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As the leading journal in its field, *HEALTHY WEIGHT JOURNAL* provides a critical link between research and practical application. Recognizing that weight is a complex condition of increasing concern throughout the world, we are committed to bringing together scientific information from many sources, reporting controversial issues in a clear, objective manner, and the ongoing search for truth and understanding. Recognizing that weight is an easily exploitable health and social concern, we are further committed to exposing deception, reshaping detrimental social attitudes, and promoting good health at any size. Our mission is to be a voice of integrity and insight in a field that has been much abused and neglected.

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Living in Starvation Mode

The horrors of starvation are still much with us even now at the end of the 20th century. Drought and war and political upheaval can quickly disrupt an already-uncertain food pipeline for suffering populations in many parts of the world. Even in the stable, developed countries of the western world, often accused of being too well fed, some people are at risk for starvation, malnutrition, and hunger.

Looking at the long history of the human race, the biggest threat to our ancestors' survival was not war or wild animal attack, though real enough, but starvation. So what traits could most ensure survival of the species? Clearly, it would be the ability to go into a protective "starvation mode," shut down the body, bank the fires, endure privation, and at the same time sharpen the drive to search for food.

And in fact, this is just what happens. The evidence is clear: The person in starvation mode shuts down physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, and heightens his or her attention to food. This is documented in both the Minnesota Starvation Study (page 68), and Collin Turnbull's anthropologic study of a starving African tribe during the mid-1960s drought (page 73).

It only takes a small stretch to relate this to dieters, patients on weight loss programs, and eating disordered women. One man in the Minnesota study developed major personality disturbances after just 10 weeks on a diet of about 1,500 calories. He had lost only 10 pounds, 7 percent of his weight, yet mentally and emotionally he was in the starvation mode, even though his diet was less strict than many weight loss regimens. His weight loss was less than the 10 percent now being recommended by the National Institutes of Health for all of the 22.5 percent of Americans with a body mass index of 30 and higher.

What can we expect from people in starvation mode? For one thing, an increase in food preoccupation. Food was constantly on the minds of the men in the Minnesota study. It was a major topic of their conversation, their reading, and their daydreams. They smuggled out bits of food, hoarded food, dawdled for hours over eating, and took vicarious pleasure in watching others eat. Most of these behaviors persisted long after the starvation period ended. The same thing happened in Turnbull's account of the starving Ik: each person focused single-mindedly on food.

How might family and social relationships suffer? Saddest of all for the Ik was the loss of love and compassion, the dulling of emotion and any sense of caring about one another. Reduced to the lowest level of survival, each became a loner, looking out for himself or herself, distrustful, malicious, cruel, and "generally mean as people can be." Children beat their frail grandparents and stole food from their mouths. A father laughed as he showed off a dying son with distended, bloated belly. Parents drove young children and old people out of their homes. And a blind woman wept as she remembered a time when her people were kind and good.

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