kinds. This combination of high quality animal protein and beans/nuts/seeds is similar to creating your own custom fabrics.

COOKED PROCESSED FOODS & COSTUME PARTY CLOTHES

Neither of these, in my opinion, is good for you over the long haul—but, yes, they can be fun every so often. Like the time I broke out a polyester dress for Halloween. The problem is when people eat processed foods on a regular basis. It's like wearing polyester clothes every day of the year. There's just nothing redeeming about such a choice.

When I look at the way I eat, I find that the majority of my food is raw or cooked vegan. Raw, organic fruits and vegetables, by the way, are full of antioxidants, phytonutrients, minerals, vitamins, proteins and fiber from

which most anyone can benefit. Just like pure cotton T-shirts, dresses, tops, skirts and jeans ... you can never have enough!

The rest of my diet depends on the particular situation.

For me, it's next to impossible to stick to one food plan 100% of the time.

So I do believe in mixing and matching different foods, just like we do with fabrics, colors and fashion styles.

That said, we are all different—from our likes and dislikes to our body types to our personalities and lifestyles. Next time you're walking through a mall, try spotting someone who has the same outfit as you do.

Chances are, on any particular day, very few people are wearing identical clothing. It's the same with food. How many people are eating the same exact food the same exact way on the same exact day?

In that spirit, remember to take what other people say or do about nutrition as ideas and inspiration—even the suggestions in this very book. From there, listen to your body to see which quality foods fit and which don't.

You deserve to treat yourself to the best ingredients.

You deserve love—so start choosing food that loves your body. Be open to new nutrition options; try them on and see how they feel. Which ones taste good and feel right? Those are the keepers.

I invite you to create your personal Couture Nutrition[®] plan.

Fill in the blanks under each category with foods that you love—and that love you in return. List foods that are nourishing and loving to your body. Use diet books and healthy food articles, the recipes I've created (which you'll find in the back of this book), and any other advice as your inspiration.

Once you are ready to eat, ask yourself: "How do I want to feel afterward?"

Then use this list to find the best-fitting meal for a particular occasion.

You weren't born with DNA-coded information about how to dress yourself. You had to learn it.

Do the same with your food, and discover the best ways to nourish your body and your spirit with food that fits you like a glove.

MY COUTURE NUTRITION® PLAN

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & MAKE ME FEEL WARM:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & COOL ME DOWN:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & MAKE ME FEEL GROUNDED:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & MAKE ME FEEL LIGHT:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & ENERGIZE ME:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & MAKE ME FEEL PEACEFUL:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & MAKE ME FEEL SEXY:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & UPLIFT MY SPIRITS:

FOODS THAT LOVE MY BODY & SOOTHE ME:

CHAPTER 12

Foods That Love Your Body and Mind

“Let’s face it, a nice creamy chocolate cake does a lot for a lot of people; it does for me.”

–Audrey Hepburn

As you are becoming your own Couture Nutrition® Designer, you will most likely want to experiment with different foods.

In this chapter you will find my Top 20 Foods With Benefits and Top 10 Books that Nourish the Soul. These are my personal favorites and I don’t expect you to feel the same way about them as I do. In fact, you may actually hate some of them. I know plenty of people who can’t stand the look of kale or the smell of broccoli.

Simply think of these two lists as little cheat sheets for you to learn more about these foods.

In the following chapter you will find several of my favorite recipes that will show how to accessorize these bland-looking items and turn them into exciting dishes.

Try them on and see how they fit you. You may fall in love with them at first bite!

Feel free to adjust the measurements and portions to your bio-individuality and personal preferences.

TOP 20 FOODS WITH BENEFITS

1. ASPARAGUS: Excellent for overall body support and detox. Asparagus also helps to support kidney function.

2. AVOCADOS: Great fats that keep you full. Avocados help to lower blood pressure, relieve muscle aches and regulate water retention. In addition to guacamole dip, try adding them in my chocolate mousse recipe.

3. BEAN SPROUTS: Great for protein and fiber that keep you full and your blood sugar stable. Sprouts, actually, are still alive when you chew them and this life force will energize every cell in your body! You can sprout mung beans, adzuki, lentil, chickpeas and whole peas.

4. BROCCOLI: Supports your liver and therefore helps your body to detox and reduce weight. I like to lightly sauté or steam broccoli and then add it to salads.

5. CACAO: Known as being high in antioxidants, cacao helps to fight free radicals. If you're sensitive to caffeine, check with your doctor before adding pure cacao to your diet.

6. CHIA SEEDS: High in Omega-3 fatty acids, chia seeds fight inflammation, which is the beginning of many illnesses. Add them to almond milk to make a chia seed pudding, blend them with a smoothie or add them to your oatmeal.

7. CITRUS FRUITS: Full of vitamin C, citrus fruits are known to reduce bloating and help metabolize fat. Drink as a juice or have as an afternoon snack to boost energy.

8. COCONUT WATER: This refreshing beverage is rich in potassium, which can help keep you hydrated, reduce bloating and counter sodium.

9. CUCUMBERS: This is a great food if you ever feel overheated as cucumbers can actually help to cool you down. Along the way, they reduce bloating and hydrate the body.

10. GRAPES: Have you ever noticed how clusters of grapes resemble lymph nodes? Perhaps nature has a way of showing us foods that are good

for certain areas of the body because grapes assist with lymphatic system flow, as well as reduce bloating.

11. HEMP SEEDS: Hemp seeds are not only rich in protein and fiber, they are a fantastic source of stress-reducing magnesium.

12. KALE: Rich in chlorophyll, kale helps to purify the blood and reduces cravings for sugar. Try adding kale to smoothies and juices or make easy cheesy kale chips.

13. KELP: Kelp is high in iodine, which helps to support thyroid function and boost metabolism.

14. ONIONS: Not only do onions kill bacteria and viruses, they are a wonderful support for the liver because they eliminate waste materials and detoxify the body. Onions are great sautéed as part of a stir-fry meal, when added raw in guacamole or as a sandwich topping.

15. PARSLEY: Along with helping to detox your body from heavy metals, parsley also helps to promote kidney health. Use this powerful herb in juices, smoothies, tabbouleh and in green salads. Chew after you eat garlic or onion to freshen up the breath.

16. RASPBERRIES: Rich in fiber, antioxidants and good-for-you sugar. These little berries strengthen your immune system to help fight off disease. Add them to your smoothie or eat them raw, drizzled with honey.

17. RED PEPPERS: Did you know that red peppers can have more vitamin C than oranges? Red peppers also are high in antioxidants and phytonutrients.

18. SESAME SEEDS: Rich in calcium to help support strong bones.

19. SWEET POTATOES: Loaded with potassium to regulate water retention and balance blood sugar. Substitute sweet potatoes for regular white potatoes; they're great as fries or in as a sweet potato mash.

20. TOMATOES: They're rich in lycopene, which helps support heart health. For those who do have heart issues, try sun-dried tomatoes—they have even more lycopene.

FOOD FOR THE MIND - MY TOP 10 INSPIRING BOOKS

The Art of Extreme Self-Care: Transform Your Life One Month at a Time, Cheryl Richardson (Hay House, 2009) - Learn fantastic ways to make self-care a daily part of your life.

Dying To Be Me, Anita Moorjani (Hay House, 2014) - Anita Moorjani shares her near death experience and how it helped her heal her body and truly live.

Excuses Begone: How to Change Lifelong, Self-Defeating Thinking Habits, Wayne Dyer (Hay House, 2011) - If you are struggling with keeping your promises to yourself, then this book is a must-read.

Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life, Byron Katie (Three Rivers Press, 2003) - Learn four simple questions that can help make you feel calm faster than you thought was possible.

A New Earth, Eckhart Tolle (Penguin Books, 2006) - Life-changing book that shows you a new way to look at yourself and the world.

Real Love, Greg Baer (Avery, 2004) - A great book for those who want to experience real love in their lives.

The Shadow Effect: Illuminating the Hidden Power of Your True Self, Deepak Chopra, Debbie Ford and Marianne Williamson (HarperOne, 2011) - This book will show you that it is OK to love your darkness and that every shadow has a powerful light to complement it.

The Spontaneous Healing of Belief: Shattering the Paradigm of False Limits, Gregg Braden (Hay House, 2009) - Learn how the power of belief can have almost magical effect on the body.

Women, Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything, Geneen Roth (Scribner, 2011)- A phenomenal book by my favorite author that inspires me daily. The title says it all.

Zero Limits: The Secret Hawaiian System for Wealth, Health, Peace, and More, Joe Vitale (Wiley, 2008) - Joe Vitale shares a powerful way to change your mind and change your life.

CHAPTER 13

Recipes

*“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well,
if one has not dined well.”*

– Virginia Woolf

In this part of the book you will find some of my favorite recipes.

They are all dairy-free, soy-free and gluten-free.

I didn't want to overwhelm you with too many choices because this book is about self-love first and foremost, so I am keeping them to a minimum to get you started.

Please always use organic and non-GMO ingredients, when possible as they love you and our planet the most.

Many of these recipes come with video instructions that you can find at www.YouTube.com/AlinaZshow

Z-TIP: Make big portions, then either place individual servings in to-go containers or leave everything in big glass bowls. This way you will have food in the house without having to cook every day!

And now ... let's eat!

BANANA PANCAKES

This is one of my all-time favorite recipes. I eat these pancakes hot for breakfast or cold as a snack. They are filling and healthy, yet feel very decadent and rich.

Batter

1 Cup oat flour (*you can finely grind whole oats and measure out 1 cup*)
3/4 Cup vanilla almond milk
1 Ripe banana
1 Organic Vital Farms® egg or Follow Your Heart® egg substitute
1 Tablespoon ground golden flaxseeds
1 Teaspoon baking powder
1 Teaspoon coconut nectar or maple syrup (*more if you want them sweeter*)
1/4 Teaspoon sea salt
Grapeseed oil spray

Strawberry sauce

2 Cups strawberries, chopped
1/2 Cup pitted dates

Preparation

To make the batter, mix all dry ingredients and set aside. In a separate bowl, mash banana with a fork and mix with egg and almond milk. Combine all ingredients into pancake batter.

Heat up a non-stick pan on medium heat, spray with grapeseed oil and pour desired amount of the batter onto pan. I like to make small pancakes, using 1/4 cup of the batter per piece. Cook for about 1 minute on each side.

Preparation for the sauce

Blend 1 cup of strawberries with dates in a blender or food processor. Add remaining strawberries into mixture and combine by hand.

Serve pancakes with the sauce.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

PITAYA (DRAGONFRUIT) BOWL

One of my favorite food groups is ice cream; however, it doesn't love my body too much, so I try to avoid it. When I want to satisfy the cravings for cold, creamy food, this is my go-to dish. I like to buy dragonfruit fresh when it is in season, cut and freeze the chunks for later use. You can also buy it already frozen in small packs.

Pitaya Base

- 1 Cup frozen pitaya (*with magenta-colored flesh*)
- 1/2 Frozen ripe banana
- 1/2 Cup frozen mango
- 1/2 Cup frozen raspberries
- 1/4 Cup coconut water or unsweetened almond milk
- 1/2 Teaspoon vanilla extract

Toppings

- Fresh strawberries
- Goji berries
- Gluten-free granola (*I like Mamma Chia® brand*)
- Chia seeds
- Coconut shreds

Preparation

Blend all bowl ingredients in a Vitamix®, using a plunger to move the ingredients around. If using a regular blender, add more liquid or use fresh fruit instead of frozen to get it to blend.

Pour into a bowl and decorate with either suggested toppings or your favorite fruits, berries, nuts and granola.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

HAZELNUT CHOCOLATE CREPES

If you thought that crepes cannot be healthy, then you are in for a sweet surprise, literally. Make these and serve them to your kids without telling them what they are made of. They will never know these yummy rolls are really oatmeal, beans and Omega-3 fatty acids in disguise.

Ingredients

1/2 Cup oat flour (*you can finely grind rolled oats & measure out 1/2 cup*)
1/2 Cup chickpea flour
1.25 Cups unsweetened almond milk
2 Organic Vital Farms® eggs or Follow Your Heart® eggs substitute
1 Dash stevia (*equivalent to 1 teaspoon of sugar*)
1 Teaspoon vanilla
1/4 Teaspoon sea salt
Grapeseed oil spray, for cooking

Accessories

A jar of Nutiva® chocolate hazelnut butter
Cropped roasted hazelnuts

Preparation

Place both flours, milk, eggs or egg substitutes, vanilla and salt in the blender and blend for 20 seconds until smooth. Let the batter sit for 15 minutes at room temperature.

Spray a non-stick pan with grapeseed oil and heat up on medium heat until oil starts to sizzle.

Pour 1/3 of a cup of batter onto the pan, quickly turning it in circular motion to let the batter spread in a thin layer over the entire flat surface of the pan.

Cook for 1-2 minutes until crepe gets a golden-brown crust on the bottom. Loosen the sides of the crepe with a wooden spatula and flip. Cook on the other side for 20 seconds.

When crepes are done, spread hazelnut butter in a shape of a long strip in the middle of each one and roll. Sprinkle with chopped hazelnuts and serve.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

BERRY CHIA PUDDING

This chia pudding is my mom's favorite. She makes a big batch of it once every 3-4 days and eats it every morning. It is rich in Omega-3 essential fatty acids that can help reduce inflammation and boost brain power.

Ingredients

- 1.25 Cup coconut milk from the recipe below
- 1/3 Cup chia seeds (*white, black or a mix*)
- 1 Tablespoon coconut nectar
- 1/4 Teaspoon cinnamon

Accessories

- 1 Tablespoon hemp seeds
- 1 Teaspoon goji berries
- 1 Teaspoon dried currants
- 1/4 Cup strawberries, sliced
- 1/4 Cup blueberries

Coconut Milk Ingredients

- 1 Raw coconut water (*Harmless Harvest® brand works great here*)
- 1/4 Cup cooking coconut milk (*I like So Delicious® brand*)
- 1/4 Teaspoon vanilla extract

Preparation

Mix coconut milk ingredients in a bowl, using a fork to blend well.

Add chia seeds, coconut nectar and cinnamon to the milk. Stir for a minute to make sure the seeds don't stick together. Let sit for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Mixture will thicken, making it a rich pudding.

Accessorize with goji berries, dried currants, fresh berries and hemp seeds.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

EASY SUPERFOOD MUFFINS

My mom once tried to eat only one muffin at a time and failed terribly after she devoured three of these little guys. I like to make mine with blueberries and walnuts, although milk chocolate chips come in close second.

Dry ingredients

- 2 Tablespoons whole chia seeds
- 1.25 Cups oat flour
- 3/4 Cup oat bran
- 2/3 Cup ground flax seeds
- 1 Teaspoon baking soda
- 1 Teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 Teaspoon sea salt

Wet ingredients

- 1.25 Cups almond milk
- 1/2 Cup maple syrup or coconut nectar
- 1/2 Cup unsweetened applesauce
- 1 Teaspoon vanilla extract

Accessories

- 1/2 Cup fresh blueberries
- 1/2 Cup chopped walnuts

Preparation

Mix chia seeds with wet ingredients first, stirring them with a fork. Let the seeds soak for five minutes while you prepare the dry ingredients in a separate bowl.

Once the seeds have soaked, add dry ingredients to the wet ones. Mix in the accessories.

Separate the dough between 12 muffin cups and bake for 25 minutes at 350°F. Let cool.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

SUPERFOOD SMOOTHIE

A green smoothie has been a staple in my diet for years. This recipe is my favorite combination, so try it and see how you feel. The best thing about this smoothie is that you can easily customize it with any combination of greens, fruit and berries.

Ingredients

1 Cup raw spinach or kale
1 Frozen banana (*you can substitute for frozen pineapple or mango*)
1 Cup frozen strawberries (*you can substitute for any other kind of frozen berries*)
1 Cup vanilla almond milk (*if you are new to green smoothies, try sweetened almond milk. If you have had green smoothies before, try the unsweetened variety or make your own from page 102*)

Accessories:

2 Tablespoons of vanilla protein powder (*Nutiva® is my favorite*)
1/2 Teaspoon chlorella or multi-greens powder
1/2 Teaspoon of maca powder

Preparation

Blend all ingredients in a high-speed blender and enjoy.

Z-TIP: Double the recipe and pour the second portion into a glass jar. Seal the jar and store in the fridge to enjoy later in the day as a snack or the following morning as breakfast.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

OVERNIGHT BERRY OATMEAL

Sometimes I crave a soothing oatmeal that will keep me full and satisfied. Here is my favorite recipe that I can't get enough of. I prepare it in the evening and it is ready to grab-and-go in the morning.

Ingredients

1.25 Cups coconut milk from the recipe below
1/4 Cup fresh or frozen mixed berries
1/2 Cup rolled oats
2 Tablespoons oat bran
1-2 Teaspoons ground flax seeds
1 Teaspoon vanilla extract
1 Tiny scoop of stevia, equivalent to 1 teaspoon of sugar
Sea salt to taste

Coconut Milk Ingredients

1 Cup raw coconut water (*Harmless Harvest® brand works great here*)
1/4 Cup cooking coconut milk (*I like So Delicious® brand*)

Preparation

Mix coconut milk ingredients in a bowl, using a fork to blend well.

Mix milk with the rest of ingredients together in a mason jar, seal and leave in the fridge overnight. If you'd like, you can add more coconut milk to thin it out in the morning.

Try substituting berries for fruit or chocolate chips to create a different flavor.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

RAW VEGAN NACHOS

I love Mexican food and use this versatile “meat” recipe in enchiladas, tacos and burritos, as well as nachos. Simply substitute regular meat with the crumbles recipe below and use with your favorite shells and fixings.

Mexican meaty crumbles

- 2 Cups walnuts, soaked in filtered water for 8 hours and drained
- 1 Cup Brazil nuts
- 1.5 Cups sun-dried tomatoes (*NOT in oil*), soaked in water for 2 hours
- 1.5 Tablespoons chili powder
- 1.5 Tablespoons cumin powder
- 1.5 Teaspoons sea salt
- 1/2 Cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 Large jicama, cut in thin slices in shape of chips.

Accessories

- 1 Cup shredded purple cabbage
- 1 Cup shredded carrots
- 1 Cup guacamole (*you can use the protein guacamole recipe on page 124*)
- 1 Cup pico de gallo

Preparation

Place all ingredients except cilantro and jicama in a food processor with an S-blade, pulsing mixture until blended well. Add chopped cilantro. Place meaty nacho crumbles onto jicama chips and accessorize with purple cabbage, carrots, guacamole and pico de gallo from the recipe below.

Pico de gallo

- 2 Medium tomatoes
- 1/2 Onion
- 1/4 Cup cilantro
- 1 lime, juiced
- 1/2 Teaspoon sea salt

Preparation

Chop tomato, cilantro and onion. Mix together with lime juice and salt.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

COLLARD LEAF SANDWICHES

This is my favorite recipe in the summer when I need a power-lunch on-the-go. If you make it the day before, skip the avocado, as it can turn brown.

Ingredients

- 1 Container of store bought hummus or use the recipe on the next page
- 6 Collard leaves
- 1 Cup purple cabbage, shredded
- 1 Cup cucumber, sliced in thin strips
- 1 Cup carrots, sliced thin
- 1 Avocado, sliced thin
- 1/4 Mango, sliced thin
- 1 Cup alfalfa sprouts
- 1 Cup sunflower sprouts

Preparation

Cut the stems out of collard leaves and make 2 long leaves out of each one.

Place the leaf shiny side down and layer the vegetables on top. I like to hide avocado slices under sprouts, so they don't slip when rolling the leaves.

Put a tablespoon of hummus towards the end closest to you and roll the leaves towards you, so hummus will help you seal the wraps. .



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

EASY HUMMUS

Hummus is one of the staples in my house. I like to eat it as snack with raw veggies, use it as a spread in sandwiches and even add it to salads instead of dressings. It is pretty easy to make. Try to it believe it.

Ingredients

1.5 Cup cooked chickpeas (*I like to buy mine in a box instead of a can*)
1/2 - 1 whole squeezed lemon
1 Tablespoon sesame tahini
1 Teaspoon sea salt
1 Clove of garlic

Accessories

Paprika
Pine nuts
Marinated artichokes
Sun-dried tomatoes
Cucumber slices
Sami's Bakery millet and flax chips
Marinated mushrooms

Preparation

Drain chickpeas and set liquid aside.

Blend all the ingredients in a high-speed blender or food processor. Add some chickpea water, if needed for thinner consistency. Serve with accessories of your choice.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

COUTURE KALE SALAD

I think of kale as the Cinderella of vegetables. Great on the inside, but in order to catch your attention, it needs a pretty outfit. Give this recipe a chance to impress you and it may be the beginning of a culinary romance.

Ingredients

5 Cups of raw kale, shredded
1/2 Cup pine nuts
1/2 Cup sun-dried tomatoes (*dried currants also work great here*)
1/2 Cup Follow Your Heart® Parmesan (*Optional*)

Dressing

1/4 Cup freshly-squeezed lemon juice
3 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 Cloves of garlic, minced
1/2 Teaspoon sea salt
Pepper to taste

Preparation

Mix dressing ingredients in a large bowl and then add kale (you could mix the dressing in a separate bowl, but then you would have an extra dish to wash).

With your hands, lightly massage the kale to make sure all leaves are dressed. Accessorize the salad with pine nuts, sun-dried tomatoes (or currants) and Follow Your Heart® Parmesan.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

BUCKWHEAT NOODLE BOWL

If you are craving pasta, but feel that a salad is more loving to your body, then try this dish. It is the best of both worlds!

Ingredients

- 1 Cup cooked 100% buckwheat soba noodles (*I use Eden Foods® brand*)
- 3 Cups purple cabbage, shredded
- 3/4 Cup carrots, shredded
- 1/2 Cup celery, shredded

Dressing Ingredients

- 3 Tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 1 Oz lime juice
- 5 Teaspoons coconut aminos by Coconut Secret®
- 1/2 Tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 Teaspoon sea salt

Accessories

- 1/2 Cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 Tablespoon black and white sesame seeds

Preparation

Mix all ingredients together. Accessorize with additional sesame seeds, shredded carrots and cilantro. Makes 2 servings.

FUN FACT: This recipe was featured in the *Miami Herald* when I launched DLrevAMP Detox, that was also named #1 Best Diet by *Harper's Bazaar* Magazine.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

DETOX SALAD

If you have been looking for a fresh new way to enjoy kale, then try this recipe. The key here is to massage the veggies with the dressing, so they soften.

Salad ingredients

- 3 Cups raw kale, chopped
- 1 Cup raw or lightly steamed broccoli, chopped
- 1 Cup raw or lightly steamed cauliflower, chopped
- 1 Cup raw carrots, chopped

Accessories

- 1 Cup sliced watermelon radishes
- 1/3 Cup raw sprouted sunflower seeds
- 1/3 Cup dried cranberries

Detox dressing ingredients

- 1/2 Cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/3 Cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3 Tablespoons raw apple cider vinegar
- 3 Tablespoons raw honey (*local or manuka honey are best*)
- 1 Teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 Teaspoon cayenne pepper (*optional*)

Preparation

In a large bowl, combine all dressing ingredients, stirring them with a fork to combine well. Add broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and kale and massage the veggies with the dressing for about a minute.

Accessorize with watermelon radishes, sprouted sunflower seeds and dried cranberries.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

SUPERFOOD SPINACH SALAD

This dish doesn't even require cooking. You simply toss all the ingredients together and you have yourself a meal that's rich in protein and fiber. This recipe makes 2-3 servings, so I make it once and eat from it for a couple of days.

Ingredients

- 3 Cups fresh spinach, chopped
- 1 Cup cooked garbanzo beans
- 1 Cup cooked quinoa
- 1/2 Avocado, diced
- 1/2 Cup yellow peppers, diced
- 1/3 Cup cherry tomatoes, cut in halves
- 1/3 Cup sprouted pumpkin seeds
- 1/4 Cup marinated olives, cut in halves

Dressing

- 1 Tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- Sea salt and pepper to taste

Preparation

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl to create high-protein, super-food meal.

Z-TIP: Mix and match different ingredients. Try it with arugula, brown rice and cannellini beans, or kale with black beans and farro. This recipe is meant to give you an idea of how to make a yummy dish that is filling, healthy and satisfying.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

PROTEIN GUACAMOLE

While most guacamole recipes are pretty similar to each other, this one is different - it is high in fiber and protein because we add green peas to it.

Ingredients

3 Ripe avocados, peeled with seed removed
2/3 Cup previously frozen green peas, thawed
1/2 Sweet onion, chopped
1-2 Limes, juiced
1/3 Cup cilantro, chopped
1 Clove garlic
1 Teaspoon sea salt

Accessories

Jicama slices
Beanitos bean chips

Preparation

Place garlic clove in food processor with an S-blade and chop finely. Add 2 avocados, green peas, lime juice and salt. Process until smooth with a few lumps.

Add onions and pulse to chop fine. Add last avocado and cilantro; pulse to chop, leaving some chunks.

Z-TIP: To keep guacamole from turning dark, cover with plastic wrap, making sure it touches guacamole directly on top.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

EASY GUILT- FREE PIZZA

If you are short on time and have a strong craving for a pizza, try this recipe. It will be faster than delivery and will leave you satisfied without feeling any eater's remorse. I always have the ingredients at the house, in case a craving hits.

Ingredients

1 Sami's Bakery® millet and flax lavash or Udi's® gluten-free pizza crust
1 Jar of pizza sauce
1 Bag of Daiya® mozzarella cheese
8 Oz mixed mushrooms
5 Cloves of roasted garlic
1 Cup of fresh spinach
Grapeseed oil spray
Sea salt to taste

Preparation

Defrost one lavash or pizza crust in the oven or toaster oven at 375°F for 2-3 minutes.

While crust is defrosting, saute mixed mushrooms with grapeseed oil and a pinch of salt in a pan for 2-3 minutes.

Spread 1/4-1/2 cup pizza sauce on the crust and place fresh spinach on top. Add remaining toppings and bake for 5 minutes at 375°F or until cheese has melted.

Z-TIP: I order Sami's Bakery® lavashes in bulk and freeze them. I use them for sandwiches, wraps, quesadillas and pizzas. Check out the healthy hazelnut chocolate pizza recipe on page 152.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

3-MINUTE CHILI IN A SWEET POTATO

When you only have three minutes and need an easy meal, make this dish without the sweet potato. You won't believe how simple it is. I usually have all of the ingredients in the house just in case. If you do have time, definitely make it with the potato.

Ingredients

- 1 Bag of Beyond Meat® beefy crumbles
- 1 12-Ounce jar your favorite salsa
- 1 10-Ounce box of unflavored kidney beans
- 1/2 Cup Daiya® cheddar cheese
- 4 Sweet potatoes

Preparation

Combine beans, salsa and beefy crumbles together in pan and sauté for 3 minutes.

Preheat oven to 400°F. Wash sweet potatoes, pierce the skin of each one with a fork 4-5 times. Place on a lined baking sheet and bake until tender, 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Once cooked, cut sweet potato length-wise and stuff with chili. Drizzle with Daiya cheese, place in the oven for another 2-3 minutes to melt the cheese, then serve.

Z-TIP: Make this recipe without the potato and serve as an appetizer with Beanito bean chips. I like to keep all of the ingredients on hand at the house in case friends come over for an unexpected get-together. It always wows even the most picky meat-eaters.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

STUFFED PEPPERS

While this recipe may look like it is complex, it is really easy to make.

Try using tri-colored peppers so this dish looks bright and sunny.

It is perfect to brighten up any cold and cloudy day.

Ingredients

3 Bell peppers, cut in halves length-wise, with seeds removed
1 Bag of Beyond Meat® beefy crumbles or 10 oz of mixed mushrooms
10 Oz cooked brown rice (*to save time, you can buy frozen rice*)
1/2 Onion, chopped
1/2 Cup carrots, shredded
1 Tablespoon butter-flavored coconut oil by Nutiva®
1 Teaspoon sea salt
Pepper to taste

Accessories

Fresh herbs of your choice, such as chopped chives, parsley or dill

Preparation

Pre-heat oven to 350°F

Heat up coconut oil in a pan on the stove. Add chopped onion and carrots. Sauté for 2-3 minutes, until onion is translucent. Add Beyond Meat® crumbles or mixed mushrooms to the pan and continue to sauté for another 3-5 minutes. Finally, add rice and mix everything together.

Line a baking pan with parchment paper and place bell pepper halves on top. If peppers are wobbly, use a pairing knife to take a little slice off the bottom of each half, to create a flat surface.

Scoop out the rice mixture and place inside each pepper. Bake for 10-15 minutes.

Accessorize with fresh herbs



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

OOEY GOOEY MAC & CHEESE

Sometimes you just want a good ol' mac and cheese. This recipe will hit the spot, no guilt what-so-ever! And if you have time to make your own sauce from the recipe, then you will get bonus vitamin B-12 and stress-reducing magnesium.

Ingredients

4 Cups dried red lentil or quinoa elbow-shaped pasta
2 Cup cheddar Daiya® cheese or use the homemade recipe below
1 Tablespoon butter-flavored coconut oil by Nutiva®
1/2 Cup unsweetened almond milk (*if using Daiya® for the recipe*)
1/2 Teaspoon of smoked salt (*if using Daiya® for the recipe*)
Pepper to taste

Homemade cheddar sauce

1 Cup raw cashews, soaked for 8 hours in water and drained
1 Cup roasted butternut squash cubes (*previously frozen can work as well*)
1/2 Cup filtered water (*add more if you would like a thinner sauce*)
1/4 Cup nutritional yeast
1/2 Teaspoon smoked salt
1/2 Teaspoon onion powder
1/2 Teaspoon garlic powder
Juice of 1 lemon (*add last, 1 teaspoon at a time, to taste*)

Preparation for the homemade cheese

Blend all ingredients except lemon juice in a blender until smooth. Slowly add lemon juice to desired flavor.

Preparation to complete the dish

Cook macaroni according to the package.

If using Daiya cheese, in a small pot, combine the cheese shreds, butter-flavored coconut oil, almond milk, salt and pepper. Cook to melt the cheese. Add macaroni when cheese starts to bubble and serve.

If using homemade cheddar sauce, simply heat it with the butter-flavored coconut oil and mix with the pasta.

Z-TIP: Use this recipe for the homemade cheddar sauce on top of nachos, burgers or any other dish that calls for a cheesy sauce.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

COCONUT BROWN RICE & QUINOA

This recipe is perfect for cold and grey days. I find it is so grounding and soothing! It is like a little ray of sunshine. Ginger and garlic make it a great immunity booster, so it's my go-to meal during the flu season.

Ingredients

2 Cups brown rice, cooked
1 Cup quinoa, cooked
1 Cup chickpeas, cooked
1/2 Cup carrots, shredded
1/2 Cup cabbage, shredded
1/2 Cup red pepper, chopped
1/2 Cup large coconut flakes
3 Tablespoons coconut oil
2 Cloves garlic, chopped
1 Inch ginger root, chopped
1/2 Teaspoon sea salt
1 To 2 teaspoons apple cider rice vinegar to taste

Preparation

Lightly sauté chopped garlic and ginger in pan with coconut oil until fragrant.

Add all vegetables and quick sauté for about 1 minute.

Add brown rice, chickpeas and quinoa. Stir together for 1 minute to mix well and warm up. Season with sea salt and apple cider vinegar to taste.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

EASY GLUTEN-FREE LASAGNA

This is my most-watched recipe on [YouTube.com/AlinaZshow](https://www.youtube.com/AlinaZshow) - even meat-eaters love it and I know many men who have made it themselves. I like to make a big pan and then freeze individual portions for later if I don't polish off the dish that week.

Ingredients

- 1 Package of rice lasagna noodles that don't need to be pre-boiled
- 1 Large jar of marinara sauce
- 1 Bag of Beyond Meat® beefy crumbles
- 1 Batch of creamy béchamel sauce (*recipe below*)
- 1 Bag of mozzarella Daiya® cheese
- Fresh basil to accessorize

Béchamel sauce

- 2/3 Cup cashews, soaked for 5 hours or overnight in water and rinsed
- 1.5 Cups of plain almond milk
- 1/2 Lemon, juiced
- 1/4 Cup nutritional yeast
- 2 Cloves of garlic
- 1 Teaspoon sea salt

Béchamel sauce preparation

Blend bechamel ingredients in a blender to make the sauce.

Lasagna preparation

Layer your lasagna in the following order:

1. Marinara – place it on the bottom of the pan.
2. Noodles
3. Marinara
4. Meat crumbles
5. Bechamel
6. Noodles
7. Marinara
8. Meat crumbles
9. Daiya® cheese
10. Noodles
11. Marinara
12. Daiya® cheese
13. Bechamel

Cover lasagna with foil and bake at 375°F for 50 minutes. Remove foil and cook for 10 minutes.

Accessorize with basil and serve.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

SMOKY PORTOBELLO MUSHROOM WITH CAULIFLOWER-LEEK MASH

*This recipe is perfect for occasions when you want to impress your friends
without spending too much time or making anything too heavy.*

Ingredients for the mushrooms

- 4 Portobello mushroom caps
- 1/2 Cup of lemon juice
- 1 Tablespoon smoked salt
- 2 Teaspoons extra virgin olive oil

Preparation

Marinate mushrooms for 2 hours in a bowl, flipping them every 30 minutes.

Ingredients for the stuffing

- 3 Cups walnuts, soaked for 12 hours in water and drained
- 2 Teaspoons of each - fresh sage, fresh rosemary and fresh thyme
- 1 Clove garlic, chopped
- 1 Teaspoon sea salt

Preparation

Place nuts, fresh herbs, garlic and salt into a food processor with an S-blade or a Vitamix® and blend until smooth. Add water if needed. When mushrooms are done marinating, scoop up the stuffing and put inside mushroom caps.

Cauliflower-leek mash ingredients

- 2 Heads of cauliflower, cut up in 1-inch pieces
- 2 Leeks, thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
- 2 Cloves garlic, chopped
- 1/2 Teaspoon sea salt
- 2 Tablespoons lemon
- 2 Teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons grapeseed oil

Preparation

Steam cauliflower until tender. Sauté leeks with garlic and oil until leeks are translucent. Blend all ingredients in a blender to make the mash.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

SPAGHETTI SQUASH

This recipe is my sister's favorite. It is so easy to make using my steaming method and it satisfies cravings for pasta without weighing you down.

Ingredients

1 Medium spaghetti squash
16 Oz of tomato basil pasta sauce
8 Oz dairy-free Kite Hill® cream cheese
1 Cup baby bella mushrooms
1 Container of Follow Your Heart® Soy-Free Parmesan (*Optional*)
Parsley, as an accessory

Preparation

Cut the squash length-wise, scoop out seeds, place in pan with 1-inch deep hot water, cover with a lid and steam for about 15-20 minutes or until soft. Use a fork to punch through to check on the density.

While the squash is cooking, sauté mushrooms in another pan for 2-3 minutes, then add tomato sauce and cream cheese.

When squash is cooked, scoop it out with large metal spoon and add to creamy pasta sauce mixture. Be careful as squash will be hot! I always use oven mitts to protect my hands.

Mix well with the sauce and serve. Accessorize with fresh parsley and Follow Your Heart® Parmesan cheese.

Z-TIP: I prefer to steam this squash because it takes less time than baking. However, I do enjoy the baked flavor a little more. So, when I have extra time, I bake it at 350°F for 45 minutes.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

When you don't have time to make a complicated dessert and just crave rich chocolate, try this recipe. It is also my go-to sweet treat during that time of the month. It can help you relax and reduce bloating.

Mousse Ingredients

1/2 Cup vanilla almond milk or coconut water
1/2 Cup maple syrup
1/2 Cup unsweetened cocoa powder
2 Ripe avocados
1 Tablespoon vanilla extract
1/2 Teaspoon sea salt

Accessories

Fresh raspberries
Coconut shavings

Preparation

Place the mousse ingredients in the order as they appear, beginning with liquids, in a Vitamix® or another high-power blender and blend until smooth.

If the consistency is too thick, add more almond milk or coconut water. Accessorize with raspberries and coconut shavings.

Z-TIP: Use this recipe as ganache for the brownie as an alternative to the peanut caramel sauce. This mousse also works great as a dipping sauce for fresh strawberries.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

NO-BAKING APPLE PIE

An apple a day keeps a doctor a way? What happens if we have the whole pie? I had a client who would eat the entire recipe in one day. That's how much she loved it.

Crust

- 1 Cup pitted medjool dates. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
- 1 Cup pecans
- 1 Cup walnuts
- 1/2 Teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 Teaspoon vanilla

Filling

- 3 Golden Delicious apples
- 3 Gala apples
- 4 Pitted medjool dates. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
- 2 Teaspoons ground golden flax seeds
- 2 Teaspoons of cinnamon
- 1 Teaspoon sea salt
- 1 Teaspoon vanilla

Accessories

- Coconut shreds
- Dried currants

Preparation for the crust

Process all crust ingredients in a food processor using an S-blade for 1-2 minutes. Transfer half of the crust to a pie dish and set half aside in a separate bowl. Use your hands to press the crust down until it is flat and firm in the pie dish.

Preparation for the filling

Quarter the apples and take out the seeds. Using the same food processor with the S-blade as you used for the crust, process 1 Golden Delicious and 2 Gala apples with dates, flax seeds, salt, cinnamon and vanilla to make apple sauce. Take out the S-blade and switch to a slicing blade. Slice the rest of apples, feeding each piece through the narrow feeding tube.

Mix sliced apples with the apple sauce mixture using a large spatula and put on top of the crust. Sprinkle with the rest of the crust and accessories.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

RAW VEGAN PEANUT BROWNIE

This is a rich and good-for-you brownie that is high in essential fatty acids - Omega-3, protein and fiber. I like to think of this recipe as almost-a-health food!

Brownie batter

2 Cups raw walnuts
1.5 Cups medjool dates, pitted. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
1 Cup raw cacao powder
1/4 Teaspoon sea salt

Preparation

Process in food processor with an S-blade for 2-3 minutes until well-blended. Separate the dough in 2 parts. Place one part in a small pan and push down with your hands. The dough should be about 1/2 inch thick.

Place peanut caramel sauce on top. Cover with the remaining brownie batter. Pat down with your hands to solidify and refrigerate to set. Cut in serving pieces and drizzle with chocolate sauce when ready to serve.

Peanut caramel sauce

1/2 Cup coconut nectar
1/2 Cup medjool dates, pitted. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
1/2 Cup coconut oil
1 Tablespoon vanilla
1/2 Teaspoon sea salt (*more if you'd like*)
2/3 Cup chopped peanuts

Caramel sauce preparation

Blend coconut nectar, dates, coconut oil, vanilla and salt in a high-speed blender until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and mix in chopped peanuts.

Chocolate sauce

1/2 Cup coconut nectar
2 Tablespoons cacao powder

Chocolate sauce preparation

Mix the ingredients with a fork in a small bowl for about 2 minutes, until well-blended.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

VANILLA LEMON CHEESECAKE

Besides chocolate, I absolutely love cheesecake! This recipe is dairy-free and there is no baking involved, so you can get instant gratification without feeling heavy afterwards.

Crust ingredients

- 1 Cup raw almonds
- 1 Cup raw walnuts
- 1 Cup medjool dates, pitted. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
- 1 Teaspoon vanilla powder
- 1/2 Teaspoon sea salt

Cheesecake filling ingredients

- 1.5 Cup soaked cashews (*soak them in water overnight if you can*)
- 3/4 Cup water
- 1 Tablespoon agar agar (*seaweed you can find in the Asian foods section*)
- 1/3 Cup lemon juice
- 1/2 Cup raw agave or coconut nectar
- 1/2 Cup Nutiva® coconut manna
- 1/4 Teaspoon nutritional yeast
- 1/4 Teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 Vanilla bean

Preparation

Process crust ingredients in a food processor using an S-blade until texture becomes dough-like. Press with your hands into a springform pan.

Boil water in a pot and dilute agar agar into it, stirring often. As soon as agar agar dissolves and the mixture becomes smooth, remove from heat and let cool for a couple of minutes.

While agar agar water is cooling, place all of the filling ingredients in high-speed blender. (Vitamix® works best here as you can use the plunger to move the batter around.) Pour the water with agar agar on top of the ingredients and blend until smooth.

Pour the cheesecake filling over the crust, freeze or refrigerate cheesecake until ready to serve.



**Photo credit JustForYou.ru. This cheesecake was a part of Balance X meal plan that I designed for this company.*

My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES

Who doesn't love chocolate? While this recipe is not an easy one, it is absolutely delicious. I like to make the whole thing once and then eat the truffles over the next few weeks. I find them so satisfying that I can easily eat just two at a time and stop.

Ingredients

1 Cup raw cacao powder, plus 1/4 cup for rolling
1 Cup medjool dates, pitted. *Do NOT buy already pitted dates*
3/4 Cup coconut nectar
1/2 Cup coconut manna (not oil) by Nutiva®
1/2 Vanilla bean
1/2 Teaspoons sea salt

Preparation

Place vanilla bean in food processor or Vitamix® with 1 cup cacao and blend until the bean is chopped. Add the rest of ingredients except coconut nectar and process until chocolate mass is formed. Slowly add coconut nectar and process to mix well.

Transfer to a bowl and refrigerate or freeze for 30 minutes.

When cooled, roll a small amount of the mixture into a ball in your hand, then brush with the reserved cacao powder so the truffle is not sticky outside. Makes 14-15 servings of 1-ounce truffles.

FUN FACT: This recipe was featured in the *Miami Herald* --when I launched DLrevAMP Detox, which was also named #1 Best Diet by *Harper's Bazaar* Magazine.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

CHOCOLATE HAZELNUT PIZZA

No cooking needed for this one! And it's high in Omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, potassium, fiber. Most importantly, it's delicious.

Ingredients

- 1 Sami's Bakery millet and flax lavash
- 1 Container of Nutiva® hazelnut chocolate butter

Accessories

- 1 Ripe banana, sliced
- 1 Cup fresh strawberries, sliced

Preparation

Toast lavash if you'd like this pizza more crunchy or use as is at room temperature.

Spread Nutiva® hazelnut chocolate butter over the lavash.

Accessorize with fresh strawberries and bananas and enjoy!



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

GOLDEN MILK NIGHTCAP

If you find yourself craving something cold, creamy and soothing at night, try this Golden Milk Smoothie instead of ice cream. It has great anti-inflammatory benefits and can help you sleep better.

Ingredients

8 oz of Harmless Harvest® coconut water
1/3 Cup coconut meat or soaked cashews (cashews make a good sleep aid)
1/3 Cup frozen guanabana
1/2 inch of fresh turmeric or a teaspoon of ground turmeric
1/4 inch of ginger root or 1/2 teaspoon of ground ginger
Dash of black pepper (*to maximize anti-inflammatory benefits of turmeric*)
1/2 cup of ice, optional
Stevia, optional
Cinnamon, to accessorize

Preparation

Put all ingredients in a high speed blender. No need to peel ginger or turmeric roots, just make sure to wash them well. Blend for 30 seconds or until smooth.

Accessorize with cinnamon.



My Couture Nutrition® alterations:

SWEET SNACK IDEAS

*If you don't need a whole meal and just want a quick snack,
here are some of my favorite go-to sweet snack ideas*

- BANANA PANCAKES, page 96
- CHIA PUDDING, page 102
- SUPERFOOD MUFFINS, page 104
- GREEN SUPERFOOD SMOOTHIE, page 106
- HAZELNUT CHOCOLATE PIZZA, page 152
- FRESH FRUIT, especially bananas and oranges, since you don't need to wash them
- FROZEN GRAPES
- SO DELICIOUS® COCONUT GREEK YOGURT
- APPLES with organic peanut butter
- RICE CAKES with almond butter and fresh berries
- BANANA "ICE CREAM" - peel 3 bananas, freeze, blend in a food processor.
- CINNAMON ACORN SQUASH: cut into chunks, sprinkle with cinnamon and Nutiva®'s butter-flavored coconut oil and bake for 15 minutes at 425°F
- HEALTH WARRIOR® 100 CALORIE CHIA BARS
- GHIRARDELLI® DARK CHOCOLATE, 2-inch squares
- TRAILMIX, try sticking to 1/4 cup for a snack

SAVORY SNACK IDEAS

For those who crave salty/savory snacks, I find these help do the trick. I usually have a few of these on hand at home in case a craving strikes.

- RAW VEGAN NACHOS, page 110
- HUMMUS with raw veggies, page 114
- RAW NUTS, try sticking to 1/4 cup for a snack
- SINGLE SERVING PACKETS OF HEMP SEEDS
- BEANITOS® GLUTEN-FREE CHIPS with salsa or guacamole from page 124
- CRUNCHY CHICKPEAS, these come in great different flavors. Find your favorite and enjoy!
- MARY'S GONE CRACKERS® with Miyoko®'s cheese
- KALE CHIPS
- OLIVES



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alina Z is an award-winning, Board-Certified Health Coach, Detox Specialist, Chef and Creator of the #1 Best Diet in America, as selected by *Harper's Bazaar* Magazine.

But just in 2009, Alina was a marketing executive who had a bad relationship with desserts and didn't even know how to peel a shallot. How did she find her way to peace with food & happiness?

Alina's unique approach to food begins with finding self-love and then creating a healthy diet that reflects your unique personality and lifestyle. Alina teaches that finding foods that fit you is a lot like choosing the fashions that fill your closet. It's a philosophy she calls "Couture Nutrition®" and sharing it with others is her passion. When you fall in love with yourself and understand food through fashion, she says, you learn realistic ways to boost your energy, control your weight, and look simply fabulous.

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and unafraid of new challenges, Alina Z came to America alone at only 15 with a dream to start a new life and launch a fulfilling career.

Alina began her journey at a Quaker high school in Maryland, then earned a degree in Design Management from the Parsons School of Design and has parlayed her sense of fashion design to her passion for food, nutrition and cooking in a way that creates your own individual style.

She became a board certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners after she completed her studies at the Institute For Integrative Nutrition - world's largest nutrition school.

Alina now coaches clients of all ages, both in person and across the world, on how to achieve vibrant health and happiness with a teaching style that's both fun and easy to follow. If she can do it, so can you!

DOES THIS SCENARIO SOUND FAMILIAR TO YOU?

1. You think that you need to lose weight and look “perfect” in order to be loved and feel happy.
2. You start to chase happiness by trying to lose weight.
3. You feel unhappy because, let’s be honest here, dieting sucks.
4. You lose a few pounds, yet you don’t feel happy.
5. Because you have been so miserable on this diet, you decide to “treat” yourself by going off the wagon for a meal... or two...ok, three.
6. You gain the weight right back, feel unloved, unhappy and alone.
7. You go back to step one.

If you have tried dieting and hated yourself for failing, you are not alone. Few authors understand the complex relationship between food and self-love (or lack of) quite like Alina Z. Before coming a sought-after holistic health coach, she has also faced her own share of demons when it comes to weight loss, body image and the deep-rooted psychology that can prevent us from loving ourselves.

In this book, Alina Z shares her comprehensive and easy-to-implement program that will give you the tools needed to fall in love with yourself and create your own empowering Couture Nutrition® solution for a healthy and happy life.



Alina Z is an award-winning health coach, chef and co-creator of DLrevAMP - #1 Diet in America, as selected by *Harper's Bazaar* Magazine.

Alina's passion is in helping people fall in love with themselves and teaching them simple and easy solutions to healthy eating. When you fully and unconditionally love and accept yourself, then pair self-love with food that fits your unique personality and lifestyle, you can truly satisfy your hunger.

Alina Z has been featured in:



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