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WHY
DIETING
MAKES
YOU
FAT

AUSTRALIAN EDITION

MARCH 1992

\$4.50

NZ \$6.95 (inc. GST)

THE NEW LOOK
ELLE MACPHERSON

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Do you think you need to diet to lose a few kilos, to "shape up", as they say? Well, go ahead, but you just might be entering into an unholy alliance, a relationship with your body which, Canadian researchers say, is akin to making a pact with the devil, one from which you may never escape.

Just about anyone can lose a little weight. The trouble is keeping it off. The old "I lost five kilos in four weeks and put back 10 in six" is a familiar and mournful refrain.

Anyone who has dieted seriously – for women, 6,000 kilojoules a day or less – knows how futile it can sometimes be. Statistics show that 90 per cent of dieters will regain

weight within months of stopping, mostly because their metabolisms slow down to accommodate reduced intakes. As soon as they eat normally again, back go the extra kilos – and more.

This tendency to see-saw can be more than demoralising. It's a health hazard, linked to obesity and possibly heart disease. Strenuous dieting has also been associated with potentially lethal eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa, skin problems, sleeplessness, stress and mental impairment.

And now, the latest bad news: dieting causes major, perhaps permanent, changes to eating habits. Canadian psychologists, Peter Herman and Janet Polivy of the University Of Toronto, have unearthed evidence of something every slimmer has always suspected and feared. Far from inducing sensible and frugal eating habits, dieting actually makes us eat more.

A report on their extensive experiments on dietary habits, spanning more than 18 years, was published

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recently in the prestigious British journal, *New Scientist*. Among other things, it purports to explain why the majority of people find dieting futile, and why they actually put on more weight afterwards.

The doctors don't mince words and their conclusions aren't comforting. Dieting is dangerous and, mostly, it doesn't work, they say. Everyone who diets commits themselves to a routine they'll have to continue if they want to stay slim. Start a diet and you begin a battle with your body which will probably last your entire lifetime.

Their jaundiced view is the result of a series of experiments conducted on female university students. In order to see how people control their kilojoule intake, Herman and Polivy gave each of the group, divided into dieters and non-dieters, a "pre-load" of one or two milkshakes, then a bowl of ice-cream, telling each student to eat as much of the ice-cream as she wanted.

Invariably, the dieters ate more than the non-dieters, as long as they were given the milkshake before-

hand. If they didn't get the "pre-load", they ate less. Why?

"The effect of the milkshake undermined their resolve, temporarily releasing them from their vow of abstinence," reported the researchers. "After the milkshake, instead of doing penance for the caloric sin, they persisted in sinful indulgence." Basically, the non-dieters were being regulated by

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