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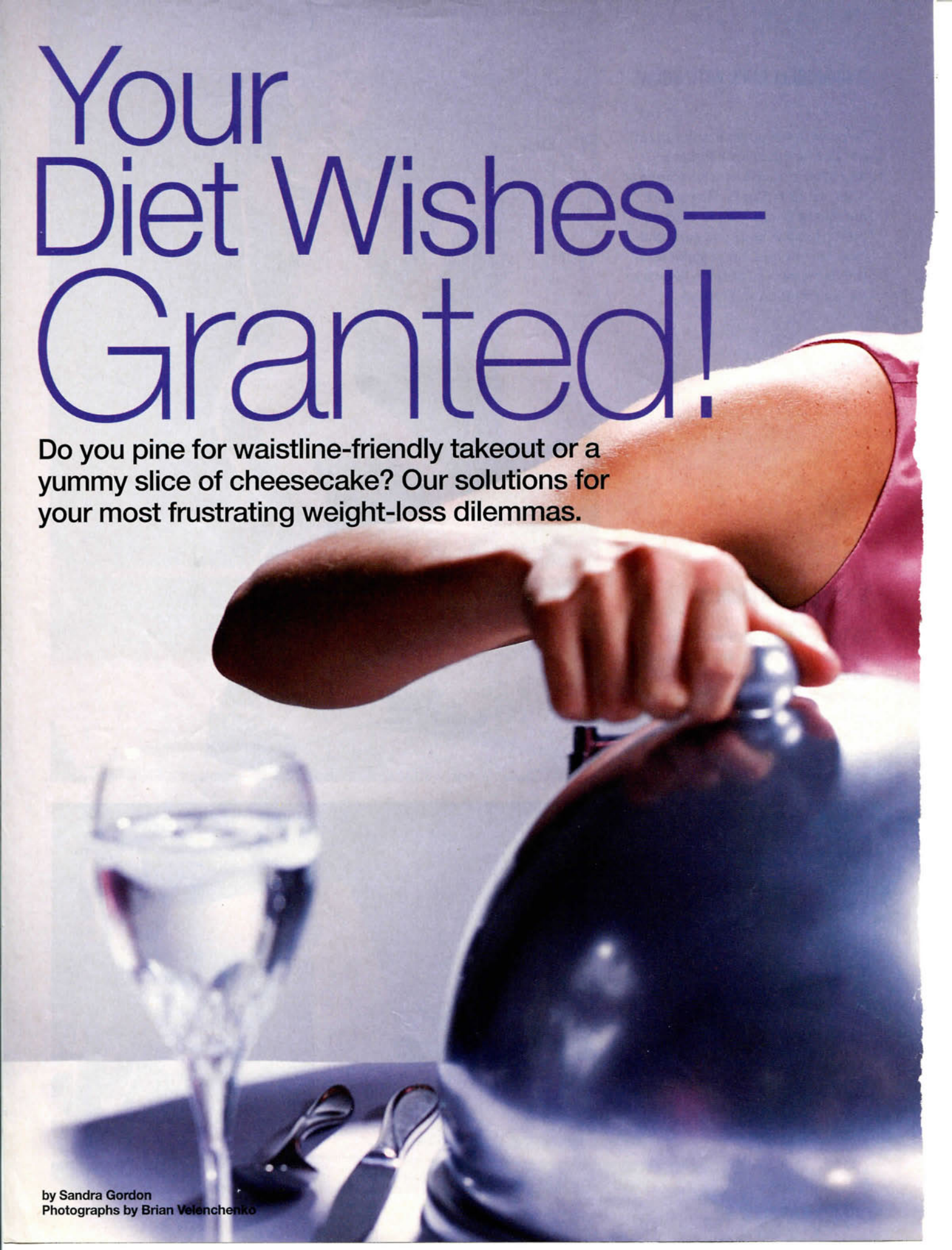
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Your Diet Wishes—Granted!

Do you pine for waistline-friendly takeout or a yummy slice of cheesecake? Our solutions for your most frustrating weight-loss dilemmas.

by Sandra Gordon
Photographs by Brian Velenchenko





As any woman who's pared down her portions or stifled her sweet tooth knows, finding ways to make dieting bearable is crucial to success. "If you're constantly fighting your cravings, they'll just come back even stronger," explains Dawn Jackson Blatner, R.D., of Northwestern Memorial Hospital Wellness Institute in Chicago.

We asked the experts for tips on everything from incorporating "forbidden" foods into your eating plan (hello, chocolate cheesecake!) to ordering take-out without derailing your diet. Follow their suggestions and very soon your biggest diet wish will come true: a slimmer, healthier you.

I wish...I could lose weight without giving up my favorite foods.

You can. In fact, you're more likely to reach your weight-loss goal if you incorporate the foods you love into your diet plan. When you prohibit something, the desire for it can become overwhelming and you may end up bingeing. In fact, you can even allocate up to 400 calories a day for treats (on an 1,800-calorie-per-day diet). The trick is to make sure the rest of your meals are nutrient-dense and no more than 1,400 calories total—meaning there's no room for frills like sauce on your chicken or butter on your bread, says Cathy Nonas, R.D., director of obesity and diabetes programs at North General Hospital in New York City. If your favorite splurge foods *are* meals, (like macaroni and cheese and porter-house steak), eat them only occasionally. Instead of making them yourself, split

an order at a restaurant (no tempting leftovers) and forgo something else that's high in calories.

I wish...I could work out without feeling famished and eating everything in sight afterward.

To ward off post-workout hunger, you need to eat before you exercise. "This keeps your appetite in check by stabilizing blood sugar, plus it helps fuel your workout and builds endurance," says Nancy Clark, R.D., author of *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook* (Human Kinetics, 2003). Clark suggests eating 100 to 300 calories of carbohydrate-based foods up to two hours before your workout. An energy bar, half a bagel with peanut butter or a small bowl of high-fiber cereal are good options. If you're trying to lose weight, factor those snacks into your daily calorie tally.

I wish...for a way to make vegetables tasty without adding fat.

Try roasting. "It brings out the vegetable's deep, rich flavor," says Walter Husbands, a chef and restaurant consultant in Oklahoma City. Toss cut-up carrots, peppers, eggplant—almost any vegetable works well, though broccoli tends to shrivel—with a drizzling of olive oil and a sprinkling of salt. Roast at 400 degrees for 20 minutes, until lightly browned and fork tender. The high heat, which sets roasting apart from baking, converts vegetables' starches to sugar, imparting a nutty sweetness that makes them perfect as a side dish, tossed into pasta or marinara sauce or incorporated into meat loaf or rice.

I wish...for a surefire way to tame temptation.

Don't fight it. If chocolate is your poison, keep individually wrapped Godiva squares or a box of chocolate sorbet pops on hand. If your tastes veer toward salt and crunch, stock up on single-

serving-size bags of pretzels and popcorn. "Make sure your 'craving cure' is no more than 150 calories," suggests Jackson Blatner. In case you're tempted to reach for another bag or square, chew some sugar-free mint gum to signal you're done, she advises.

I wish...I could eat a healthy, tasty lunch even though I'm chained to my desk.

Easy—bring your lunch to work, and keep it in the fridge or an insulated bag. When you make it yourself, you control fat and calories, and since it's right there, you won't succumb to high-fat takeout or skip lunch altogether and then ransack the vending machine. But what to make? According to Jackson Blatner, a healthful and satisfying lunch has five basic ingredients: whole-grain bread, crackers, rolls, bagels or tortillas; lean protein, such as cheese, bean soup, turkey or tuna; vegetables

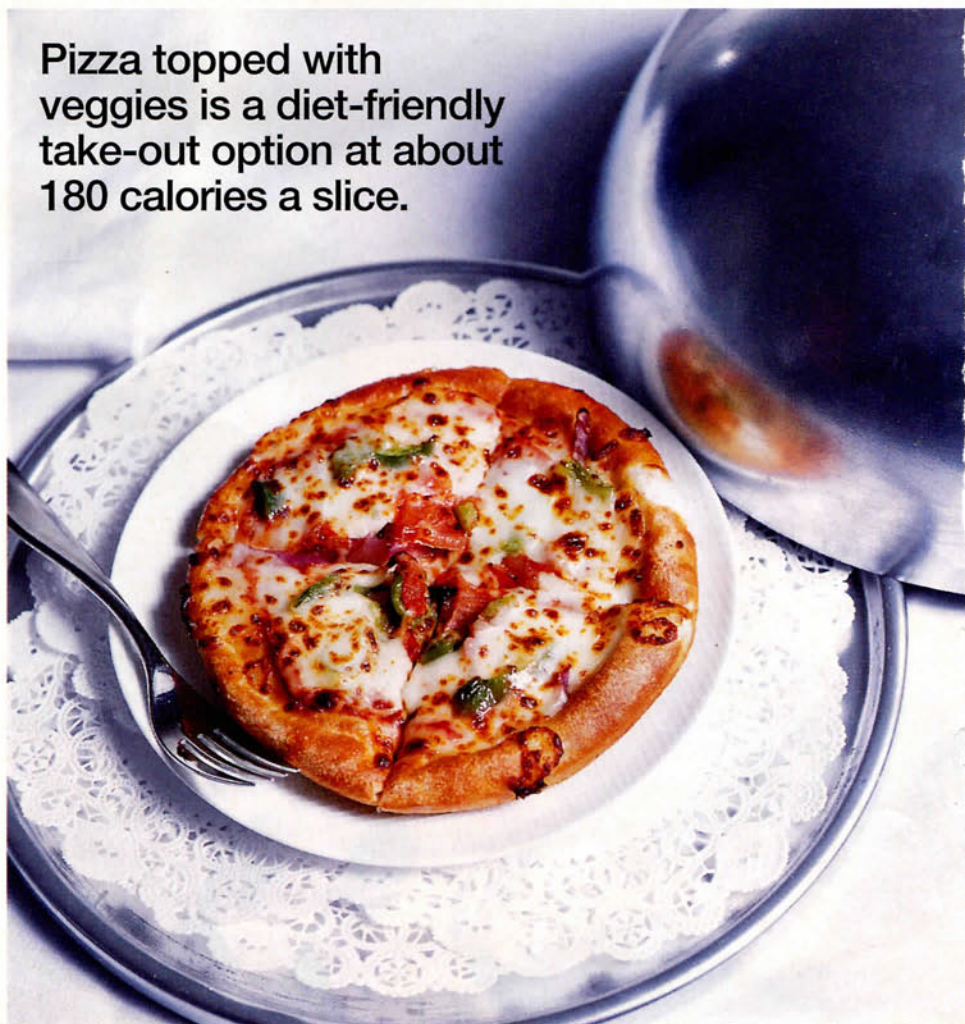
like carrot sticks or a green salad; a piece or a cup of fruit; and a low-calorie drink such as skim milk, seltzer or water.

If you don't want to make your lunch every day, wrap up leftovers from the previous night's dinner, or pack a frozen entrée. Check labels and choose meals that contain between 220 and 350 calories, no more than 4 grams of saturated fat, and 10 grams or more of protein.

I wish...for diet-friendly takeout.

Takeout can be healthy if you customize your order, says Jackie Newgent, R.D., a New York City-based nutrition and communications consultant. For fast food, good to-go choices include main-dish salads such as the Caesar Salad with Grilled Chicken at McDonald's, which has just 200 calories and 6 grams of fat. Instead of using the entire packet of dressing (190 calories and 18 grams of fat), dip your fork into it, then spear the lettuce. Skip the

Pizza topped with veggies is a diet-friendly take-out option at about 180 calories a slice.



croutons (60 calories, 1 gram of fat).

If you're craving Mexican, try Taco Bell's "Fresco Style" tacos, Gorditas, burritos or tostadas, which swap sauce and cheese for a mix of tomatoes, onions and cilantro. You'll save up to 120 calories and 12 grams of fat per item.

For Chinese, Newgent advises ordering stir-fry, such as chicken with broccoli or beef with broccoli, but getting the sauce on the side so you can add your own amount, which saves as many as 100 calories. For extra fiber, opt for brown rice instead of white. Thin-crust pizza is another great option, especially topped with vegetables like broccoli or lean meat like grilled chicken, says Newgent. Go light on the cheese and you'll save an estimated 100 calories per large slice.

I wish...I could get through my pregnancy without gaining a ton of weight.

The biggest mistake pregnant women make is thinking that it's a time to eat for two. In fact, you'll need only an extra 300 to 500 calories daily, depending on your activity level, to accommodate the nutritional demands of pregnancy, and that's mostly in the second and third trimesters, when the fetus is growing rapidly. "That's equivalent to half a turkey sandwich, a piece of fruit and a glass of skim milk," says Becky Hand, R.D., the nutrition consultant for Babyfit.com.

To keep your weight in check, Hand recommends planning three small nutrient-dense meals each day, plus two or three nutritious snacks such as yogurt, fruit, peanut butter and, yes, even ice cream (go low-cal or low-fat, if you like) so you don't get too hungry between meals. Use a food diary, but instead of recording what you ate afterward, write down each day's menu the night before.

Since you'll be weighed at each prenatal visit, it's easy to make sure you're on target, but you can also weigh yourself at home once a week. On average, expect to gain five to six pounds in the

first trimester and three-fourths to one pound a week in the second and third trimesters, says Susan Warhus, M.D., an ob/gyn and author of *Countdown to Baby: Answers to the 100 Most Asked Questions About Pregnancy & Childbirth* (Addicus Books, 2003). Staying within the pregnancy weight-gain recommendations—28 to 40 pounds if you're underweight to begin with, 25 to 35 pounds if you're a healthy weight and 15 to 25 pounds if you're overweight or obese—minimizes risks for both mother and baby, such as high blood pressure and low birth weight. It can also help you avoid long-term weight gain. According to a study published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, women who gained more weight than was recommended were more likely to be overweight a decade later. Still, no matter how much you weigh initially, never try to lose weight when you're pregnant. Severe calorie restriction during pregnancy has been linked to birth defects including mental retardation.

I wish...I could get down to my college weight. My scale is stuck five pounds above it.

If you're falling short of your goal by a mere five pounds, fine-tune your weight-loss efforts. Ask yourself: Am I nibbling? "A handful of pretzels here and there, sucking on hard candies throughout the day or even just sampling as you make dinner can add up to more calories than you might think," says Nonas. An extra 45 calories a day (the pretzel grab, for example) is all it takes to gain five pounds in a year. Also, scan your diet for anything that's megasized, such as your morning bagel, and eat just half or order a small one instead. Try cutting out something extra from your diet for two weeks, such as alcohol on the weekend or salad dressing, and see if you lose a pound or two.

To rule out underexercising, use a pedometer; you should be walking 10,000 steps a day. Still at your wit's end? Try a meal-replacement bar or shake to control portion sizes and calories. A recent

Australian study in the *Journal of Nutrition* showed that meal replacements can be as effective a weight-loss tool as a structured weight-loss program. "Finally, if it's really only five pounds, it may be due to physical changes such as perimenopause, certain medications or even from muscle if you're very active," Nonas says. "It could also be a sign that your goal weight just isn't realistic." Can't get past the obsession? Keep in mind that five pounds isn't something other people can see, says Nonas. And it's nothing a good pair of black pants or a pencil skirt and spiky heels can't hide.

I wish...I could have a cocktail without scarfing everything in sight.

Alcohol does lower your inhibitions. Studies show that when dieters have a little bit to drink, they are more inclined to overeat. Regardless of whether you're dieting, alcohol can pack on pounds. According to a French study of 73,000 women, the heaviest drinkers (those who had three or more glasses of wine daily) consumed 30 percent more calories per day than the nondrinkers.

Still, that doesn't mean you can't have a post-work cocktail or glass of wine—just be sure to eat something first. "The alcohol will be less likely to go to your head and weaken your resolve," says Katherine Tallmadge, R.D., author of *Diet Simple* (Lifeline Press, 2004). Start the night with a nonalcoholic drink, such as seltzer, and have something light like a shrimp cocktail, a vegetable plate or a handful of carrot sticks. Then have a drink. At a restaurant, ask the waiter to take the bread basket or chips away from the table, and order your meal before your cocktail. Planning to hit happy hour? While at work, eat a snack such as yogurt or low-fat cheese and crackers so that you don't arrive hungry. Also, have a glass of water with your drink. You'll be less apt to guzzle it, further letting down your guard. "The idea is to sip and savor a drink or two," Tallmadge says. ■