

The Lies You Tell Yourself

by Jennifer Plesko

I am skinniest in the morning. My belly forgets the previous day's sins, and I wake up looking taut like a model. Then it starts.

I begin each day analyzing my naked body in the mirror. By the time I've straightened my hair and put on my makeup, I am no longer perfect. The dimple on my thigh. My misshapen butt. My love handles. My arm flab. I will only eat 200 calories for breakfast.

By 9 am, my stomach is growling. But I saw the way my thighs looked in my reflection on the glass as I opened the door to the office building this morning, so instead I pop open another diet soda. No calories, you know.

At lunch, a Lean Cuisine. It's 320 calories. I am allowed to have some baked chips with it, but I have to count them out. One serving size. Nine chips. 120 calories. But I always sneak just a couple more. Then there's the guilt. I pull up my shirt and look in the mirror. I must've gained five pounds since this morning. I'm still hungry, so I pop open another diet soda.

It's 1:00 and I'm already thinking about dinner. So far I've had 700 calories today. If we go to that Mexican restaurant he wants to go to tonight, I can only eat 800 calories. How will I be able to do that?

I go to the bathroom at 2:00 for another mirror inspection and see that I've gotten even fatter since noon. I decide that 70 minutes of cardio is in my future.

On the treadmill, I'm running faster than usual. It's getting hard not to stop, but I focus on how much my butt jiggles with each step, and it motivates me. With each stride, I will stamp out the jiggle.

We are at the Mexican restaurant and he's getting a margarita. He orders one for me too. And chips and queso. My 800 calories are almost up and I haven't even ordered. Panic burns in my throat. How fat will I be after this? I clean my plate of enchiladas because it's what I do. I never waste food. It's all part of the sick love-hate relationship we have, food and I.

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My stomach is full. It makes me feel dirty. Naughty. Shameful. I need to get rid of it. Cleanse myself. Redeem myself. I can pretend it didn't happen. I can make it go away.

It's best to do it in the shower. Harder for anyone to hear you. But you have to time it just right. Do it too soon and it won't come up easily. Do it too late and the bile will choke you. I tell myself I'll only do it a couple of times so I don't feel full anymore. After the ninth...tenth...eleventh time, my body rebels. My throat is scratchy. My eyes are red. My nose is swollen.

But I stand up under the steamy hot rush of water and feel the sins of the day being washed away. I emerge from the shower clean, atoned, and thin again.

