

EAT **LIVE** THRIVE DIET



A LIFESTYLE PLAN to REV UP YOUR
MIDLIFE METABOLISM

DANNA DEMETRE AND ROBYN THOMSON

Praise for
Eat, Live, Thrive Diet

"This book contains cutting-edge information to revolutionize your health and well-being! Health and weight loss is best done by addressing the total woman—body, soul, and spirit. *Eat, Live, Thrive Diet* gives accurate and practical insights and applications that will help women not only lose unwanted weight but also enhance their health in ways that could produce anti-aging results."

—DR. MARK STENGLER, naturopathic medical doctor, best-selling author, and adviser
to *Eat, Live, Thrive Diet*

"This is not a book of theory; it's a practical, day-by-day manual on living your best life. If, like me, you want to have a strong, healthy body to serve God for as long as you can, this book is a gift."

—SHEILA WALSH, author of *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*

"In *Eat, Live, Thrive Diet*, Danna and Robyn have passionately researched, lived, and committed themselves to sharing trailblazing information to inspire women to soar over the increasing physical hurdles they experience as they age. They give us hope that we can *thrive* beautifully as we dance with the years."

—PATTI T. MILLIGAN, PHD, RD, CNS, natural foods and integrative medicine nutritionist

"Danna and Robyn have provided a road map for a sustainable lifestyle. Proof that our best bodies—and lives—are still ahead of us, no matter our age."

—NANCY STAFFORD, actress, speaker, and author

"In this timely book, Danna and Robyn bring clarity to the guesswork, confusion, and contradictions that have puzzled eternal dieters over the years. Their candor, practicality, and encouragement bring renewed hope for all who want to glorify God with their bodies. This is a classic must-read!"

—DEBORAH SMITH PEGUES, CPA, TV host, global speaker, and best-selling author

"Danna and Robyn have created a practical, encouraging, and vital resource that every woman needs to take her health and vitality to the next level. If you want to live longer and stronger, and be more vibrant, you should read this transforming book!"

—PAM FARREL, codirector of Love-Wise and best-selling author

"I am now down more than thirty-seven pounds since the first of the year and have set my second goal to lose thirty-five more on this plan, and I feel so much better! I just returned Saturday from a

week's vacation and am happy to say I did not gain a pound, thanks to tips from these two! In fact, when I weighed myself Monday morning, I was down a pound more!"

—LACRETIA, a participant of the Eat, Live, Thrive Diet and Lifestyle Plan

"I was fifty-six years old and twenty-five pounds overweight. I was tired of carrying around menopausal weight that would not budge, no matter how hard I tried or what diet I chose. Then I stumbled onto this diet plan. After the first week, the weight began to budge and I felt better. My hair began to grow thicker and wasn't dry anymore, and my skin had a healthy shine. At about thirty days into this diet, I decided to develop an intermittent fasting routine that fit easily with my lifestyle. Then the weight and inches started coming off even more easily. I had increased energy and felt healthy again, something I had not experienced for more than ten years. Within six months, I lost twenty-five pounds and twenty-eight overall inches. Now, one year later, I've easily kept all the weight and inches off. I feel as if I've rolled the clock back twenty years."

—SANDI THYS, a participant of the Eat, Live, Thrive Diet and Lifestyle Plan

"I have known Danna for the past twenty years. She has a unique ability to speak to the need of body, soul, and spirit, giving her a strong practical impact. *Eat, Live, Thrive Diet* will help the individual looking for a significant change in their life to move forward. No fad approach here, just helpful tools to change the course of your life."

—DR. TIM SCOTT, president of Hope Rescue, Inc.

"Danna and Robyn were instrumental in advising me in the rebuilding of my wellness after a bout of foodborne illness. They helped me discover things my doctors could not, and my gut is thankful! I could not wait to read this book. They confirmed hunches I have had for years about the connection between my brain and my stomach. The research is thorough and fascinating. And their hearts are beautiful. This book feels like a personal coaching experience with the world's foremost experts in body wellness for women, but it also feels like a fun conversation with two girlfriends!"

—DANNAH GRESH, best-selling author of *Lies Girls Believe: And the Truth That Sets Them Free* and founder of True Girl

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EAT, LIVE, THRIVE DIET

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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This book is dedicated to every woman who has believed the lie that her best body, health, and life are in the past. We're here to shout from the rooftops that your best years can be ahead of you when you put the Eat, Live, Thrive Diet and Lifestyle Plan into action!

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Introduction



We have a friend named Sarah. She recently had an epiphany, and she doesn't like it. "Oh my gosh. I've got a muffin top. I have no energy, and my body feels ten years older than I really am." Sarah sighed. "I've become my mother!"

Have you ever felt like that? As though your best years are behind you and you'll never feel even close to how vibrant you did in years past?

Well, we're here to tell you, "Stop thinking that way!"

It's true that for many women weight gain and lack of energy make them feel old. Their skin lacks the youthful glow and smoothness it once had. And if that weren't enough, dealing with perimenopause and postmenopause is not a cakewalk either.

Are you like Sarah, forty-five or older, with numerous diets under your belt, so to speak? And you still can't shed that extra layer of fat around your waist or thighs? We admit that it does get harder to lose weight and keep it off as we age. But it is not impossible!

We know because we've personally been in the trenches as you have. Maybe we haven't experienced exactly the same things, but we do understand "the struggle"!

Danna's Story

I still remember the despair I felt years ago that expressed itself in a nightmare. In my dream, I was shoving cookies, doughnuts, potato chips, and candy into my mouth at an alarming speed. I could not stop eating everything in sight. In the middle of my dream, I sat up in bed and yelled, "You. Just. Eat when you're hungry!" And then I flopped back down onto my pillow and started crying.

It didn't take a psychologist to unravel my inner turmoil. I dreamed this because it was my reality. By the time I was twenty years old, I'd been secretly binge eating for more than three years. Some days I ate enough to feed a small country. The reason I was only twenty-five pounds overweight rather than a hundred was because I purged.

By the time I was in my junior year of nursing school, I sometimes binged and purged five times a day. I was a physical and emotional wreck and had no idea how to get well. To top it off, I started to take amphetamines to try to control my urges, but they made me nervous and I couldn't sleep. I cycled for a long time between starvation on pills and bingeing.

No one knew I was bulimic. No one knew my pain. Not even my fiancé. I thought I was alone in my problem. Back in the 1970s, people talked about anorexia but not much about bulimia. I felt as though I was the biggest loser on the planet, and I wanted to die.

Then the panic attacks started.

Initially, they came only occasionally, but soon they were triggered by any stress—even leaving the house. I became a hypochondriac, always thinking the worst. My stomachache was an ulcer; my heart palpitations, a heart defect; my nervousness, low blood sugar. The list went on and on. Over time, I became convinced I was either dying or losing my mind.

I got A's in all my medical-surgical classes in nursing school as I attempted to diagnose myself. Then I shifted my attention to my mental health and got A's in psychology as I became convinced that I was suffering from one or more disorders. Medical doctors, counselors, psychologists—I saw them all. The panic attacks continued so intensely that I lived on high doses of Valium to calm me down enough to get through my classes and complete college.

In retrospect, living in fear and shame for all those years was the worst and best thing that ever happened to me. I know that sounds weird, but let me explain.

As my panic attacks went from uncomfortable, free-floating anxiety to terrorizing moments when I seriously believed I was dying, I was forced to ask myself, *What would happen if I did die?*

I was utterly exhausted from living in constant fear. One night, I was home alone and had the most severe panic attack I'd ever experienced. I was certain something was terribly wrong with me and I was going to die all alone in my bedroom.

Having been a nurse, I realize I was probably hyperventilating so much that I was in danger of passing out—but certainly not of dying. I remember sitting on the edge of my bed and burying my face in my hands, trying to breathe slowly and calm myself. I cried out to a God I believed in but did not truly know. I believed he existed, but I had no idea how to reach him or if he heard my feeble cries.

Well, he did. In that moment he brought a woman to my mind—the one and only woman in my

life I would have called “religious.” I found her phone number in my address book and called her that very moment. In a breathless rant, I told her that I was dying and needed to know if she knew God personally. You have to be rather desperate to do that. I was.

Sweet Tonette assured me that she not only knew God but that God knew *me*. This godly, selfless woman poured into me over the next days and weeks and shared the gospel with me. I found a new, saving faith in Jesus Christ. While he did not heal me instantly of my fear, bulimia, and insecurities, he did begin a healing process in me and I learned the power of a renewed mind. (I’ll share more about that in chapter 3.)

Today in my midsixties, I am leaner than I was in my thirties. I’m often told I look fifteen to twenty years younger than I am. I don’t know about that, but I do know that I *feel* that young and that life is so much richer as my health and vitality continue to soar.

Regardless of what kind of battle you’re in, there is hope for victory. Perhaps you’ve simply developed some unhealthy habits that need to be exchanged for healthier ones. Or maybe you feel as though you’ve lost all control when it comes to food. No matter. Change is possible!

Robyn’s Story

I was chubby as a child and adolescent. I remember being teased about my size and feeling self-conscious and inadequate compared to the other girls at my school. Then one summer in my early teens, I experienced a massive growth spurt and shed all my excess body fat, just like that.

My classmates didn’t even recognize me when I returned to school in the fall. Their acceptance of me based on my outward appearance was quite eye opening. I knew that I never wanted to be overweight again.

I stayed lean and was very content with my body into my twenties and thirties. But when I hit my forties, something changed. I started gaining weight, even though I was doing the same things I’d always done.

I realized quickly that I couldn’t eat the same way I had and was determined not to travel full circle and become a chubby menopausal woman. I knew I would need to make some strategic changes quickly, but I had no idea what those changes should be.

To add insult to injury, the quest to drop the excess pounds was even more challenging because I began to experience an unexplainable and insatiable hunger. I would finish a full and normally satisfying meal and then would want to eat a second one before I left the table! Thankfully, I did not give in to my feelings, but the sensation of always being hungry became stronger and more disturbing. And to make it even more unfair, eating made me even hungrier!

I have seen many doctors over the years, including my primary-care physician, two endocrinologists, and my naturopathic medical doctor, who is brilliant and very skilled at getting to the root of many hormonal and metabolic issues. He's truly perplexed that everything we try seems to fail.

All the pros do agree on one thing: this is not an emotional issue but rather a physiological one, particularly that hormonal signals between my stomach and my brain may not be getting through. Oh my!

Though I've found many creative ways to manage this "thorn in the flesh," so far there's no complete and lasting solution. It is still something I face every single day, some days more intensely than others.

My challenge with weight gain and relentless hunger sparked a focused motivation to find answers. I've committed the past decade to massive research to find the best diet and supplements to become and stay lean as a woman over fifty.

I've also learned the importance of trusting God in the journey. He gives me the strength not to cave in to the lies my body tells me about being hungry. By his grace, and a strong foundation of personal discipline, I've stayed my ideal size through most of my "hunger games." On the rare occasions when my weight has crept up, I've taken drastic action, such as fasting for thirty-six hours to break the cycle.

I must choose my goal over immediate gratification hour by hour. It's a skill I've developed over time, and I've surprised myself by how strong I can be with God's help. He does his part, but I must also do mine! The alternative—giving in to my hunger—would result in obesity.

I use many of the nonfood techniques we teach in our Eat, Live, Thrive Diet as tools to help me choose well. If I can do it—with relentless hunger—you can do it too.

I know and believe this completely. It is our job to help you believe it as well!

I won't pretend that my hunger issue hasn't been hard. Do I get discouraged? Sure I do! Do I get frustrated? Daily. Sometimes I'm so weary trying to find a solution that I wonder, *Why can't I just be satisfied?* On occasion I succumb to my strong desire to eat, even though I know that my body does not need more food. Usually I eat foods that are healthy, but other times, not so much. I may be a nutrition expert and weight-loss coach, but I'm also human!

I share all this because I want you to know that you don't need to be a victim of your "feelings." Danna and I had very different challenges. Hers was mental and emotional; mine was physical. We both needed to make an important decision about how we would respond to our respective challenges. Would we give up, or would we be proactive?

We chose action, and you can too!

Everyone Has a Story

You have a story too, and it is important. It gives you perspective and motivates you to give yourself grace for being human. But your history (the past) does not need to be an excuse for staying stuck (in the present)! We are certain that you can rewrite your story in a way that brings you a sense of victory and freedom, and we want to help you do that.

After reading our stories, you can tell we both have a strong faith in God. Perhaps you share our Christian faith; perhaps you don't. Although we do share teaching that applies to not only the body and mind but the spiritual dimension as well, most of the principles mentioned are universal truths that can be applied and produce great results regardless of religious belief.

This Book Is for You!

We're honored that you've chosen to go on this journey with us to discover how to eat, live, and thrive no matter your age. The Eat, Live, Thrive Diet and Lifestyle Plan is for all women, with extra help for women over forty-five because of the unique challenges that emerge as we age.

We wish we'd known some of these strategies much earlier in our lives. Practicing them will help you stay “ageless” into midlife and beyond. We like the word *ageless* over *mature* because it reflects both an attitude and a lifestyle that defy time. We're excited for you to take this journey with us so you can celebrate life fully in the years ahead.

In part 1, we want to prepare you for long-term success by addressing various challenges and strategies before we dig into the three phases of the Eat, Live, Thrive Diet. However, if you are chomping at the bit and want to start Phase 1 of the diet today, you certainly have “permission” to skip ahead to part 2. Today is always the best time to take action! However, make sure you return to part 1 once you're underway because one of the most important chapters in the book—“You Are What You Think” (chapter 3)—provides simple steps for permanently overcoming some of the challenges you've probably faced over the years when trying to lose weight and keep it off. Plus, the concept of short-term fasting and the reasons why we've designed an eating cycle specifically for ageless women is also clarified in part 1. You may also want to visit our support website and watch our “Getting Started” video at EatLiveThriveDiet.com.

Whatever you believe, whatever you've experienced, wherever you are in your life journey, we want you to know that you can benefit from the Eat, Live, Thrive (ELT) strategy and tips we share to help you rev up your midlife metabolism, lighten the scale, and turn back the clock.

Now let's get introduced to the Eat, Live, Thrive Diet and Lifestyle Plan!

You Are What You Think

Starting Your Diet in Your Brain

3

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to
do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

—ROMANS 7:15

Do these words from the apostle Paul resonate with you? Do you wonder why it is so hard to make yourself do the things you know are good for you? You are not alone.

We all struggle with the “battle of the flesh,” and many of us succumb easily when it comes to food or other forms of immediate gratification. It’s like there is an urge that cries out, “I want it. I need it. I’ve got to have it. Now!”

Making healthier choices is definitely easier said than done. Mustering an extra dose of will-power or motivation is not enough. We need to get to the core of the issue, which quite often is rooted in unhealthy thinking and bad habits. Our underlying perspective is more powerful than most of us realize.

In fact, the power of our thoughts influences us in so many ways we cannot begin to fathom, even changing our body chemistry!

Mind over Milkshake

Alia Crum, a clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Stanford University, wanted to know if a nutritional label could physically alter what happens to a person eating that food. She’d spent her early years as a student studying the placebo effect (i.e., how a sugar pill can physically alter a body if the person taking the pill believes it will).

In 2011 Crum devised an interesting new experiment using food. First, she made a large batch of French vanilla milkshake and then divided it into two. One batch was labeled as a low-calorie drink called “Sensishake.” The label reflected that the drink had no fat or added sugar and was

only 140 calories. The other batch was called “Indulgence.” Its label indicated that the shake contained a high amount of sugar and fat to account for the whopping 620 calories. The reality: both shakes were a moderate 300 calories.

The people in the study had their ghrelin levels measured before and after they drank their version of the shake. Ghrelin is what many health pros call the hunger hormone. When levels of ghrelin rise in the stomach, this tells your brain that you are hungry and that it’s time to find food. Metabolism also slows down in case the need for food is not met right away.

After a substantial meal, ghrelin levels will drop, signaling to your brain that you’ve had enough to eat, and your metabolism increases, allowing you to burn the new

calories from the meal. If a meal or snack is small, the levels don’t drop very much and the metabolism remains less robust.

Most scientists have assumed that ghrelin levels fluctuate in direct relation to the actual nutrients the ghrelin encounters in the stomach. That is not what Crum discovered in her milkshake study. This is what she reported:

The ghrelin levels dropped about three times more when people were consuming the indulgent shake (or thought they were consuming the indulgent shake), compared to the people who drank the sensible shake (or thought that’s what they were drinking).¹

Wow! The ghrelin levels dropped more just because the participants *thought* they were consuming an indulgent shake. Just imagine what could happen if you rewired your thinking to consider healthy choices as “indulgent”!

This eye-opening illustration should motivate us all to cultivate healthy mental habits for a lifetime.

Our beliefs matter in virtually every domain, in everything we do. How much is a mystery, but I don’t think we’ve given enough credit to the role of our beliefs in determining our physiology, our reality. We have this very simple metabolic science: calories in, calories out. People don’t want to think that our beliefs have influence, too. But they do!

—Alia Crum, clinical psychologist

The Freeways of the Mind

Our brains were designed by our Creator to respond in specific ways. And the brain—just like the heart, liver, and kidneys—is designed to perform certain vital functions. It's helpful to understand how God made this magnificent glob of gray matter work the way it does. We can better appreciate the complexity of our feelings and our behaviors when we understand the brain's physiology.

With recent advances in medical technology, researchers have come to better understand that the human brain has an almost unlimited capacity to store information. Before we are born, we begin to develop billions of neural pathways. These are complex, microscopic circuits where our thoughts and experiences create an explosion of electrical activity. And it is where all our mental data is stored.

Some of these pathways can become physically strong and dominant because the thought or experience is frequently repeated. They become like superhighways in our minds, overriding many of the weaker pathways or less dominant thoughts.

The size of our neural pathways can physically change. Old dominant pathways can shrink and become less influential when they are neglected or overridden with new messages. And smaller, weaker pathways can physically grow and become like superhighways. How? They change through repetition. You've heard the saying that practice makes perfect. More accurately, the statement should be that practice makes permanent. How perfect will depend on the quality of what is being practiced.

Stewardship of Our Minds

Like computers, our brains do not place judgment on their data. They just store information, true or false, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Ultimately, we come to believe the strongest messages—those messages that have played the loudest and most frequently throughout our lives. But what if that information is wrong? Well, just imagine what would happen if someone replaced the data that is stored in the NASA computers with wrong information. The result would be disastrous. The same is true with our minds.

This is what author Bob George refers to in his book *Classic Christianity*: "People . . . are locked in error, and that error has them in emotional and physical bondage."²

From Bible scholars to the most popular modern-day motivational speakers, those who have

studied human behavior know that *how we think* drives our choices and behavior. Though our brains function as storage centers for information, God has also given us the ability to think, reason, and apply knowledge.

God has, in effect, given us stewardship of our minds.

From our simplest habits to our most destructive behaviors, our actions are the direct results of our mental programming. Both psychologists and biblical scholars agree that it is almost impossible for individuals to behave inconsistently with what they believe about themselves. Your mind will naturally go in the direction of your most prevalent thoughts.

If this is true—and it is—there is no permanent way to change our behavior without first changing our minds. That’s why diets alone tend to fail. All the change is external. And when the diet is over, 95 percent of people revert to old programmed behaviors.

It’s essential to change the program!

If you don’t like who you are, don’t just change your behavior—change your thoughts. It may feel awkward at first, as though you’re lying to yourself, but your brain doesn’t know the difference. At a point, it will respond to that dominant message as if it were true.

Listen to yourself when you look in the mirror each morning. What words do you use as you resolve to lose that excess weight? How do you describe your body, your fitness, your energy, your self-control? If you keep telling yourself that you are fat and you hate exercise, you’ll continue to believe it. Those beliefs will sabotage your efforts.

Most of us have heard that it takes 21 days to change a habit. Unfortunately, many experts now believe that it takes 21 days for any change to *begin* to take place. For most people, it takes much longer than that for a new habit to become fully established. A 2018 study evaluated ninety-six individuals and concluded that on average it takes 66 days for a new habit to become second nature. However, the individual timelines varied from 18 to 254 days.³

Renew Your Mind to Transform Your Body

Getting beneath the surface and discovering scriptural truths about who we are and how God sees us can help us overcome many of the lies we’ve been telling ourselves. Sometimes we know these truths intellectually but still don’t believe them for ourselves.

As a new believer still struggling with panic attacks and bulimia, I (Danna) was excited the first time I read Romans 12:2, which says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Wow, that sounded so good! *Transformed*. It’s a powerful word. But how do we do it? In my

journey toward wholeness, I learned that we are transformed by truth. When we see, hear, speak, and believe that truth over and over, it replaces the lies we've been believing.

In the first part of that verse, we are told not to conform to this world. What does that mean? Conforming means complying with a set of customs or standards. God calls us to be different and set apart rather than driven by our culture's values. This can be very hard to do, especially when we are bombarded with ideas and images that tell us how to think and be.

How God Renewed Danna's Mind

As I (Danna) shared in the introduction, my severe panic attacks and bulimia motivated me to begin a relentless journey to find truth. During those years of internal struggle, I doubted I would ever be free of the paralyzing fear and lack of control that permeated my life daily.

Do not underestimate what God may be doing in your own struggles to draw you closer to him and transform you into the woman he wants you to become. This battle of the body is so much more than a physical one, and God can use every aspect of your journey to his glory and your benefit.

In the first few weeks as a new believer, I was ravenous for answers to overcome my fear. I could hardly set down my Bible. One day while reading, I ran across a verse that made me catch my breath. It was like water in the desert to my thirsty soul. I felt as if it were written just for me. The verse is

Winning Thoughts

In the human brain, the most dominant thoughts win. So what are your dominant thoughts? Are they serving you well? Or have your persistent negative thoughts made you their unknowing servant?

Don't underestimate the power of truth to transform you from the inside out. As a starting point, copy these statements of affirmation and put them in a place where you will be reminded to review them every day:

- *I am excited to discover a healthier lifestyle and watch my body transform.*
- *I love being active, so I make exercise a part of my daily lifestyle.*
- *I choose to eat for maximum energy and health.*
- *I am changing my unhealthy beliefs and attitudes.*
- *I am becoming transformed by the renewing of my mind.*
- *I can see myself leaner and healthier in the months ahead.*

2 Timothy 1:7, and it says, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (NKJV).

Every time I sensed a panic attack brewing, I would say this verse. I personalized it and said, “God has not given *me* a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” I must have repeated those words thirty or forty times *each day* for six months.

At the same time, I began reminding myself of other truths. When I felt anxious, I would tell myself that God was with me and had never let me die or “fall off the edge” before. And even if I did die, at least I knew where I was going! Over the course of the next nine months, my panic episodes became less intense and less frequent. Before the end of a year, they were completely gone. Oh, the power of truth to transform us through the renewing of our minds!

Two things happened in my journey toward transformation. The first was physical. As I repeatedly counteracted the lies I believed about losing my mind, dying, and being out of control with the scripture and statements I’ve mentioned, my neural pathways started to change. My old, destructive, dominant pathways started to shrink, and the new messages created strong new pathways, which grew until they finally propelled me to have healthier feelings and behavior. And although the change was gradual, much like watching our hair grow, it was very real.

I believe the second thing that happened was supernatural. In Hebrews 4:12, it is explained like this: “The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

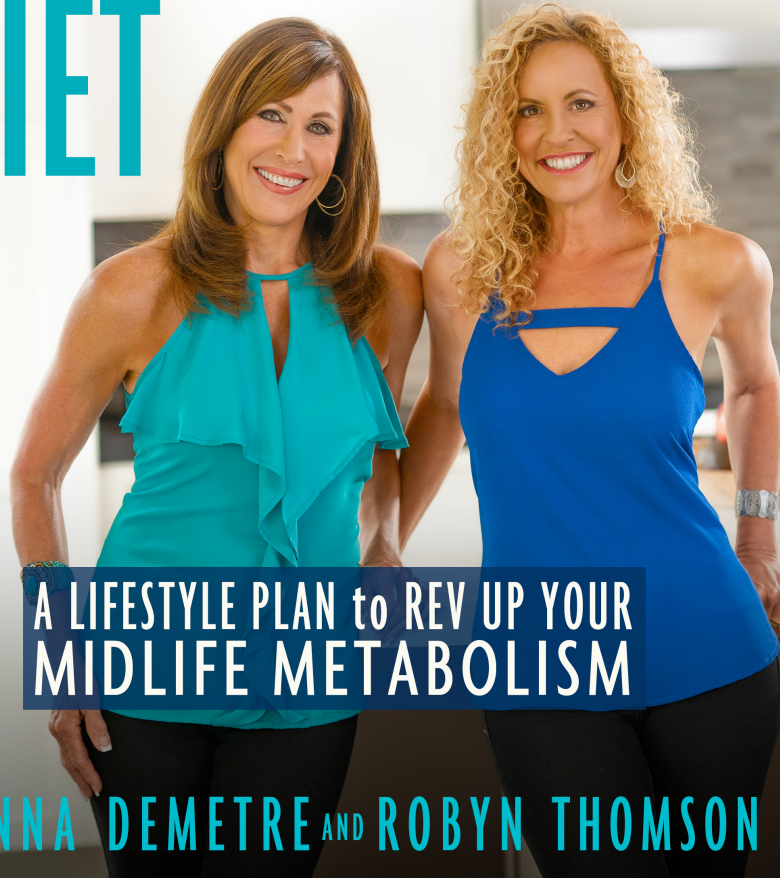
Spiritual and Physical Transformation

God’s Word, the Bible, is so much more than wisdom and good advice. It is alive! It is active and does surgery on our hearts and minds. The Greek word for “sword” in Hebrews is *machaira*. Biblical scholar Tim Scott, my pastor, told me that it means “a short dagger, like a double-edged surgical knife.” As I pondered this text, I realized that I had turned the truth of God’s Word on myself and allowed it to cut out the lies I believed and replace them with life-changing truth. When I exposed myself to and dwelled upon God’s truth, it miraculously transformed me.

As with the changing of my neural pathways, there was no crash course or shortcuts. I just applied God’s Word consistently to my life day after day, and in his perfect timing, I was transformed.

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