

Body Alchemy is the art and science of transforming thoughts, emotions and beliefs into the physical bodies we live in. Body Alchemy is like a diet in only *one* way. It is a formula. When you take it step by step and do the work, you will see the results. But unlike a diet, there won't be any rules to follow. It won't take any willpower. You won't give up anything you love. You won't do workouts you don't enjoy. You won't even have to go around hungry. In fact, doing any of those things is only going to slow down your results. Body Alchemy is for anyone interested in losing weight without the pain of giving up the foods they love or being on a diet. Emotional eaters, binge eaters, and those that cannot seem to find the bottom of their endless hunger will find the tools and strategies here to solve the root of all overeating so they can finally give up the struggle and find a healthy body that they love

When I lost ten pounds in two weeks without trying, and another twenty pounds over the course of three months, all without changing my diet or lifestyle, I knew I had finally cracked the code. Before this, I struggled with weight (to the point of a clinical eating disorder and exercise addiction) for over fifteen years. I remember being so tired from a calorie-restricted diet that I wrecked a car, weighing and measuring every morsel of food that went into my body for years, month long juice fasts, and endless hours of brutal exercise. And still, every time I managed to lose some weight, it came back.

Now my weight is completely stable. If I lose a few too many pounds, my appetite gets strong, and I gain those pounds back. If I gain a few too many pounds, then my appetite drops, and I lose the weight. There is zero willpower involved. I never fight cravings. No more eating in secret, no more hiding wrappers in the trash before my husband sees them, no more packing my diet compliant meal for parties, no more fear of buffet tables. And the best part, not only is my weight in the healthy range, but I absolutely love my body. I like to try on clothes, I like to get dressed up, and I like to wear a bathing suit. I feel confident in my own skin.

The freedom of looking at a menu and ordering what sounds good, of enjoying a guilt-free ice cream with my son, of walking by a store window and liking what I see, of waking up in the morning and not thinking about food—that kind of freedom—is like crossing over from hell into heaven. When this system clicked for me, I knew I had to share it with everyone.

So what is the secret I discovered that took me from being stuck in diet and exercise prison to being healthy and in love with my body without giving up my favorite foods or enduring painful workouts? What I'm about to say is going to sound crazy, so stick with me. There is nothing wrong with your weight. Nor is there anything wrong with the way you eat. Weight and food are symptoms. Think of them like the check engine light in your car. It is there for your benefit. When this light comes on, we would be fools to rush to a mechanic and beg them to turn off the light. Instead, we ask the mechanic to diagnose and fix the problem. Once the repair is done, the light automatically switches off. Similarly, once we've addressed the reasons our body is asking for food above and beyond what we need to maintain a healthy weight, then excess hunger will fall away, and our bodies will naturally take their healthiest shape and size. So this is the secret: body transformation is the effortless side effect of treating the root cause of excess weight. The root cause is much deeper than just a physical problem. It is mental, emotional and spiritual as well.

Diets treat only the symptoms; they shut off the check engine light without actually fixing the problem. This is precisely why diets don't work. Studies show 95% of dieters will regain their

weight (Mann 2007). Restricting calories or denying oneself the simple pleasure of certain foods, such as carbohydrates, doesn't work to promote long term weight loss. It often works at first, but eventually the weight comes back. Given enough time, people under torture will cave. When we torture ourselves through diets and brutal workout routines, eventually the willpower runs out. Willpower is a finite resource; it always runs out. A starving animal will do anything, ANYTHING, to eat. When we restrict ourselves for long enough, our bodies will take over and we will eat, and generally the higher calorie the food, the better! That is when we find ourselves elbow deep in a tub of ice cream. Or if you are like I was, kneeling on a pee-covered gas station bathroom floor to purge what I had just binged on. That was torture. Not only do diets fail to achieve their goal of permanent weight reduction, but they are fundamentally unkind because they ask us to deny our basic needs.

Today many frustrated dieters are familiar with Intuitive Eating, a method highly touted in social media by anti-diet dieticians. Intuitive Eating teaches to allow all foods in all quantities based on listening to the body's natural intuition about what and how much to eat. On the surface, this seems like a much kinder way to treat one's body. And to those of us who understand that bodies are not flawed and instead are fully capable of supporting life, this sounds pretty good!

But there are a few problems here. The first is that food is engineered to be addictive. Before the invention of factory farming, worldwide shipping, and a whole host of processed foods, the only access to say, cherry pie, was when Grandma made one at Christmas. The cherries in the pie she had picked and then canned last summer; the flour for the crust came from wheat her neighbor grew in his field and ground into flour; the butter she churned from milk from the family cow she milked last night; and there was no sugar added because sugar was expensive, and cherries are already sweet!

But after World War II, our food supply system and food itself made a huge turn for the worse with the industrialization of food. Now, in most parts of the world, highly palatable and addictive food is available twenty-four/seven within walking distance. (But most Americans will drive because walking too has become a terrible inconvenience to speed and progress.) Many major food corporations have scientists on staff to engineer their food to be highly addictive. It is given the perfect amount of sugar, salt, crunchiness, or softness so that the brain becomes hijacked. One [study](#) found that the sugar changes dopamine levels and binds to opioid receptors. It even changes mRNA expression (Avna 2009). And it's not just big companies making processed foods that are exploiting these facts. My own mother loves to cook and host dinner parties. Everyone knows her food is fabulous and none of us miss a chance to show up at her house for her home cooking. We are addicted to her cooking. And it is no wonder. She taught me to cook by adding heavy cream to the soups, massive amounts of salt to the meat, butter and cheese on all the veggies, and sugar in almost everything. Any menu at any chain restaurant will have been designed with these same principles to keep you coming back. We are dealing with a real addiction problem, and it is no wonder weight-related illnesses plague the entire world and well-meaning women fail every diet out there only to end up "letting themselves go." Because food has become so much more than fuel.

Food is comfort. Food is pleasure. Food is distraction. Food is something to do. Food is stress relief. Food is a relief from social anxiety. Food is a sleeping pill. Food is a remedy for sleep deprivation and exhaustion from overworking, over producing, and overdoing. Food is a drug and all of us have used it that way from time to time.

And this is why going on a diet won't work. It is like telling an addict to simply stop using methamphetamine or an alcoholic to simply stop drinking. I have never met an alcoholic or drug addict who used the substance because of the way it tastes. No, the addict uses drugs and the alcoholic drinks to excess because they want to change the way they feel. They are struggling and the drug or the drink brings them temporary relief. "There is a significant overlap between mental health [conditions] and substance misuse, with over 80% of individuals having both," says **Dr. Monty Ghosh, Addiction Specialist**.

And the way we use food is no different. People suffering from depression, anxiety, PTSD, and more will temporarily receive a great deal of relief in a binge. I have always called food the drug for "good girls" since it is legal, necessary, and free from stigma. But you don't have to have a diagnosable condition to get temporary comfort from food. When we are sad, lonely, angry, hurting, worried, stressed, or confused, we use food to relieve the suffering from these powerful emotions. This is called emotional eating. And we have all done it!

So binge eating and emotional eating help us with our mental and emotional health, temporarily. But in the end, they cause bigger problems. And that is why diets will never cure the problem. They are like shutting off the warning light on a car's dashboard. It fixes the annoying dinging but never addresses the real problem. Eventually, it cannot be ignored.

Likewise, Intuitive eating is going to become an excuse to continue bingeing and emotional eating. Your intuition, in the form of sore joints and low energy and a body you loathe, is already telling you to slow down at the dinner table. But still, somehow you find it impossible to stop. You can try your darndest to listen to your intuition, but when food is your main way of coping with the harsh reality of being alive, you won't hear much above the cravings for highly palatable food. The intuition around what, when and how much to eat is no longer intuition about how to nourish a body, but rather intuition about how to cover over the pain of being human. Undoubtedly, your deeper intuition tells you that eating as much as you want of anything you want is going to lead to some increasing health issues and weight gain.

That is because food is not the problem. Here is the key. The *cravings* to eat more than what we need are the true problem. End the cravings, end the overeating.

After fifteen years caught in the diet cycle, including the last five years with clinical bulimia, I swore off diets all together and immersed myself fully in intuitive eating. I followed all the rules perfectly. And I gained fifty pounds, thirty-five of which I did not need in order to be at my optimal weight. I knew I was missing something important. But what? My life was in shambles, my health wrecked from the eating disorder, my marriage falling apart, and my business about to go under. I woke up one morning and couldn't get out of bed. I wanted nothing more than to be dead. I knew in that moment I had a choice to make. I could let the weight of life crush me or I could fix what was broken. The idea of digging myself out of the hole I was in was overwhelming, and yet I knew it was possible. Suicide would have been the easy way out. I knew I would have to pass through a dark night of the soul in order to heal but I also knew I could handle it. I resolved that day not only to live, but to thrive.

I hired dieticians. I went to twelve-step meetings. I had a therapist. I devoured spiritual books. I got a divorce. I sold my business. I took a solo multi-year road trip through Mexico where I learned to do body work and trained in big-wave surfing. I studied yoga in Bali. I became certified in clinical nutrition, personal training, reiki, and yoga. I learned a great deal and grew

personally leaps and bounds. My happiness had improved dramatically, but the weight was still hanging around. I knew I was so close. There was just a small missing piece, but what?

Through my study, I learned that all physical imbalances, including illness, injury, and weight gain, are in response to a problem that starts long before our physical cells become damaged.

In my case, weight gain was a symptom, and I was digging deep to find the root cause.

Whenever we aren't treating the root cause, symptoms will worsen to the point that we are forced to pay attention. And that is exactly what happened to me. My body threw a new problem in the mix, a debilitating back injury which left me unable to walk, sit, or stand for more than five minutes at a time for about a year. Finally, my body had my attention. I knew healing would only come by putting the rest of life on hold (I had no choice in this case) and digging deep within.

Because of the tools I had learned over the previous five years, I knew there was a major lesson in this injury, and I resolved to understand it. I spent the better part of my days in bed or lying on the beach meditating. For someone with clinical anxiety, this was excruciatingly difficult. But I knew that somehow this experience would be the key to overcoming whatever was still holding me back.

The answer came to me one morning in a flash. I can only describe it as a moment of grace, divine inspiration. The answer came to me in a banana.

I was very hungry as I headed to the beach in front of my house early one morning to do my meditation. I wanted to eat upon waking like I normally did, but something told me to do this meditation while fasting, an experiment I had never tried before. Strangely enough, after I dropped into a meditative state, my hunger was forgotten. After a few hours, I noticed a rumble in my stomach. I reached in my bag for the breakfast I had packed. I pulled out a banana. As I held it in my hand, I felt a rush of pleasure from the delightful texture of the peel. I held it for several minutes, just gazing at the color and enjoying the texture on my skin. It was mesmerizing. So mesmerizing that I forgot I was hungry. In fact, I *wasn't* hungry. The texture and the pleasure had somehow satiated me. Then I lifted the banana to my face and inhaled deeply. I was overwhelmed by its delightful smell, as if it was the first time I'd ever smelled a banana. It was too beautiful, the whole experience. That is when the code cracked for me. I realized in an instant that food was for pleasure as much as it was for fuel. I became acutely aware in that moment that I had been using food as my staple, and almost singular, source of comfort.

It was the moment when all that I had learned on my quest suddenly became synthesized and usable. Up until that point, I had been doing the work. I was learning what was available to me through books, professionals, support groups, travel, lifestyle changes, and certifications. Then I carved out the space to be still (or rather was forced into it). And when I was finally ready to understand the answers I so desperately sought, I saw them there in plain sight. Now my body's "check engine light" (weight) is turned off because I addressed the underlying problems. In the three months following that meditation, I lost twenty-five pounds without a second thought.

Body Alchemy is everything useful that I have learned about how to have a healthy body that you love without ever dieting again and none of the BS. I remember reading plenty of eating disorder books, telling me to take a warm bath or call a friend when I felt a binge coming on. I would laugh at these useless suggestions, intuitively knowing they were not going to solve the real problem. On the other hand, I remember friends and therapists suggesting, "You just need to be happy and learn to love yourself no matter what." To which I always wanted to reply,

“Yeah, that sounds all well and good, but could you tell me *HOW?*” This book is the reply I was looking for and you will find it to be foundational in your journey as well.

Having a graduate degree in math, I love to take complex ideas and simplify them into simple and elegant formulas. I have done my best to throw out all of the woo-woo spiritual bypassing and include only what is absolutely essential to get you on the fast track to your happiest body ever so you can ditch the struggle with weight and move into your greatness NOW. Body Alchemy isn't a diet at all, but rather a powerful formula that delivers life changing results. Let's take a look at the overall formula before we discuss the specifics.

Diets fail at providing permanent weight loss because they don't treat the root cause of why a person wants to overeat in the first place. So it follows, treat the root cause and physical transformation will happen.

What happens when you get a cut? Your body closes it up without being asked. What happens when you get a cold? Your body heals up without medicine. What happens when your bladder gets full? Your body sends a signal to your brain and asks you to please urinate. Did you try to take your last breath or did your body breathe *you*? If you are a person with ovaries and you've made your own little person, how did you do that? Even the most brilliant and talented obstetrician cannot explain exactly how the female body makes humans, but we've been doing it since long before science was invented.

So if our bodies tell us to breathe when we need air, tell us to drink when we need water, tell us to urinate and defecate when we need to release waste products, then why are they asking us to overeat? The answer is one word: suffering.

Food is a temporary solution to suffering, both over and under eating. There is overwhelming scientific data showing how food changes brain chemistry. But you don't need to look any further than your own experience. Food makes us forget, calms us down, gives us something to do, cheers us up, and distracts us from all sorts of pain. We have associated eating with symptomatic relief from pain so much so that all pain starts to feel like hunger. Food is a fantastic pain killer. But like taking a painkiller for a broken arm, it's not going to solve the problem. So if suffering is the cause of overeating, then the solution logically follows: end suffering, end overeating. And in a world where we often feel completely out of control of our own suffering, we turn to food, the one thing we can control, to ease the pain. So how do we end suffering when we are simply not in control?

Obviously we can stop bad things from happening. Of course not. Loved ones die, wars rage, children starve. Pain is certainly inevitable! But suffering is optional. There is a well-known prayer that is repeated thousands of times a day in twelve-step meetings all over the world. The *Serenity Prayer* goes like this: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” In this book, you will learn how to handle unavoidable pain with serenity, how to know when something painful needs to change, and how to make powerful changes when they are warranted. You will learn all of this in order to reduce, or even end, suffering. When this happens, the body falls in line with its natural rhythms once again and the cravings to eat more than what the body physically needs naturally disappear.

The formula appears to be very simple, and it is, but this oversimplification covers everything we must unpack in the pages to come. Now we must go about doing the work in order to get the result.

## How to Read this Book

This book is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on ending the suffering caused by being out of alignment with our true purpose. This is the kind of suffering we can change by making external changes.

Part II is all about ending the suffering we cause ourselves by becoming too wrapped up in our thoughts. This is also suffering that we have the power to change by making internal changes.

The third part is a road map for cultivating serenity in the face of unavoidable pain. The aim of this section is to provide a framework and tools so that when pain presents itself, you will have the power to manage it without the addition of suffering.

Part IV of this book specifically addresses the body. This part of the book comes last for a reason. Skipping ahead is like trying to take a test before learning the material. You're bound for failure before you even start. Whatever is going on in your body is a symptom of something going on emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. That is why it is important that you read the first three sections of this book first and master the activities before moving on to address the body. Throughout this book, I provide concrete tools to strengthen your awareness and put in the groundwork for true transformation. Just like a diet, I'll ask you to follow a few specific steps. But unlike a diet, they won't involve depriving yourself in any way. Actually, it will be the opposite. I have only one rule I ask for you to follow throughout this entire process: *do what you want to do*. Nothing more, nothing less. Let every action you take be motivated by "want-power" not willpower. It is true that thoroughly completing every bit of homework, taking to heart every suggestion, and acting on this information immediately will provide the fastest and most powerful results, but, and this is a big but, the results will not be lasting. If you are simply not ready to make changes, or not enjoying the changes you are forcing yourself to make, eventually you will tire of doing them and go back to your old habits.

The approach I suggest instead is to do the homework as much as it brings you joy. Try out each suggestion and then let it go if it doesn't serve you. Perhaps you will pick up just one nugget of truth from this book that will then set you up to be ready for some encounter, workshop, or other delivery of transformational information down the road which would have otherwise fallen on deaf ears had you not read this book. Or perhaps you will pick up this book again in a year's time and find that you are now in a place where everything resonates with you and you are ready for big changes. You are ready when you are ready, not a moment before. So please don't guilt yourself into being an "A" student. Some people love homework assignments and thrive on being the high performer in the room. If that is you, then by all means have fun and do your best. But if you tend to be a back of the classroom kinda girl, don't worry; do what feels useful and leave the rest for another day.

There are fifteen homeworks and eight body image activities. They are numbered sequentially as you read through this book. If you want additional support and feedback I encourage you to join my free homework discussion group on Discord. Visit my website for more information at [www.MelanieEzell.com](http://www.MelanieEzell.com)

Lastly, this book uses female nouns and pronouns. But Body Alchemy works equally for men and non-binary individuals who struggle with emotional and binge eating and are finally ready to ditch diets for good so they can find a body they love.

## **Part I Making External Changes**

### **Chapter 1: Internal GPS**

The first step to reduce suffering is to end self-inflicted pain. This means making bold changes to the things that can and need to be changed in our lives. The reality is that some pain is unavoidable, and we will cover that type of pain in Part III. But sometimes it is possible to remove the painful stimulus altogether, which is certainly preferable, but often takes great courage and commitment. In this chapter, we will look at the things in our lives that need to change and can be changed. I will present a framework for knowing if change needs to be made, how to make that change easily, and how to find more moments in your life where everything is flowing and painful stimuli are at a minimum. Although this might sound daunting, remember you have full permission to work at your own pace, doing what feels right when it feels right.

I like to think of a boardroom up in heaven. The label on the door says, "New Human Programming." In that room, there is a group of angels in charge of solving humanity's problems. They can see the whole picture from up there and they know exactly what needs to be done to move humanity forward in evolution. So they design each new baby to fulfill a critical role toward that end. But how will the baby know what she needs to do when the time comes to do it? How will she find herself in the right place at the right time? How will she learn the skills necessary in her lifetime in order to accomplish her mission? These angels do not override a human's free will. Instead, they give each new human a road map, like GPS. If they choose to follow the GPS, they will accomplish their mission. So what is this GPS? The desires of the heart. Each turn-by-turn direction sounds like a desire to do or say something. Unfortunately, each time an authority figure tells that child that she "shouldn't" do that, the volume on the GPS gets turned down a tiny bit. And by the time most children reach adulthood, the GPS is at such a low volume that they can't hear it at all. They find themselves staring at a restaurant menu, making a choice based not on the description of the food that sounds best, but on the calorie count next to the description. Worse yet, they are at that restaurant for a business meeting they don't want to be in, making money in a career that doesn't bring them joy to support an oversized mortgage in a city they never wanted to stay in. Everything you need to know about how to live your best life was programmed into you from the very beginning.