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7 Secrets To Eliminate The Midlife Muffin Top Revealed

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The 7 Secrets Top to Eliminate The Midlife Muffin

(That Will Also Help Prevent Heart Disease, Diabetes, and other terrible age related illnesses)

Let's start by answering some questions

- What does “Muffin Top” mean anyway?
- Why put two diseases into the same white paper along with something like midlife weight gain?
- Is it possible to take care of all three with only 7 steps?

These are the questions I will answer for you in this report. For a long time I have resisted drawing attention to midlife weight gain and the lifestyle diseases we are more prone to as we age. The results of the *Smart Women's Mind and Body Survey 2008* told me it was time to share what I know and help you stay or get fit and healthy at midlife.

For a majority of women, the sudden — and I'm talking overnight sudden — onset of extra pounds and a muffin top rising roundly at the top of our jeans is a concern. Wait, let me call a spade a spade here; we hate it and want to get rid of it. Photos by the pool this summer aside, we just want it gone!

Are you familiar with the concept of muffin top?

Just reading the words might give you an idea of what it refers to; but if not, I'll give you a hint. It can be found when you zip up your favorite pants. Just like the shape of a muffin that overflows its baking compartment, so mushrooms the waist as we age. It's not easy to prevent it completely; but keeping it to a minimum is not only a healthy idea — you'll learn more about that in a moment — but it sure feels better to have a small one than one that looks like an adult flotation device.

Some lifestyle choices are made with a view to fending off disease and lots of us make good choices each day. But let's face it, the motivation to eat differently or exercise more is often not driven by whether we'll get diabetes, but by how we *look and feel* in our clothes. I'm here to tell you that that's okay.

*Your **why** is not what matters.
What you do to look and feel better in clothes has the added bonus of
being protective to your heart and overall health.*

What's the link between heart disease and diabetes?

According to the American Diabetes Association, “The most life-threatening consequences of diabetes are heart disease and stroke, which strike people with diabetes **more than twice** as often as they do others. Most of the cardiovascular complications related to diabetes have to do with the way the heart pumps blood through the body. Diabetes can change the chemical makeup of some of the substances found in the blood and this can cause blood vessels to narrow or to clog up completely. This is called atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, and diabetes seems to speed it up.”¹

“Over the last decade, diabetes rates surged almost 50 percent in the United States, to about 17 million. Globally, 150 million adults now suffer from the disease, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO) that number may well double by 2025.”²

“There is one positive side to the diabetes-heart disease connection. What benefits the heart - healthy diets, exercise and vigilant doctors - also appears to prevent or delay Type 2 diabetes.” So wrote Kathryn M. Delude in the New York Times online in January of '06.

Logically then, what helps us lop off the muffin top — healthy diets, exercise, and let's say complimentary health practitioners who can step in when we need them — will also prevent or delay the onset of heart disease and diabetes.

We get three times the payoff for one set of efforts. Now that's leverage!

So, you know what a muffin top is and you have a better understanding about the links between heart disease and diabetes and why they sit together in a white paper on weight loss.

The answer to the third question, “Is it possible to take care of all three with only 7 steps?”, is a definitive “yes.”

¹ <http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-statistics/heart-disease.jsp>, “Diabetes and Cardiovascular (Heart) Disease”, American Diabetes Association

² IPS <http://www.ips.org> Kathryn Stapp, HEALTH-U.S.: Wall Street May Offer Key to Diabetes Control - Expert

For some of you, taking on 7 changes at one time might be overwhelming. Not to worry, you can start with one thing. And I encourage you to keep the **7 things** posted where you can see them. This will remind you that you are on *a path* to wellness, taking one step at a time, adding things to your toolbox as you feel ready.

Caution – going slow is not for everyone.

For some, and for some of us some of the time, going cold turkey makes change easier. We are all designed differently and we change along the way. If you try it one way and it doesn't work, you can quit. NOT! Just wanted to see if you were still paying attention.

You don't quit – you try it a different way. Every attempt at change brings you closer to the new habit you are forming. *As long as you do something differently.* It's easy to form the habit of failing by doing the same thing that does not work over and over.

Whatever we do repeatedly becomes what we do habitually.

A Word or Two About Fat and The Significance of Where It Settles

Is there significance to where the weight settles when we gain it? Yes.

How could a wee bit of extra you around the middle be unhealthy? Read on.

First some new facts about fat.

Scientists used to think that fat was simply a layer of insulation, static tissue designed to store excess calories. Not any more. According to the authors of *The SuperFoods Rx Diet*, “Indeed, fat cells are little metabolic machines, actively churning out a variety of substances **that can affect your weight, appetite, and how many calories you eat as well as how efficiently your body uses those calories for energy.** In general, the more fat cells you have and the fatter those cells become, the more of these substances, (adipokines or fat specific messengers) they can pump into your bloodstream”³

Increased levels of these hormones and hormone-like substances can damage the circulatory system and impair blood flow. As you would imagine, blood flow is tantamount to good health. Impaired flow can lead to heart disease, diabetes, even cancer.

³ SuperFoods Rx Diet, Rodale, Wendy Bazilian, DrPH, MA, RD, Steven Pratt, MD, Kathy Matthews

More reasons to limit growing our fat cells; but what's the connection with an increasing **waist size** and our health?

Drs. Oz and Roizen, in *You On A Diet* explain it this way; “We all have three kinds of fat: fat in our bloodstream (called triglycerides), subcutaneous fat (which lies just underneath the skin's surface), and omentum fat. (This is the fat that lies just below the muscles of the stomach.) There is a fourth fat that's the fat in food.”

They go on to say, “Because the omentum fat is so close to your solid organs, it's their best energy source. Think of the omentum fat as the obnoxious eighteen-wheeler on a crowded highway — elbowing out the stomach, pushing away other organs, and claiming all the space for itself. The omentum greedily bullies surrounding structures out of the way. The squished diaphragm and lungs make breathing difficult, and the squashed kidney and its blood supply secrete hormones to raise the blood pressure in an effort to fight back.”⁴

Not only that, but recent reports out of Kaiser-Permanente, The Mayo Clinic, The NIH's Kennedy-Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and USC all point to the connection between the ever-expanding waistline of our nation and strokes. Dr. Amytis Towfighi, Assistant Professor of Neurology at the University of Southern California, reported at the February 2008 International Stroke Conference that there has been a **tripling of stroke** in middle-aged women age 35-54 in recent years.⁵ Gives me shivers, how about you? Oh and the other links that keep showing up in studies go to dementia and inflammation which is damaging to all of our organs and internal systems.

The 7 Steps

Now for the good news. There are a million ways to incorporate the 7 Steps. This means you can design your change program to suit you. You've got choices, and we like choices.

Think of the 7 steps as 7 categories, and here they are:

- ⇒ Exercise
- ⇒ Relieve Stress
- ⇒ Eat A Diet Suited to Your Individual Body Type
- ⇒ Sleep
- ⇒ Know Your Numbers

⁴ You on a Diet, Discovery Health, Michael F. Roizen, MD, Mehmet C. Oz, MD

⁵ <http://www.healthyhappylyfe.com> April 12, 2008, “This Belly Fat is Going to be the Death of Me and Now I Finally Understand Why”

⇒ Love and Allow Love

⇒ Practice Awareness – What One Thing Can I Do?

Now, before your brain checks out because of the “I’ve heard this all before” factor, I want you to thank your little voice for sharing, but let it know it’s time to just be quiet.

Yes, some of the things on this list, like exercise and stress relief, are ones you hear over and over. You may still be in “round to it” mode, as in, “I’ll get around to it one of these days”. Now hear this, there is no way around them, and the time is now.

Exercise

Exercise is number one on the list because it offers so much ROI and can be done by anyone for free.

According to an article published in the New York Times in April of this year, **“The single thing that comes close to a magic bullet, in terms of its strong and universal benefits, is exercise,”** Frank Hu, epidemiologist at the Harvard School of Public Health, said in the Harvard Magazine.

What’s the point of exercising if you are suffering from rheumatoid or osteoarthritis, multiple sclerosis, congestive heart failure, a knee or hip injury or haven’t been active in years? What if it hurts to exercise, or you get exhausted doing it?

The best idea here is to talk to your doctor ask her to recommend a physical therapist trained to reintroduce the body to movement.

“The data show that regular moderate exercise increases your ability to battle the effects of disease,” says Dr. Marilyn Moffat, a professor of PT at New York University. “It has a positive effect on both physical and mental well-being. The goal is to do as much physical activity as your body lets you do, and rest when you need to rest.”

Not only that, but exercise burns calories that would otherwise be hanging around making muffins.

So how much do you need? Get as much as you can, with a minimum of 30 minutes per day. I’m not in the take-a-stroll-through-the-mall-and-smell-the-Cinnabons camp either. It’s my contention that you’ve got to sweat, but that can come once you are feeling ok with just moving on a regular basis, if you are not right now.

If you are exercising regularly, then you know how good it feels and how good your body looks when you stick to your intentions to do it. But, even knowing this, I bet out of every hundred women who exercise regularly, 98 would say there are days they have to argue with themselves to put on the sneakers and go. The little voice loves comfort, and the couch is generally a whole lot more comfortable at the end of a long day than a power walk is. Or is it? It's the idea of the walk isn't it? Once we are out there swinging our arms or pumping the bicycle, and getting out of our heads, doesn't it feel like a gift?

One last point about exercise, shake it up now and again. Our muscles love a routine just as much as our brains. However, unless you are changing up what you do with your muscles, they will adapt to the daily routine and nothing will change, you'll plateau. And chances are, you will get bored, and boredom leads to the couch.

Relieve Stress

Stress? Is this perhaps another area where you feel you are tired of hearing about it, but can't find a way to get rid of your particular brand? We do get brand loyal and it's not just about Kleenex and Bayer. If you are the type who is always "on" – working, texting kids and partners, working out, volunteering – add in the normal stresses of having and doing it all, and you are not taking time out for you, then, I hate to say it, but you are courting disaster.

There is no such thing as too young or immune because of overall good health that will protect you from the constant state of high alert, high cortisol levels, and high anxiety that comes from that type of living. Basically, you are wearing down your defense systems, making you more susceptible to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.

Now, I know you're thinking, "Greg, most of us have a life that looks something like what you described above. So, what do we do, short of selling the family and moving to a remote desert island?"

B-R-E-A-T-H-E

No, really. Throughout the day, if you can keep an awareness of how often you are not breathing or are breathing in a shallow manner, you can slow your heartbeat and relax the fight or flight response, the one responsible for hormone release which thickens our blood, slows digestion, and contributes to overweight.

Check out [this website](#) or google to find others that can teach you different ways of breathing for different kinds of stress or pain relief.

May I also remind the readers that exercise is as good at stress relief as the strongest pharmaceutical? Exercise increases levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine. The first one is a mood elevator the latter elevates your ability to focus. It's easier to de-stress when you are in a good mood and able to focus on what's really important.

Don't underestimate the value of connecting to have a de-stressing effect. Of course you have to choose who or what experience you want to connect with for reasons we are all aware of. Tell me a walk with a friend, child, dog, ferret, or whatever isn't a great stress buster.

So is time alone. Know when you need it, and make it happen.

Eat A Diet Suited to Your Individual Body Type

Food. No more glorious word exists for me, but it was not always so, and I suspect I'm not alone. Now, I may care more about food than the average peep because I spent 20+ years working with it in restaurants. I'm pretty sure though that for a good majority of people, food is a favorite thing among many favorite things.

So what to eat at midlife and why is it different than any other time of our lives? What to eat now is as it's always been, but at this place in our lives ***the right fuel matters more than ever***. Our bodies have been the long-suffering friends taken for granted and willing to work with whatever we gave them. Now, they are tired and need us to step up and give these temples the royal treatment.

What that means is as individual as the gene profile we have. The science of Metabolic Typing as applied to staying well or reversing disease is getting hot, and I for one am a believer. This group of docs and scientists believe and can prove that the blood reveals a world of information on how we process food. How we process food, in turn, determines whether we have all the resources we need for our body's systems to function at peak performance.

Peak performance here determines not only how we feel each day, but our tendency towards putting on extra weight or thinness, our risk of diseases, and how we heal from injury and disease, our longevity and on and on. For more information drop me [an email](#).

Whether or not you decide to do some investigation into what your body functions best on or not, these guidelines serve the majority of boomers for health and disease prevention.

Not that you haven't heard this before, but it bears repeating until we get it right. And please don't be too hard on yourself about what you are not doing yet. It's all a practice until it becomes second nature.

- ⇒ Eat breakfast and eat it close to waking up. In other words, don't wait until 11 am, when you've been out of bed since 6:30 am to fuel your engines.

For a comprehensive, recently updated guide to
Totally Delicious and Nutrition Breakfast
Ideas that go way beyond the Cereal Box,
use [this link](#).

- ⇒ Eat by color, and by that I mean real reds, oranges, yellows, and purples – not Jelly Bellies by the handful. (Although my friend and former co-author, Patti Milligan, did make it onto the radio after publishing an article which suggested jelly beans for breakfast was better than nothing!) I'm talking fruits and veggies, and if you aren't sure how to increase these nutrient and fiber rich foods into your diet daily, think small. Add some spinach leaves to your salad or soup, add a handful of frozen stir fry veggies to the rice for dinner, or chopped mushrooms, peppers, and squash to your omelet or egg beaters breakfast
- ⇒ Buy organic when possible, especially in dairy products.
- ⇒ Add eggs back in to your healthy diet. They not only help boost good, or HDL, cholesterol, but the fat in eggs is a healthy one. They are a great lo-cal snack.
- ⇒ Yes, snacks are a good thing. Plan your day to include one mid-morning and one late afternoon. Best bets? Protein with some carbs and fiber or protein alone. Almond butter on a whole wheat Akmak cracker or two, hard boiled egg in a half a whole wheat pita, an apple with some cheese.
- ⇒ Notice I write “whole wheat” before the words cracker, bread, pitas? It's time to give up the white stuff for good with a couple of exceptions:
 - If you are hungry and it's all that's available, eat one slice with something on top
 - If you are lucky enough to go to an exceptional artisan bakery or restaurant where the bread is to die for — eat it, enjoy it, and consider yourself blessed to have had that treat.
 - Or if you just want it. Once in awhile is not going to kill anyone, especially if you remember that slowing down the glucose spike

from white flour or sugar by having some fiber and protein at the same time makes it less damaging.

- ⇒ Limit or eliminate cold cuts and processed foods with nitrites, and other preservatives that are not naturally occurring.
- ⇒ Give up the soda! Most of you don't drink sugary sodas and bottled drinks anyway but if you do, know this: these beverages are directly linked to increased weight gain, diabetes, Syndrome X, and possibly cancer. If you drink diet sodas thinking you are off the hook health-wise, think again. It has come to light that the artificial sweeteners in diet drinks creates an insulin response similar to that of a real sugar in the system. This finding came out of a study done at the University of Texas Health Science Center, called the San Antonio Heart Study:
 - “On average, for each diet soft drink our participants drank per day, they were 65 percent more likely to become overweight during the next seven to eight years, and 41 percent more likely to become obese,” said Sharon Fowler, M.P.H., faculty associate in the division of clinical epidemiology in the Health Science Center's department of medicine. For a more in-depth review of this finding and why, use [this link](#).
- ⇒ Lean meats, fish, and fowl is by now a common idea. But, the fats in oily fish like mackerel, sardines, and salmon, are super healthy. Eat 3 – 4 servings of these fish per week.
- ⇒ 80% of the time eat live, fresh, or otherwise natural foods; foods that do not come with a bar code or microwave instructions. The other 20% of the time, you can have at it.
- ⇒ Red wine is a good thing, coffee is now off the hook and teas of all colors have good-for-us properties. Water is always a good choice. All the liquid you really need is equal to half your body weight in ounces. So, if you weigh 150 pounds, you will be well hydrated with 75 ounces, or 9 eight ounce glasses. If that seems like a lot, consider that it's less than one glass per hour of waking time.
- ⇒ FIBER, FIBER, FIBER! Prevent all kinds of potential health problems, not to mention the unmentionable, constipation, which becomes more the norm as we age. The daily recommendation is 35 grams. Most of us get between 8 and 15! Eat more raw fruit and veggies; look for high fiber cereals; take a natural fiber powder, like psyllium, daily.

This is, of course, the very down and dirty list of how to eat for your health. I have recommended a number of great books which will give you more information. These reviews and recommendations can be found at the [newsletter archives](#).

Sleep

Speaking of waking time, SLEEP is the next thing on the list. From 20/20 to 60 minutes, Time magazine to the New York Times, and many other publications, the importance of sleep is being discussed. You cannot stay healthy, look your best, feel your best, or successfully avoid carbohydrate and sugar cravings if your body is not rested, period. If you have trouble sleeping, here is a short list of things to consider.

- ⇒ Have you had your hormone levels checked?
- ⇒ Are there any bright lights shining into your bedroom from the street, a clock with a bright face, a night light that's too bright?
- ⇒ Is it noisy in your bedroom? If he or she snores, you should try ear plugs or, if necessary, get a secondary place to lay your head.
- ⇒ Are you too hot or too cold? Your body temp should be allowed to fall as you prepare for sleep.
- ⇒ Can't quiet your thoughts? Try one of the herbal sleep remedies, a meditation CD, soft sounds from a white noise machine, or create a mantra you can say as you breathe in and out deeply and focus on the breathing.
- ⇒ A light snack of dairy and a little carb will help induce sleep due to hormonal responses to those foods.
- ⇒ Booze is not a good idea, and as we age it becomes even less good the closer it is to bedtime if sound sleep is important to you.

Know Your Numbers

What numbers? No, the one on the scale doesn't really interest me I'm referring to the markers of wellness and disease prevention. The holy trinity of medical reference — weight, BP, and cholesterol levels — are no longer enough.

Inflammation, not high cholesterol is the primary cause of heart disease. Surprised or not sure you believe it? If you haven't heard this, you will soon, as the bastions of western medicine from Harvard to Stanford, WebMd to the AHA have all started to see inflammation as the culprit it is in many disease processes.

As such, you'd want to know whether you show signs of inflammation wouldn't you? C-reactive protein is one of the most important markers of inflammation and is easily measured by a blood test. Most docs won't include it in a CBC or "complete" blood screen, and when I first asked my doc to include it years ago she said, "This is a very fancy but unnecessary blood test. It must be that your specialist ordered it." She chuckled and put in the order. I chuckled secretly because there was no specialist but I got the test I wanted so wasn't about to point that out. Lucky for me, I do not have inflammation, but it doesn't mean I don't keep an eye on that number. Here too, healthy lifestyle choices, such as those I'm suggesting in this report, keep inflammation at bay.

Here is a basic set of tests that will give you and your physician a bird's eye view of what's going on inside.

- ⇒ Echocardiogram and stress test: once at 50 as a baseline
- ⇒ Know your waist size. Women should shoot for 32.5" or less; men 35" or less. According to a study out of Sweden's Karolinska Institute, "Insulin-resistance tests are positive in 50% of those who have a waist circumference above 1 meter [39.37 inches]," Wahrenberg says. "There are still obese people who are not insulin resistant. But if people have a waistline less than 1 meter, there is very little chance they are insulin resistant." Insulin resistance is the first step in developing type II diabetes.
- ⇒ Oral exam by a dentist, yearly. Inflammation anywhere in the body can compromise your heart muscle, this includes periodontal disease.
- ⇒ Total Cholesterol, including fasting blood sugar
- ⇒ Complete Blood Panel, and ask for the VAP test
 - The VAP monitors many components of cholesterol and is more comprehensive than standard lipid tests.
- ⇒ Have your levels of CRP, (C-Reactive Protein), homocysteine, and fibrinogen tested when you have blood drawn.

Love and Allow Love

What's love got to do with it? Your willingness to be open to love and to loving others is a powerful practice – period. The benefits are countless, but include lowering of cholesterol levels, raising levels of immune boosters, increased blood supply to the heart and other organs, and a sense that one is connected makes us feel better about ourselves. Higher self esteem usually means we take better care of ourselves – a circle of ever-increasing benefits. On the flip side, feeling

disconnected or isolated can lead to depression, lowered immune response, and an overall increase in risk of premature death.

Get out and give yourself to the world. What a great opportunity to not only protect or increase your health, but be surprised by what you might experience or gain in return.

Practice Awareness — What One Thing Can I Do?

This has been a lot to take in, especially if you are new to the idea of really tapping in to what your body needs and wants at this stage of life. How to make sense of it all? Practice awareness. You've already put the ball in motion. By opting in to get this report, you are saying to your inner wisdom — and the universe — I value me and I am going to do what I can to make health my natural state.

By being aware of how you feel throughout the day, you will start to make different choices. If you find yourself heading for a snack and you are aware of the desire to eat, stop for a sec and ask yourself if it's time for that mid-morning snack, or is it frustration or procrastination that led you here.

When you are running late on a day you planned to work out before heading home, take a sec and see where you might be able to delegate, reevaluate the urgency of, or shorten the time involved in a task before you simply run out of time and the gym becomes a “shouldda.”

Awareness also comes in the form of realism. Have you taken on too much in this quest to lob off the muffin top? Are you stressed about not getting in your de-stressing activities? Ask yourself, “What one thing can I do?” Do one thing in this minute or this day to move you towards your goal.

The best way I have found to succeed with this question is this: Let's say you want to release 10 pounds. You know what the best way for you to do that is — chances are you've done it before, and if not, you have figured out how to start. Write down as many answers as you can to the question “What One Thing can I do to get these 10 pounds removed?” Just list them on a sheet of paper. Then keep the paper somewhere that you can refer to it during the day.

For instance, when I recently decided to kick the “Holiday 5” to the curb and get back into my favorite jeans, I wrote these things on a piece of paper:

- Eat fruit for snacks vs. licorice all sorts if I want something sweet
- Buy and eat only whole grain crackers with no trans fats

- Limit my snacks to fresh or raw foods — nothing from a bag or with artificial colors and flavors
- Carbs only twice per day
- Avoid Starbucks, unless it's for a skinny latte (I use half and half in my coffee and I'd never give it up in my morning cup, but more than once per day is a fat whack I don't need)
- Drink water
- Use green tea extract in my water at least once per day

Get the idea? This way, I'm armed with ideas to answer my question, "What One Thing can I do right now to make this moment count towards my goal?"

The Practice

To sum up, the way to successfully shape your lifestyle choices around the desire to be healthy and feel good about your body is to take what you have learned and **practice**. We don't become masters with intention alone. It's unlikely any one of us will transform our less than supportive habits, remove procrastination in all areas of our lives, and understand all there is to know about health, longevity, and disease prevention just by wanting to. We do have plenty to start with and enough to go on for a long time. And at this age I wager that we know when our bodies want more or less of something than we are currently allowing or doing.

Eat well, sleep, love, be loved, de-stress, move, find what brings you joy and practice awareness. Get your annual tests done; it's the unknown that is dangerous – everything else is just information about what is; a place to start restoring balance or celebrate.

If doing this all on your own seems overwhelming, please don't hesitate to give me [a shout](#). Accountability comes in many forms and support is critical to your success.

I'd love to hear your success stories, by the way. We are all bolstered by other's stories, so please send me yours and if it's OK with you, I'll share them in the newsletter or at the blog.

Here's to the best You ever – living fit, healthy, sassy, and sane.