

THE BIG IDEAS



It's Not Just You
And... YOU CAN DO IT!!

The Stats
And the heroic (!) challenge.

The 4 S's
Post Breaking the Bright Lines.

Optimus vs. Saboteur
To whom are you listening?

"The purpose of this kind of precision [of Bright Line Eating] is that you're building up integrity and credibility with yourself."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson



The Official Bright Line Eating Cookbook

Weight Loss Made Simple

BY SUSAN PEIRCE THOMPSON, PH.D. · HAY HOUSE © 2019 · 343 PAGES

"The fact is that losing weight is exhausting. By definition, it requires eating fewer calories than you expend, which forces your body to undergo the effortful task of harvesting fuel from within. Plus, since fat cells store our toxins, shrinking them dumps waste into our bloodstream, making us very tired. Not fun. Which is why I want you to have to do it only one more time—ever. Then I want you to stay at your goal weight for the rest of your life. It is truly, realistically possible.

Five years in, what we're seeing is that Bright Line Eating (BLE) is unusually, outrageously successful *for the people who continue to do it*—the people who commit their food daily, keep their Bright Lines shiny, and surrender to the plan as it was designed. But if you cut corners at the beginning, or give it a good start and then succumb to the overconfidence bias and drift away, the weight will return, along with the disappointment, the joint pain, and the despair.

Those of us who succeed follow the formula. We *trust* the plan and *do* it. We let go of our old ways of relating to food, conceptualizing food, and using food. We realize that if we had known how to succeed we would have done it already. So we embrace this new way of eating wholeheartedly, allowing these new habits to reshape our brains. At the same time, we *invest* in this community. This places us in an environment where our new way, which flies in the face of our entire food culture, is normalized, reinforced, and refreshed all the time. Because society, which we are still a part of, works to erode our resolve DAILY. So we have to replenish it daily as well.

Starting right now, you are a part of this community. Let us help you become everything you were meant to be. Let us help you live Happy, Thin, and Free."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson from *The Official Bright Line Eating Cookbook*

I LOVE (!) Susan Peirce Thompson and her work. A few years ago, we featured her *New York Times* best-selling book [Bright Line Eating](#). <- A book that combines the science of willpower and nutrition?! I'll take it!

In that book, we learn about the fact that Susan used to be obese and addicted to everything. As in... EVERYTHING. What makes her especially awesome is that she went antifragile on it and got a Ph.D. in Brain and Cognitive Sciences so she could understand what the heck was going on.

She's now an Adjunct Associate Professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester. (Note: Mr. Intrinsic Motivation (author of [Why We Do What We Do](#)) [Edward Deci](#) is also at the University of Rochester. So is one of the world's leading researchers on the science of relationships—a guy named Harry Reis with whom Sonja Lyubomirsky is writing a new book.)

Susan is an expert in the psychology of eating and is the creator of Bright Line Eating Solutions—a program (and community!) that has helped thousands of people live "Happy, Thin, and Free."

"What the research shows is that if you have a brain that is highly susceptible to the pull of addictive foods, you need to take advantage of ALL the science, ALL the support structures built into the program, and ALL the information on HOW to do Bright Line Eating."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"Science has proven that food addiction is real. As real as cocaine or heroin addiction.

There is no physiological difference. Have you ever made a rational decision to turn away from foods that are harming you, but then found yourself eating them anyway? That's addiction. People ask me, 'Really, sugar and flour are as addictive a cocaine and heroin?' Actually, researchers estimate they might be more addictive."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

This is the Cookbook to her *Bright Line Eating* book. I've never done a Note on a Cookbook before but a) this isn't your normal cookbook and b) the topic of the importance of optimizing our metabolic health (and how that correlates to our visceral fat which is tied to our waist-to-height ratio) has been very salient for me as we continue to figure out the central tenets of (and standards for) our Optimize Coach program.

So, when Alexandra got our pre-ordered copy (Thanks for being you, Babes! :), I flipped it open and was like, "Wow. This is REALLY good. And REALLY important."

And, well, here we are. The first 70 pages of the book are a really powerful overview of "The Revolutionary Neuroscience of Sustainable Weight Loss" that quickly unpacks "Why Bright Line Eating Works," "How to Do Bright Line Eating," and "The Science of a Simple Diet."

Then we get recipes and techniques on everything from Breakfasts, Vegetables, Perfect Plates, Dressings and all that goodness. It's the perfect complement to the core book. If you and/or a loved one have ever struggled with your weight, I HIGHLY (!!!) recommend Susan's books and Boot Camp. (Get a copy of the Cookbook here. And her first book here.)

Of course, this book is packed (!) with Big Ideas. For now, I'm excited to share a few of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

Note: Although this book provides an ASTONISHINGLY (!!!) concise look at the neuroscience of food addiction (hello, leptin and insulin and dopamine and nucleus accumbens!), we're going to focus on the fundamental, big-picture motivation side of things so check out the other Note for more on the four Bright Lines: 1. No Sugar + 2. No Flour + 3. Meals + 4. Quantities along with the neuroscience of food addiction, the Willpower Gap, etc. And, of course, get the book.

IT'S NOT JUST YOU... AND... YOU CAN DO IT!!!

"Welcome to a cookbook unlike any you've ever used before. This is not your typical 'diet' cookbook where you can just skip ahead to the recipes, follow the weekly meal plan, cross your fingers, and hope that this time you're going to lose your excess weight—and keep it off. That's because Bright Line Eating is not your typical weight-loss program. The typical weight-loss program has a financial model based on recidivism. According to a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, fewer than 1 percent of obese people are able to achieve a normal BMI within one year. And 78 percent of those who lose at least 5 percent of their body weight regain it within five years. In essence, across all people and all programs, diets have a 99 percent failure rate. If you have thought it's just you, it isn't."

A few things we want to highlight here. First, if you've failed at a "diet" you're not alone.

99% (NINETY-NINE PERCENT!) of people who try to lose weight fail to keep it off.

Enter: Self Compassion 101. It's time to channel our best Kristen Neff wisdom and recognize the toxicity of shame as we embrace the three main facets of her self-compassion model: Self-Kindness (we'll talk about this in a moment), Common Humanity (you're not alone!!) and Mindfulness (let's notice when we're off/what we're doing when we get off and get back on!).

That's the first thing that came to mind when I read that. But then you know what I thought of? I thought of the 1% who succeed against the odds. Kinda makes you wonder what THEY did, eh?

Get this: As per Susan's internal research, the participants in her program have tried, on average, SIXTEEN (!!!) other dietary approaches before trying Bright Line Eating. SIXTEEN!!!

I want to pause for a moment and celebrate the HEROIC courage it takes for someone to keep on trying again and again and again—embodying THE most important word of the growth mindset: "... yet."

As in, "I have tried and failed sixteen times. That's OK. I just haven't figured it out... YET!"

"Eating this way has worked for me for a long time now, and I have seen it work sustainably for thousands of others around the world. But the parts of your brain that have been hijacked by sugar and flour are going to put up a huge fight. They want you to find the 'diet' that will let them keep getting their fix while somehow getting you into a right-sized body. If you ever find it please let me know."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

"The typical weight-loss program has a financial model based on recidivism."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

Cue Stanford researcher [Carol Dweck](#) (again!) who, in her seminal book called [Mindset](#) (on how remarkably the quality of our lives is influenced by how we approach life's challenges) quotes Michael Jordan's Nike commercial to make her point: "Michael Jordan embraced his failures. In fact, in one of his favorite ads for Nike, he says: "I've missed more than nine thousand shots. I've lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot, and missed." You can be sure that each time, he went back and practiced the shot a hundred times."

Dweck also tells us: "People in the growth mindset don't just *seek* challenge, they thrive on it." And: "In the fixed mindset it's not enough just to succeed. It's not enough just to look smart and talented. You have to be pretty much flawless. And you have to be flawless right away."

And, you know what? That's why the VERY first thing I did when I opened the book was flip through and read the stories of the "Bright Lifers" who (goosebumps as I type this) went ALL IN on the Bright Line approach and completely transformed their bodies and lives and well-being. And then, very importantly, MAINTAINED their ALL IN COMMITMENT to sustain their gains.

I got tears in my eyes many times reading the stories of the radiantly exemplary women (they were all women) who dropped 50, 75, 100+ (!!) pounds. The pictures were, as the back cover promised, jaw dropping, but it was their heroic, growth mindset-fueled grit that most moved me.

In fact, as I read the stories Susan featured, I thought of one of our beloved Optimize Coaches, Maxine Hargreaves. I'll let her share her story. [Check this out.](#)

So... One more time: Remember that you're not alone. 99% of the people who try a diet fail and the average number of attempts for the Bright Lifers was 16 times!

AND!!! Know that IF SUSAN'S BRIGHT LIFERS CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU. That, by far, is the most important takeaway from this book and for this Note.

I repeat: Know that IF THEY CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU.

As Susan says: "Thousands of people have done this successfully, and there's no difference between them and you. This plan works beautifully if you follow it."

AND!!! Very importantly: Susan also tells us: "I promise you there are no new questions—if you are facing a challenge, someone ahead of you has solved it. Benefit from their experience."

Susan tells us that WHATEVER challenge you may be facing—whether that's a weight gain after menopause or some other situation, her community has seen it and conquered it. So can you.

THE STATS AND THE HEROIC CHALLENGE

"In the United States, more than 70% of people are overweight or obese. Nearly half of our white children and adolescents are overweight or obese, as are nearly three quarters of our children and adolescents of color. That excess weight comes with dire health consequences: 1.5 million new cases of type 2 diabetes are diagnosed each year, resulting in 84,000 people getting a foot or leg amputated annually, and 63% of us are dying early from obesity-related diseases.

... Long before we die from eating this way, we stop living. I remember vividly what it felt like to be obese. It was mentally and physically exhausting. On my way to becoming the speaker for my graduating class at UC Berkeley, I would lumber across campus with marshmallows in my pocket, needing a 'fix' every few minutes just to keep going. It was misery. And therein lies the paradox that led me on this field of inquiry, and ultimately to creating Bright Line Eating: I could get myself to do everything I needed to do to graduate with highest honors and start (and then finish) my Ph.D. in Brain and Cognitive Sciences, but I could not control my eating."

EVERY SINGLE TIME I read stats like those I wince. Especially the rates (and disparity within ethnicities) among children. :/

" Scientists have noticed that insatiable hunger differs from real hunger in two key ways. The first is that it's accompanied by a strong urge to be sedentary. The second is that eating doesn't actually satiate it."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

Then I recommit to doing everything in my power to help people understand the metabolic drivers behind all of our chronic diseases AND the behavioral changes we can make to Optimize WHILE striving to compassionately hold us to *really* high (optimal!) standards so we can be the change and change the world together.

Part of a longer chat but... When I think of WHY people give up on Optimizing their weight, I think of two primary potential reasons: 1. They may not understand *just* how important our weight/measures of visceral fat are to our lifespan (and health span); and/or 2. Even if they DO get that it's important, they don't think they can actually achieve their goals (see 16 prior failures) so they give up and/or start believing that it's not that important anyway.

So... I think those are the two things we REALLY (!!!) need to get. We already covered the second point—KNOWING (!!!) we CAN Optimize our weight and get "Happy, Thin, and Free."

Regarding the first point: I think we need to get the fact that getting to our "right-sized" bodies is REALLY important. Not so we look great for the selfie, but so we FEEL great and have the Energy to give our best to our Work and Love TODAY and for a lot of Todays. AND so we can be radiantly exemplary models of what self-mastery looks like while (most importantly for changing the world) SHARING the hard-won wisdom of how we went from sub-optimal to optimal while supporting/encouraging others to do the same.

Susan includes "Thin" in her tagline for a very specific reason. Research shows that our amount of *visceral* fat is REALLY (!) important. In fact, it's THE greatest predictor of our morbidity.

(Note: Some people reference reports that say being overweight is actually healthier for you. Apparently, and unfortunately, those conclusions are drawn from data that includes people who are *involuntarily* losing weight—from stuff like chemotherapy, etc. When you take out THAT data, you see the unequivocal toxic effects of excess weight.)

As leading UCSF endocrinologist [Robert Lustig](#) puts it in *Fat Chance*: "When it comes right down to it, it's all about your middle. This whole obesity/health/longevity question centers on your abdominal, visceral, or 'big belly' fat—at least statistically."

He also says: "In a nutshell, your body fat is your biggest long-term risk for infirmity. Nothing correlates with diabetes, heart disease, and cancer better than your fat." And: "Visceral fat is the fulcrum on which your health teeters."

Finally: "The simplest and cheapest surrogate for determining your health status is your waist circumference, which correlates with morbidity and risk for death better than any other health parameter. This is arguably the most important piece of information in your entire health profile because it tells you about your visceral fat. A high waist circumference translates into the 'apple' shape that tips physicians off to risk for diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer."

Research is showing that there's an even more reliable predictor of morbidity than a simple waist circumference measure: It's called the waist-to-height ratio or WHtR. ([Check out this academic paper for more detail.](#))

The optimal ratio between your WAIST and your HEIGHT? $<.5$. (For example, I'm 6 feet tall. That's 72 inches. My waist can be up to 36 inches to pass the $<.5$ test. It's 32 or so. Yours?)

<- That $<.5$ WHtR indicates an optimal level of visceral fat—which, again is what we're after if we're truly serious about Optimizing our lives so we can be the change we want to see so we can play our role in helping CONQUER the PANDEMIC of chronic disease that's driven by metabolic dysfunction that shows up in visceral fat and is easily measured by our WHtR.

And THAT (!!!) is why we are challenging our Optimize Coaches to hit the $<.5$ WHtR target.

For some, it's a HUGE challenge. And (I have goosebumps as I type this), that's why I think people who are willing to do the *heroically* hard work to CONQUER this obstacle have the

" Every cell in your taste buds dies and is replaced by a brand-new taste bud cell every two weeks."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

" So many people come into Bright Line Eating having experimented with giving up sugar, only to watch their flour consumption, and their weight, balloon. The science of flour addiction is in its infancy. We know that flour raises insulin levels, but we haven't uncovered the dopamine connection. YET.

But no one has ever driven out in the rain at 3 A.M. to get sauce and cheese on broccoli. Why do people rate pizza as the number one most addictive food in existence? It's the flour."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

" I was a crystal meth addict who dropped out of high school and became a crack cocaine addict. With incredible help and grace, I was able to kick both addictions before I was even legally old enough to buy the alcohol I no longer wanted or ever touched again. But food was harder. Food was an addiction that took me years and years more to finally kick."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

greatest opportunity to positively affect those around them. (Go Maxine!!!)

All of which brings us back to you. How's your WHtR? Time to rock it?

YOU GOT THIS and LET'S DO THIS!!

THE 4 S'S OF BREAKING BRIGHT LINES

"In Bright Line eating, we celebrate the strength in our shared commitment to sticking with the Bright Lines, a commitment to no exceptions, to being unstoppable. This gives us the physical recovery we're seeking—lasting weight loss and brilliant health—and it also results in a lot of freedom and happiness. This is what's so counterintuitive for people who don't need Bright Line Eating. Having clear structure can lead to so much freedom.

However, we also work on having a gentle, wise, and self-supportive approach when we do break our Bright Lines. Not everyone who embarks on this way of life will have breaks—some grab hold of this program like a lifeline and just follow the plan, one day at a time, indefinitely. Others deviate, either on purpose or under duress, and then work to get back on track. I myself have not had unbroken Bright Lines since I first started eating this way on May 21, 2003. I've had long stretches of shiny Bright Lines (as long as eight consecutive years) and other periods when I was struggling mightily to keep my Lines bright. Through that experience, I came to realize that there are four key components to handling a break in the Bright Lines successfully, adaptively, and in a way that strengthens our program. They are the Four S's."

That's from a chapter on "How to Do Bright Line Eating."

Bright Lines. They're helpful PRECISELY because they help us avoid the "Willpower Gap" by using our willpower wisely to install habits that run on autopilot.

And... What happens when we break them? We rock the 4 S's: 1. Speed + 2. Self-Compassion + 3. Social Support + 4. Seek the Lesson. Here's the super-quick take.

1. **Speed.** When you step on the wrong side of a Bright Line, Susan tells us that we don't to "resume" our good habits at some point in the future (whether that's tomorrow or next New Year's or whatever). She says we want to REZOOM immediately! Speed is a force style.
2. **Self-Compassion.** Didn't we already chat about this? YEP. VERY (!) wise to chat about it again. Why? Because if we don't have a TON of self-compassion we might run the risk of falling into a sort of "self-delusion" where, to avoid the pain of shame, we ignore the reality of our situation and rationalize our past attempts/failures in order to preserve our sanity. MUCH better to "gently" and "wisely" counsel ourselves so we can face reality with the Stockdale Paradox optimism required to do hard things (like get your body right-sized!).

Susan echoes Kristen Neff when she tells us: "Inside your head, treat yourself like you'd treat your best friend who just sprained her ankle on a hike. You'd get her help. Rally resources. Make sure she was resting and taking it easy. No downward, negative spiral of self-loathing. Because shame over eating leads to more overeating. Be gentle, kind, and encouraging. You are not a bad person. You just have a malfunctioning brain."

3. **Social Support.** The stories of how Susan's BLE community supports one another are astonishingly (!) inspiring. When we fall short, we don't want to isolate ourselves. But... We ALSO don't want to go to a group of friends where shame/resignation is the norm. Fastest way to up your game? Join a community of people who are committed to the same goals and who are there to encourage (literally: to GIVE COURAGE!!) when you need it!
4. **Seek the Lesson.** Make a mis-take? Ain't no thing. Put on your lab coat, run the data from your N = 1 "me" search project, ask yourself "What needs work?" and put that data to good use. +1. +1. +1.

"The most successful people in Bright Line Eating are those who decide to trust the full plan and do it as outlined. After all, nothing you've tried before has gotten you where you've wanted to be, right? Thousands of cases show that this road map works. Trust."

~ Susan Peirce Thompson

OPTIMUS VS. THE SABOTEUR

"If you are doing Bright Line Eating and it's going well, *protect that*. Your Saboteur, I guarantee, will try to convince you to make an exception here or there. *Don't fall for it*. That road is slippery and painful. The fact that rezooming is possible is *absolutely not* an invitation to take a slight detour from the Lines and then get back on track right afterward. It doesn't work like that. The first thing that happens when you break the Bright Lines is that your freedom evaporates, instantly. And it goes downhill from there. You don't want to live a life of breaking and rezooming. The reason we honor the Bright Lines and commit to living within them is because we find that it makes us Happy, Thin, and Free. But more than that, it allows us to be more of the people we strive to be and to do more of the things we want to do in life beyond food—to be self-actualized and engaged in the world. *That is what we want our lives to be about.*"

That's from the final section before the actual recipes—right after our "Four S's" and right before "Getting to Goal Weight" while creating a new IDENTITY and WAY OF LIFE so we stop the ups and downs that often plague weight-loss programs and, well, every other aspect of our lives.

We've GOTTA KNOW that, as [Adam Alter](#) says in *Irresistible*, once our brains are "pickled" by one addiction or another, that "pickle" CAN NEVER BE UNPICKLED.

In other words, don't tempt fate. Maintain your Bright Lines.

So, when your Saboteur INEVITABLY tries to tempt you with a jar of pickles, wave at him or her then turn to your other shoulder and high five your inner daimon and carry on Bright Line Optimizing and actualizing—rocking the core tenets of the Eudaimonology of Eating. :)

Here's to using our greatest challenges in life—whether that's weight issues or addiction or whatever—as the antifragile fuel we need to live heroically.

You've got this. Now, give us all you've got—Energized and Happy, Thin and Free.

Let's be radiant exemplars. Not just for ourselves but for our friends, communities and world that desperately needs more of us stepping up to do the hard work to be the change we want to see so we can change the world.

Together. One person at a time. Starting with you and me. TODAY.

B

Brian Johnson,
Philosopher in Residence

About the Author of "The Official Bright Line Eating Cookbook"

SUSAN PEIRCE THOMPSON



Susan Peirce Thompson is an Adjunct Associate Professor of Brain and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Rochester and an American business entrepreneur and author. She is the founder and CEO of Bright Line Eating Solutions, a weight loss and weight sustainability company.

About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.

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