

# Think Yourself Thin

The latest weight-loss advantage is all in your head. Can flexing your mental muscles work for you?

**You probably think that using your imagination as a weight-loss tool in the same way you use your food diary or a scale defies the science of weight loss.** But new research from Carnegie Mellon University suggests you may actually be able to help curb your cravings for certain foods—from chocolate to french fries—by mentally “eating” those foods. In that study, participants who looked at photos of a bowl filled with candies or a stack of cheese cubes, and then envisioned themselves eating those specific foods one by one several times, reduced their desire for them.

As many WW members can attest, the mind can be a powerful weight-loss tool. For example, in the months before her son’s wedding, Mary W., 58, of Houston Texas, took a few minutes



PHOTOGRAPHY: MASTERFILE.

# Losing

## WINNING AT LOSING

every day to flex her mental muscle: “I saw myself walking my son down the aisle in a halter sundress,” she recalls. “His father and I are divorced, and I kept picturing the look on my ex’s face when he saw me.” Envisioning herself in a revealing style she wouldn’t normally wear was the push that Mary needed to stay on track for the big day. Similarly,

### BACK TO THE FUTURE

While envisioning your “after” shot is a great motivator, channeling images from the past can also encourage weight loss. “I have a picture of my overweight self in a bathing suit that I think of every time I’m tempted to go off track,” says Kim B., 55, of City Center, Florida. “I simply remember myself in that photo, and then I go for a power walk. I don’t want to go back to where I was.”

Heather H., 31, of Portland, Oregon, conjures up imaginary scenarios to help maintain her weight loss. One of the images that keeps her accountable is a bit far-fetched, but it works. “I imagine myself as a runway model,” she says. “Why not?”

**These mental exercises may seem impractical or out of character for you at first.** But when your tried-and-true methods (tracking, weighing and measuring) get stale and you need to shake up your mind-set, they’re a fun way to reinvigorate your resolve. Try imagining a thinner version of yourself

doing something you wouldn’t normally do, such as crossing a marathon finish line or strutting confidently into your college reunion.

When it comes to image surfing, the time of day matters, too. “Morning is the perfect time to find a quiet place, close your eyes, and let your imagination run wild,” says Lois Barth, a relationship and life coach in New York City. “It sets the tone for the day.” Barth suggests enriching your scenarios by giving them a soundtrack; for example, if you want to fit into a smaller jean size, see yourself zip them up, and then hear your husband say, “Wow, you look good in those jeans.” **Do these exercises often to maintain your focus.** And as your goals change, find new images that help you move closer to the finish line.

WW

A technique that life coach Lois Barth recommends to clients is creating a split screen in your mind with a “before” image on the left and a more positive “after” image on the right. “This technique may at first cause you to feel frustrated because you’re not losing fast enough or your after image is fuzzier than the before,” she says. But don’t let it throw you off course. Instead, simply acknowledge how much closer you are to your weight-loss goal than when you started, and continue to practice the technique until your after image is as clear in your mind as your before.