

Get Lean without Starving

Does your utopian summer barbecue meal involve a drippy burger with a caramelized crust and rosy interior, gooey cheese and crispy bacon on a grill-kissed bun? Does it end with moist, crumbly brownies? Now stop dreaming and be honest: Do you think you can enjoy this meal without guilt?

You can have your burger and brownie and eat them too, thanks to Devin Alexander, the queen of lower-calorie comfort food and *New York Times* bestselling cookbook author. Featured on the “The Biggest Loser,” the host of FitTV’s “Healthy Decadence” is a weight loss success story—she’s kept 55 pounds off her frame for more than 15 years by engineering recipe makeovers.

When Alexander, who used to hide peanut brittle under her bed, was a kid, she epitomized the classic yo-yo dieter: She rode a binge-and-fast roller coaster from the age of 8 to 15, when she had ballooned to 200 pounds. The turning point came when she read that if she cut 100 calories from her daily

intake, she could lose 10 pounds in one year. The gradual reduction theory worked and it’s been her consumption philosophy ever since.

“People on the Biggest Loser are always shocked to learn that I don’t count calories. It just doesn’t work for me,” Alexander said. “It’s a matter of knowing exactly what’s going into my body and in what ways.”

When lightening a high-calorie classic, the former caterer focuses on textures, flavors and aromas—the psychological cues that help create cravings. Scrutinizing

labels, rigorous testing and selective ingredient swaps are Alexander’s guiding principles: she’ll use some fat-free products like Greek yogurt but not others, like mozzarella, and she opts for regular peanut butter

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over reduced fat because the calorie counts are similar but the amount of sugar is not.

“Focus on cravings; if you’re really going to enjoy it, then I say have it, but be smart about it,” she said. “If you save 200 calories at lunch, then you might be able to have them another time.”

—Sabrina Grotewold



>> **Devin Alexander** is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling cookbook, “The Most Decadent Diet Ever.” She lost about 30 pounds the first year she started cutting calories in small increments. She’s learned to embrace exercise and the endorphin boost it gives her.



• LIGHTEN UP

Devin’s Fueling Tips

“If I make a turkey burger, I start out with 99 percent lean ground turkey and add egg substitute and oatmeal or bread crumbs because that will give it a fatty texture.”

“I snack a few times a day; I’ll have a smoothie or brownie cups, but all of my snacks are 100 to 300 calories, depending on what they are.”

“Don’t put kids on diets. I always tell parents that. If you put a kid on a diet, then it’ll mess with their self-esteem and body image and it’s just not worth it. Teach them to make healthier choices instead.”

“When I go out to a nice dinner, I just get a steak. And I don’t put sauce on it.”

“If you’re the type of person who is used to eating indulgent desserts, then put berries in a martini glass with fat-free Cool Whip on top. I think the Cool Whip is OK because you’re getting a much lower fat and calorie dessert and you’re at least starting to change a behavior.”

Photo by Deborah Feingold