

## Fat is a Typological Issue

By Janet Thuesen and Otto Kroeger

"If you give an NT diet to an NF, they're going to gain," says Otto Kroeger. "The diet that works for the SP is going to be unique to the SP."

Otto Kroeger is an ENFJ who specializes in teaching people the theory behind the MBTI. For five years he's been thinking about how weight problems tie in with type. After observing people and talking with them, he's developed some hypotheses. He's working now to collect "hard" data to support his ideas and hopes to make a book out of it someday.

His principle hypothesis is that some of the letters, or preferences, make it harder to lose weight than others. See if your type is a help or hindrance in dieting, according to Kroeger's theory.

### **E or I**

Kroeger believes that the Extravert has more trouble losing weight than the Introvert. Extraverts respond more to external stimuli, (the food all around us), their gregariousness gets them into more social situations, and they have less "inner attentiveness." "When an introvert gratifies himself orally, he's more aware of it," says Kroeger.

You can begin to see that certain diet tricks will be more popular with certain types. For example, the method of recording everything you eat will be more appealing to Introverts because they already tend to make note of the things going on inside them.

### **S or N**

It helps to be a Sensing type if you're trying to lose weight. They're more attuned to sensual stimuli and can truly enjoy food without eating a lot. Ss are most likely to chew their food slowly and experience all the tastes and textures. The Ns, on the other hand, can finish their meal and go back for more because the food never really registered with their senses.

"It's also a question of the here-and-now vs. tomorrow," says Kroeger. "The intuitive is less concerned when he fails today because there's always tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow."

"And the intuitive will think, 'If that was good, imagine how much better more would be.'" Since intuition gets people into trouble when they're dieting, should an intuitive try to develop Sensing habits? Yes, but don't count on that alone to get you through a diet. If you're iNtuitive, that kind of sensory awareness will be difficult to maintain over time. "Try to plug into another letter in your type and watch out for your intuition," Kroeger advises.

### **T or F**

"For a Feeling type, food covers a multitude of sins," says Kroeger. "Eating together is a way of expressing intimacy and harmony with others. Food is a gift that Fs give to others and must accept appreciatively from others. Food is often a comfort for Fs and they use it as a personal reward (whereas the T thinks, 'I expected myself to be good.')." "

Fs desire to please others, and that adds a struggle beyond the temptation of the food itself. It makes it difficult to say "no" to food prepared by parents or spouses or hosts, or to turn down lunch with an old friend. It makes it harder to create "disharmony" in a restaurant because you want your food cooked a certain way. And to refuse to split a piece of chocolate cake with your true love after a romantic meal is just about impossible if you're an F.

Fs more than Ts need the help and inspiration of other people to stick to a diet. The first thing they need to do is to make the people in their life aware that they're trying to lose weight and enlist their aid.

## **J or P**

"Dieting as we know it is a J function," says Kroeger. "You set goals and move toward them. Your success is in achieving your goals."

"A diet is being in control. The J has a built-in indicator that tells him when he's out of control." The P has a lower need to be in control."

Ps are the most likely to wake up one morning and say, "Today I'm going to diet." The J will spend that day preparing and planning for the diet that will begin tomorrow.

Ps who try to force themselves into J diets fail repeatedly. They'll only lose weight if they take it one day at a time. They could focus on the process of eating less, instead of the goal. One suggestion is to have a variety of diet menus available: high fiber, low fat, carbohydrate, frozen food, health food, gourmet, international, etc., and choose from them according to their impulse at the moment. They have fun experimenting with the over 2500 diets that entered the market in the last 20 years and enjoy the fact that there are unlimited ways to eat less.

If Kroeger's observations are accurate, ISTJs have the easiest time losing weight. Is this true?

As a trainer for 15 years, Kroeger has come in contact with thousands of ISTJs. "They are overwhelmingly in good physical condition," he says. "I have never met an overweight ISTJ without an accompanying stress-related problem."

"On the other hand, I would bet that if you have a skinny (not thin) ENFP, it's stress related."

"More than any other type, the ENFPs struggle their whole lives with the problem of weight. I know many ENFPs who are thin but whenever I mention this to them they say, 'Thank you, I've learned to conquer my weight problem. I've learned to live with the struggle. I have to constantly monitor myself.'"

"And they almost always see themselves as still overweight."

## **Dieting by Your Temperament**

Everyone wants to lose weight because they'd look better that way. But that is usually not enough motivation to succeed in losing weight. Something else has to be involved, something that triggers the power in your temperament.

### **The NF Diet**

For the NF, the motivation to diet is relational. They lose for love. "One of their selfish needs is to live for others," says Kroeger. "Their weight has to be an issue with someone who is important to them. They have to know who they are pleasing, who will be stroking them if they succeed. To lose weight just to please themselves is hardest for NFs."

"If you're an NF and the person you love loves you the way you are, you're not going to lose weight. I suggest that you alter your goals and just try to maintain your weight. It's psychological poor health to make goals you can't reach."

"When NFs are unhappy about their weight," says Kroeger, "they are often blaming their weight for some failure to get strokes or affirmation. Usually it has nothing to do with weight. They need to figure out what the real source of their negative self image is. They are also the least likely to have a realistic picture of themselves. They seldom look as good or as bad as they think they do. Before setting weight goals, they should use their senses to see and feel how they really look. The last thing they should think about is the actual diet."

What is the NF dieting style? They make contracts—"I promise you I'll lose weight." They accompany their diets with all sorts of probing into themselves ("Why do I eat? What makes me this way?"). And they can feel most guilty when they fail. "NFs can feel guilty because they don't feel guilty," says Kroeger. "And then they'll deal with their guilt by overeating."

## The NT Diet

For the NT, the motivation to diet will come from the chance to compete with themselves or someone else. The weight loss will be secondary to the competition. They'll rise to the challenge to be masters of themselves.

The NT diet begins in the mind. ("The danger is that it might end there, too," says Kroeger.) They need a conceptual base, to study, discover and understand why they have to change.

"The best NT diet is probably designed by themselves," says Kroeger. "One NT stunt is to take a diet like the Pritikin and merge it with two others. They have a systems approach to dieting. And since they have such a great fear of failing, they'll back away from systems that could fail."

## The SJ Diet

For the SJ, the motivation to lose weight lies in it's being viewed as an issue of responsibility. In the SJ army, if you're overweight, they say you're not being responsible. The reward for SJs is not in pleasing others, nor in out-performing others. The reward is in setting a goal and accomplishing that goal as quickly as possible.

Everything we know about dieting is SJ. They'll do everything they should to be successful in weight loss. They'll design a program that structures their eating; they'll make lists of what they eat; they'll work steadily toward a regular weight loss.

"If an SJ is having trouble losing weight, it's got to be the E or F causing the problem," says Kroeger.

"Play into your sensing," he advises. "Look at your food, smell it, identify the different flavors. And find an authority figure to report to."

## The SP Diet

The motivation for the SP is that their body is telling them that it has too much weight. They are the most in touch with the reality from their senses. They're aware instantly that they're no longer hungry or when their stomach is being stretched.

"If you're an SP, you don't need a scale to tell you when you're overweight," says Kroeger. "Listen to what your body says today. I know an ISFP who told me she could feel a small pain inside her womb."

"Don't set long-range goals. Three weeks is a lifetime and a reincarnation for an SP. Make it a tangible, short-term goal, ("I can buckle this belt or button this shirt button.") Stress exercise and doing."

Kroeger's advice for dieters is this: Tailor your diet to your temperament and then go to the individual letters. An INFJ can begin by identifying someone to lose weight for and getting a realistic picture of their weight. Then they can plug into their I and J by recording everything they eat and planning their meals in advance. The ENTP can architect a system that will lead to a loss of weight, then say "no" to social eating and just enjoy the company.

ENFPs may have to do some extensive "type developing", but they can be counted on to come up with creative ways to go about it.

This year, rather than going on diets that work for someone else, try using your type to figure out what will work for you. Otto Kroeger would appreciate a report on your progress.

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