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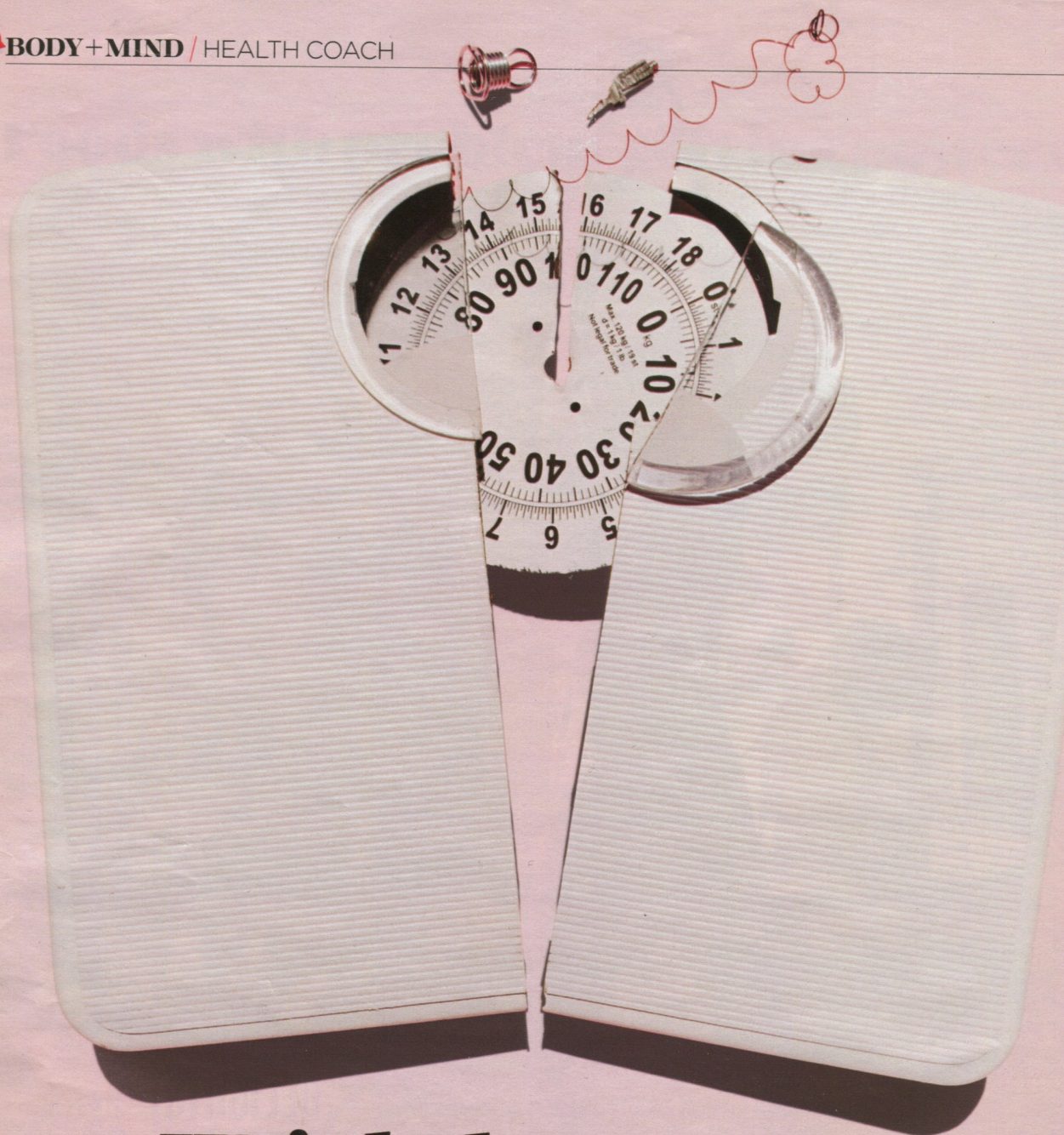
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Weight loss myths, busted

The truth will *let you eat*. Heidi Powell, cohost of *Extreme Weight Loss*, helps you slim down in smarter ways.

MYTH YOU JUST NEED TO DO MORE CARDIO.

TRUTH IT'S *MUSCLE* THAT MAKES YOU LEAN. An hour on the treadmill will torch some calories, sure, but strong muscles burn more calories even when you're *at rest*. (Amazing, right?) To tone your body and maximize its ability to burn fat, do some strength training three days a week. Try resistance

bands, dumbbells, or body-weight exercises like planks and push-ups. Cardio has many benefits beyond weight loss, so don't skip it: Aim for five days a week, and keep it fun. You can start with just five to 10 minutes at a time, and anything from dancing to soccer counts. And remember, the stronger you are, the more bang for your cardio buck you'll get.

MYTH YOU SHOULD STICK TO FEWER THAN 1,200 CALORIES.

TRUTH THERE'S NO MAGIC NUMBER THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE—BUT 1,200 IS ALMOST ALWAYS TOO LOW.

Your body needs fuel (food!) to burn fat, but how much depends on a number of factors, like your age and your weight. Fad diets—with their big promises—can make you feel like you have to eat as little as possible to shed pounds, but they're called fads for a reason. One thing that's always true: Eating a very low-calorie diet can quickly cause your body to feel starved, slowing your metabolism. Instead, use a tool like our app Transform or a fitness wearable to determine the number of calories your body uses per day and aim to eat 150 to 250 calories less than that number. Or, find your sweet spot for weight loss with my rough guide below:

YOUR WEIGHT LOSS CHEAT SHEET

IF YOU WEIGH: 100–150 pounds

TRY: Eating 1,500 calories

IF YOU WEIGH: 151–180 pounds

TRY: Adding a zero to your weight—that's your daily calorie count

IF YOU WEIGH: 181 pounds or more

TRY: Adding a zero to your weight, then multiplying that number by 0.9

MYTH YOU MUST MAKE TIME FOR THE GYM.

TRUTH YOU'LL SLIM DOWN FASTER WITH SHORT WORKOUTS THAT CAN BE DONE ANYWHERE. Research suggests that just four minutes of high-intensity intervals can improve fitness levels and burn fat more effectively than slogging through an hour of running or climbing hills on a stationary bike. So try doing just one exercise—like sit-ups, air squats, or burpees—as intensely as you can for 20 seconds, then rest for 10, and repeat eight times total. If you can, try another exercise for four minutes after that, then another. You'll spend at most 16 minutes on this, and the payoff is huge.

MYTH NEVER EAT IN THE EVENING.

TRUTH IF YOU STILL NEED ENERGY AFTER DARK, YOU STILL NEED FOOD. Your metabolism doesn't clock out when the workday is over, and neither do you, so there's no need to skip meals. I think it's smart to eat five small meals a day, every three hours; for instance, if you eat breakfast at 7 a.m., your last meal would be around 7 p.m.

That should keep you going until you wind down for bed. (You still don't want to have a big meal super close to bedtime, because digestion works better when you're up and about.) For dinner, stick with lean proteins, healthy fats, and nutrient-rich vegetables—veggies are carbs, but their fiber will help curb your cravings for the sugary, processed kind. My go-to meal is 4 oz cooked and shredded chicken and ½ avocado, sliced, served on a bed of greens and veggies, with low-fat dressing.

MYTH ABS ARE MADE AT THE GYM.

TRUTH ABS ARE MADE IN THE KITCHEN. You can do all the crunches and planks in the world and never see a six-pack. Here's why: Abdominal exercises can help build the bricks below the surface, but they won't do anything to reduce the fat on top. To lose that, you need to eat well *and* exercise. The two food rules below will give you results!

HEIDI'S FLATTER-BELLY SECRETS

EAT MORE PROTEIN... Protein is the building block of muscle. A simple rule of thumb for healthy adults: Calculate 80% of your body weight—that's how much plant-based and lean protein I recommend you eat each day, in grams.

...AND LESS SODIUM. Even if those bricks are there, and even if your body fat is low enough to show them, too much sodium can leave a layer of water on your belly. Aim to keep your intake under 2,300 mg per day—that's good for your heart too.