

# **Getting Slim**

# **Staying Slim**

*Heal Your Self !*

Jean-Luc Mommaerts, M.D., M.A.I.



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# *1. The slim ideal*

That women in glossy magazines and other media full of advertisements have to be superslim, has reasons that are very obvious from the viewpoint of suggestion. Advertisements have a low information content and a very high suggestion-to-buy content. Abstractly seen, the following happens:

- ◆ The consumer is made to feel less well by showing her somebody who is very 'happy', apparently *because* she conforms to the slim ideal. This condition to happiness is a supposition that is very powerful because it is mostly unspoken and because at the same time it is paramountly present in our society.
- ◆ The consumer is driven by the (consciously or unconsciously felt) frustration, to strive for this condition. (Read this sentence again and take notice of how the consumer is powerfully motivated twice, once negatively and once positively).
- ◆ Again and again the ad then proposes a merchandise that seems to bring happiness within reach. Even in ads for the most fatty foods, one can see superslim people. This proves that the world of advertising finds this principle very efficient.

In order to be optimally effective, the slim ideal has to be something that appeals to most people, but at the same time is rather inaccessible to most. The merchandise then becomes a surrogate for this. **The advertisement trick par excellence: make people unhappy, at the same time offer them happiness in a box.** Women in advertisements are superslim just because this if for most consumers as good as unattainable. This provokes the frustration wanted: non-frustrated consumers only buy what they really need. This is but a fraction of what is consumed in reality.

Because the same principle is repeated thousands of times and for very different products, the side-effect occurs that the slim ideal is enormously intensified and in the end gets completely out of proportion. The world of advertising as a whole feeds itself upon this. However, the slim ideal is not consciously orchestrated. The industry only leads existing 'energy streams' into certain directions

if it can make profit out of this. For further consequences it remains blind and deaf.

There is an answer to the question why models have to be so slim that they are no more representative of 'normal' women. The answer is: this is exactly the purpose. It is the 'trick' through which ads work, as simple as that. The people put on stage are idealised people, provoking the wish for everyone to be part of their ideal world. People who naturally have an urge towards bodily perfection, can easily be drawn into this. Actually this is very sad. The ideal of femininity is unreal. It is only real as a *model* to strive for. If you get caught in its web however, it becomes more than real to you. It becomes even more problematic when the cultural obsession with slimness ever increases and catches younger girls too. The number of obese people (grown-ups and children), increases and we will see in this book that one has much to do with the other. There is clearly something very wrong here. Especially young girls and boys who still have to explore their own changing body, find an environment that makes it very difficult for them. Girls who would otherwise not encounter any problem with their appetite and weight, are encouraged by the ideal to start dieting. In this way they become caught in a cycle that leads them to compulsive eating behaviour, overweight and dieting, or even to obsessive dieting that leads them to selfdestruction.

If a cultural ideal gets so extreme, it is good to understand how relative it is. This way a very interesting thought experiment is to place two contrary ideals next to each other (fat versus thin). Then you can make up for yourself how you would react to it as a member of two very different cultures, each embracing an opposite ideal. Do! Write down for yourself the associations you make to the ideals of fat and slim. I myself have done this exercise and have written down some of my own associations at the end of this chapter. I find that my associations change in time and even by the merely writing them down. I am convinced that others will have totally different associations. Do the exercise now for yourself, before you take a look at my results.

The slim ideal does not come in a vacuum. As an aesthetic norm this is subordinate to the power of esthetic norming on itself. In the first place it is not so important which exactly is the existing norm to hold on to. What is the norm here and now, in other times and

cultures is an example of ugliness. The existence of a norm itself makes people strive for it and through this striving they again and again reinforce the norm within a certain culture. Especially women are expected to conform to whatever is the current norm of beauty. In many cases this provokes a huge compulsion but at the same time it offers certainty and safety. **An aesthetic ideal offers certainty as well as coercion.** The woman/man knows what the ideal to strive for is and gets moments of satisfaction if she/he grows toward the norm. This satisfaction comes from the self and from the social approval and is very powerful through the existence of the generally accepted strive direction (the slim ideal) and the repeating of this under all kinds of circumstances. The person senses this satisfaction not only personally, but sees it happen to others too. Through own approval he probably heightens it. Concretely: people give and receive congratulations if someone gets slimmer. This is the soil on which a complete branch of western industry grows, namely the industry of slimming products.

Men too are obviously sensitive to the suggestivity that concerns the slimness of their wives. The 'ideal man' is supposed to be glad with a slim girlfriend or wife. **The slim ideal for the woman also works through the man.** This too is idealisation. For the real man in most cases it is not so important. He rather has a nice-tempered woman than a slim woman. The idealisation dictates it otherwise and men are as sensitive to this as women. Moreover, of course men do read women's magazines and see how much energy is put into 'being slim and happy'. They learn to think that a corpulent woman is an unhappy woman. This has its influence on his thinking, even when he sees the opposite sitting near himself.

***My associations to the ideal of slim and the ideal of fat:***  
***slim as ideal***

❑ <i>frail, fairy</i>
❑ <i>well oriented</i>
❑ <i>open</i>
❑ <i>risk-seaking</i>
❑ <i>vertical, gothic</i>
<b>fat as ideal</b>
❑ <i>generous</i>
❑ <i>fertile</i>
❑ <i>concrete, present</i>
❑ <i>risk-baring (namely the risks of other people)</i>
❑ <i>earthly, horizontal, roman</i>
❑ <i>caring, motherly, soft</i>

Conclusion: to me the ideal woman is at the same time fat and slim. This is no nonsense, because 'slim' to me is not so much related to the actual weight as to the emotional, intellectual, even spiritual dimension and personal countenance.

What are your associations and conclusion? If you wish, you can write the results on the AURELIS website ([www.aurelis.nu](http://www.aurelis.nu)). I will keep a list there (completely anonymous of course) of the most frequently described associations.



## *2. Why diets make you fatter*

The more people suffer from obesity, the more they are busy with all kinds of diets. This seems logical: people who are overweight will try harder/ more to do something about it. Or maybe it is the other way around: the more people are involved with dieting, the more they grow fatter ... Does dieting make you fatter?

Because being continuously on a diet means an unremitting battle, many choose for the shorter pain: a strong diet from time to time and in between much looser eating habits. In the periods of harsh dieting a huge amount of will power is used with the consolation that it is only temporary. Many people who are on a diet for a while, see themselves regain weight quickly after this period, until they attain their previous weight or even exceed it. This is the so-called yoyo-phenomenon. Some 10 years ago, scientists thought that this was provoked by a slowing down of the metabolism during a period of dieting. They hypothesized that this slowing down continued for a while after the dieting. The adage then went: 'dieting makes dieting more difficult'. Later research by the same and other researchers showed that this slowing down of metabolism does *not* continue after the period of dieting. A possible explanation for the fact that people grow fatter after dieting is that food has become more attractive through the dieting itself. Living on juices and celery is not everybody's first choice after all. **Through dieting, the attraction of food grows stronger.** Hunger gnaws and attention is continuously drawn to non-eating and not-being-allowed-to-eat. In the period after this, the period in which you return to earth, the frustrations are compensated by all kinds of extras 'that you well deserved'. This provokes feelings of guilt, a feeling of failure and a new powerful frustration: that of the failing of the diet. The effort that went into it has all been in vain. To many obese people, over-eating is the best way to work out frustrations... The consequence of this is easy to guess.

Dieting is often part of a complex self-perpetuating pattern that ends in becoming fatter in the course of time. Other elements in this pattern are:

- ❑ the idea that you can not manage without dieting. After the period of dieting, this 'truth' weighs heavily on you.

- ❑ the loss of confidence in the own body, the own subconsciousness
- ❑ the frustration during the dieting, which translates itself in the suggestion that 'getting slim always hurts'
- ❑ the idea that you have done all that you can in order to get slimmer, bypassing the real causes of obesity
- ❑ regaining weight after dieting, the frustration born out of this, the feeling of guilt and shame, and the consequence of this: eating more in order to lessen these bad feelings.

A diet makes someone with perfectly normal eating habits and who trusts his own body to keep his natural weight, into a person who loses this trust. Through the diet, you say to yourself that the problem of overweight can only be helped by a conscious and complete control over what otherwise happens spontaneously. You are the losing side, the more so because your subconsciousness will try its best to get what it deems to be important, namely: to keep enough weight. Maybe the reasons for your overweight reside in a long since passed childhood. **Outlived reasons are to the subconsciousness as real as other ones.** To your subconsciousness this does not matter in the least. The reasons it has, old and outlived as they may be, are effective *now*.

During a diet, you can think that the endurances you put up with, will have as a result that the problems of everyday life will all get resolved more easily. This idea is a certain path toward regaining weight after the diet, and even to get a bonus. If you solely orient yourself to the weight, then remaining slim will always be a great deal more difficult than becoming slim. While *becoming* slimmer, you are kept on the right track by the results and the visible evolution, and by the idea that this is only for a well-outlined period of time. While *remaining* slim, you can no longer see this evolution. **Becoming slimmer is a temporary effort. Staying slim is for ever.** The results are there already and a possible change from now on can only be in the negative. To try and stay slim is not for some limited time period, but for ever. The 'endurances' -if you have looked at it this way- do not receive a special reward any longer. You know that when you let yourself slip away, you will regain the weight that you had and that everything will have been 'in vain'. To try and keep a diet can even lead to feelings of revolt against any form of dieting and of taking care of healthy eating habits.

To deny yourself food, means thinking the same way as someone with overweight. Diet-thinking in fact is the same as overweight-thinking. Through the diet-thinking you prevent yourself to encounter the real problems. Regaining weight after dieting is pre-programmed in the dieting itself if you do not give enough attention to the entire person who wants to become slimmer: yourself.

