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PLAN

Ellie Krieger

Healthy-Eating Expert,
Author and Host of
the Food Network's *Healthy Appetite*

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LIFETIME
FITNESS

An Appetite for Change

Best-selling author and TV host Ellie Krieger found a personal balance between good health and delicious food. Now she's committed to helping others make a breakthrough.



VIDEO EXTRA!

See the behind-the-scenes footage from our photo shoot with Ellie Krieger at experiencelifemag.com/videos.

WEB EXTRA!

Check out Ellie Krieger's pantry in the online version of this story, and explore some of her delicious recipes in "All Grown Up," available in the July/August 2008 archives at experiencelifemag.com.

Ellie Krieger considers “diet” a four-letter word — both literally and figuratively. The 43-year-old host of the Food Network’s *Healthy Appetite* and best-selling author of *The Food You Crave: Luscious Recipes for a Healthy Life* (Taunton Press, 2008) thinks that adopting a diet mentality — where we distinguish between “healthy” meals and the foods we really crave — simply sets people up for failure.

“So often, people’s perceptions of healthy food is that there must be some compromise in taste and enjoyment, but I try to show that it is all interconnected, that delicious food can also be healthy food,” she says.

Because we tend to view food in extremes, she explains, we’re often either obsessing about eating healthy and being “good,” or we’re indulging rampantly and feeling guilty.

“First of all, you’re good no matter what,” she says.

“There’s no point in putting a value judgment on how good or bad you are based on how you’re eating at any particular instant.”

Research has consistently shown that one extreme yields the other — the biggest risk factor for bingeing is dieting, Krieger notes — so it’s important to break the cycle completely: “Instead, we should ask ourselves, ‘Where is the point of balance where I can live happily and mindfully and authentically enjoy eating?’”

Although Krieger’s recipes feature nutritious comfort foods — think meatball-and-pepper hero sandwiches, steak tacos with cucumber-avocado salsa, and chicken with mango barbecue sauce — eating in balance means not feeling deprived, so if you really want a few French fries with your meal, so be it. The key is not making a big deal out of it or rigidly tracking calories. “It’s important to be aware of what we are eating, but when we start to eat by numbers, we lose something incredibly valuable, which is enjoyment and pleasure,” she says.

This is not just theory for Krieger, who was overweight as a child growing up in the New York City borough of Queens. She remembers being teased as a kid and feeling self-conscious that she couldn’t wear the same clothes as the other girls. “I came from a family where food is love, and I was . . . well-loved,” she says, laughing.

Krieger credits her mother, a teacher and guidance counselor, with helping her become interested in nutrition as a teen to lose weight. “I just had this inborn hunger and passion for food; I remember always thinking, ‘I want

food. I think that learning about nutrition transformed my relationship with food in a healthy way,” she says. “My mom jokes that it was positive transference — like a pyromaniac becoming a fireman.”

Although she admits she went through a rough period in high school where she became a little too compulsive about what she ate — a compulsion that, at one point, led her to binge on a batch of her grandmother’s brownies until she made herself ill — Krieger thinks that her personal struggles have only aided in her quest to help others reinvent themselves.

She majored in clinical nutrition as an undergrad at Cornell University (while supporting herself as a model with the legendary Wilhelmina agency) and earned her master’s in nutrition education from Columbia University before opening a private practice in New York. Her first book, *Small Changes, Big Results* (Random House, 2005), written after the birth of her

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daughter, Isabella, caught the attention of a Food Network producer, who tapped her to host *Healthy Appetite*, which debuted in 2006.

Through it all, Krieger has focused on the importance of small changes. “One of the biggest obstacles to reinventing your eating habits is setting unrealistic goals. Instead of saying, ‘I’m never going to eat bread again,’ take an objective step back, and with loving intent, say to yourself, ‘What can I realistically do and live with?’” she explains. “If you are overly ambitious, it winds up backfiring, which can be very painful because you feel like you’ve failed.”

After all, she notes, nutrition is only one part of a larger picture of wellness that includes fitness, stress management and other lifestyle considerations — including awareness and self-acceptance. “I run 30 minutes in the morning, and I’m literally the slowest person out there. For example, just today, old people were speed-walking past me, and I was like, ‘This is pathetic,’ but then I thought, ‘I’m out here, I’m moving my body and I get to be outside.’”

And although Krieger views her teen transformation as a “coming out of a cocoon” moment, she is quick to point out that reinvention is a constant process: “I have to be constantly evolving. I have a daughter now, which means I have less time for elaborate meals. I’ve entered my 40s, and I realize it’s really affecting my metabolism, and I have to change my plan. It’s a dynamic process; life changes, and you have to move with it.”

Anjula Razdan is an *Experience Life* senior editor.