Tom Kerridge is the Wiltshire-born chef best known for television programmes such as Saturday Kitchen, Sunday Brunch and Great British Menu, where he graduated from competitor to judge. He’s chef patron of The Hand and Flowers in Marlow, which is the only UK pub with two Michelin stars – and he’s struggled with his weight, reaching around 30 stone at his heaviest. Now, at least 12 stone lighter, Tom extols the virtues of a healthy lifestyle. The success of his BBC series Lose Weight for Good led to Fresh Start and most recently Lose Weight and Get Fit. With a book of the same name, packed with lower calorie recipes and exercise suggestions, we asked Tom for tips on how we can all shed the pounds for summer...

How difficult was it for you when you first went on a diet?

When I first lost weight I was on a lower carbohydrate diet, and my trigger moments were around roast dinner and freshly baked bread. Those were the things I missed the most, because the lovely smells evoked the feeling of: ‘I want to eat that!’ Now I’m on a lower calorie diet I can have bread, which is great because bread’s lush, but moments of weakness will come no matter what diet you’re on. There are always times when you’ve got to be strong. People talk about which diets work, but actually all diets work – you’ve just got to find the right one for you. Finding one you can stick with is the difficult bit.

What gives you the strength to walk away when you’re craving something unhealthy?

Remind yourself why you want to lose weight. Remind yourself what your motivation is. If you’re going on a diet, you’ve recognised that there’s an issue with what you’re doing. You’ve recognised that what you’ve been doing isn’t working for you. Maybe you’re making noises when you go up the stairs or maybe you’re in even worse health than that, and you’ve recognised that long term, ‘This is not good for me.’ So tell yourself where you want to be, whether that’s jogging around with your kids or whatever it is. Then in moments of weakness, remind yourself what you’re doing this for.

If you do have a moment of weakness, and you eat a family size bar of Dairy Milk, how do you come back from that without letting it turn into a downward spiral?

CAJUN SALMON

Serves 4

4 skinless salmon fillets (120g each)
250g (1 small head) broccoli
1-cel sunflower oil spray
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
For the Cajun seasoning
1 heaped tsp ground cumin
1 tsp garlic granules
½ tsp hot smoked paprika
½ tsp cayenne pepper
½ tsp dried oregano
½ tsp dried thyme
For the dirty rice
1 tsp olive oil
1 onion, finely diced
2 garlic cloves, sliced
1 red pepper, cored, deseeded and finely diced
1 tbsp tomato purée
1 tsp dried oregano
½ tsp dried thyme
200ml fresh chicken stock
400g tin black eye beans
500g cooked brown and wild rice (freshly cooked and drained or 2 pouches)
4 spring onions, finely sliced
To serve
1 lime, cut into wedges

CAJUN SALMON

Using punchy flavours like Cajun seasoning helps to keep your cooking exciting, taking lower-calorie mealtimes to the next level.

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C/Fan 180°C/Gas 6.
2. For the Cajun seasoning, mix the ingredients together in a small bowl with 1 tsp flaky sea salt. Pat each salmon fillet dry with kitchen paper and then sprinkle with the seasoning on all sides. Leave to marinate while you prepare the broccoli and dirty rice.
3. Line a baking tray with a silicone mat (or spray with oil). Cut the broccoli into bite-sized florets, season with salt and pepper and spread out on the tray. Cook on a high shelf in the oven for 12 minutes or until the broccoli is lightly charred and cooked through.
4. Meanwhile, for the dirty rice, heat the oil in a large sauté pan over a medium heat. When hot, add the onion and cook for 4–5 minutes until softened. Add the garlic and cook for 2 minutes, then add the red pepper and tomato purée and stir well. Add the oregano, thyme and stock and bring to a simmer.
5. Drain the black eye beans and add to the pan with the rice. Cook for another 5 minutes. Season well with salt and pepper and stir through the spring onions.
6. Heat a medium non-stick frying pan over a medium heat. Spray the salmon fillets a few times with oil then place in the pan. Cook for 2–3 minutes on each side or until lightly charred and cooked through.
7. Spoon the rice into 4 shallow bowls or containers and add the broccoli and salmon. Serve at once, with lime wedges. Or cool then seal and keep in the fridge. Eat within 2 days, either cold or reheated.
The problem with fad diets is that if you're eating badly and you need to lose weight, you can't just suddenly lose weight then go back to eat badly again, because if you do that, the weight goes back on. It's about balance. If you can get to a point where you're happy in your clothes, and you think, 'I'm fit enough here,' there isn't anything wrong with having fish and chips on a Friday.

It's about being conscious of what you eat – eating better and moving more. The recipes in this book can fit into a short term diet plan. They’ll work – you’ll eat great food and you'll know exactly what you're eating. But I recommend enjoying them as part of a balanced diet, and a healthy lifestyle. From an NHS guidelines point of view, if you go to the website and put in your details such as height and weight, you'll see how many calories you should be consuming each day to reach your weight loss goal.

I'm easily influenced by adverts on the TV for triple cooked chips, or a chocolate gateaux. If I see it, I want it. What advice would you give me?

Plan for every eventuality. Arm yourself with healthy choices and have them around you, so if you walk past a Mars Bar, or see something else that makes you think, 'That looks nice?' then you've got the low calorie skinny popcorn next to you, and you can have that instead.

You can think to yourself: 'That burger and chips on the advert looks great, however, I'm cooking myself this lovely bowl of penne pasta with pesto and pine nuts and a little bit of parmesan and it's delicious!'

A big mistake people make is not eating enough, and not eating at the right time, then they get hungry and make the wrong decisions. So eat food, make sure you're not hungry, and enjoy what you're eating. Focus on the foods you can eat, not the ones that you can't, and get into cooking. When you enjoy being in the kitchen, you'll enjoy everything.

When I'm at home, eating meals I've planned, I find it easy to be good – but when I go out it all seems to spiral out of control. What are your tips for eating healthily if you're going to a restaurant?

The beautiful thing about restaurants is that they have a menu, and there will be choices on there that are better for you. Don't have the deep fried camembert, followed by fish and chips, followed by a creamy, stodgy bread and butter pudding. There will be other options. There will be a lovely soup, a salad, a piece of fish that's been roasted or grilled, a dessert that involves a bit of fruit – maybe even skip pudding and just have a coffee. Don't do yourself in by not going out and spending time with people. You can enjoy yourself – just make conscious decisions.

Should we clear all the unhealthy food out of the house?

It depends how strong-willed you are! It really depends on your mental strength. I recommend not having temptation there because then it's a lot easier for you. However, if you've got kids, or growing teenagers, or a husband or wife who doesn't need to lose weight, who's quite happy having a slice of chocolate cake on a Saturday afternoon, you can't deny everybody else. So you need to take responsibility. Having said that, a lot of the recipes in this book don't feel like lower calorie recipes, so you can cook them for your family and they'll enjoy them.

Is it OK to have little treats now and again? I know you don't believe in cheat days, but can we have the odd glass of wine without feeling guilty?
Of course you can, but make sure you calorie count it. You can have a glass of wine or a gin and tonic, or a pint of beer, but it all counts towards your daily allowance, so if you’ve consumed it, make sure you take responsibility. Losing weight is all about taking responsibility. Nobody made you eat this stuff in the first place to get you to this point. Other people will support you, but nobody is going to force feed you low calorie food. You have to make conscious decisions about what you consume.

I imagine it would be helpful to do this with a partner, but what if your partner falls off the wagon and tries to pull you down with them so they don’t feel so guilty – what would your advice be?

Remind them why they’re your partner. Tell them you’re here as a support system as well, and say: ‘Help us do this.’ Give your partner and your friends a gentle nudge to help you. Remind them how important it is to you that you stay on the straight and narrow. And remember that’s what they’re there for – they’re friends and partners because they want to make things work for you.

Exercise plays a big part in losing weight and leading a healthy lifestyle, but we all have days when we don’t feel like it. How do you motivate yourself if you have a day like that?

Sometimes my day starts at 5.30am before the gym opens and finishes at 1 am the next morning, so on days when I don’t feel like it, but I make myself go. I remind myself that it’s worth going because I’ll feel great afterwards. You can motivate yourself by finding something you enjoy doing. If you’re dreading going, you’ve chosen the wrong activity. It should be about playing squash, going for a swim, running, getting on a bike, going to a class with friends. Find something fun that you relish doing and that will be your motivation.

What should we do when we hit a plateau and it seems like we’re not making any progress with losing weight?

Re-evaluate what you’re doing – if you’re not getting any slimmer, it’s probably because you’re cheating somewhere. One of the big things that can help when you’re on a lower calorie diet is using an app and putting in everything you consume, whether it’s cups of tea or anything you consume. Make sure you calorie count it. Of course you can, but make sure you calorie count it.

Your end goal for weight loss was being able to run around with your son – that was something you really wanted. You set yourself SMART goals – goals that were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely – to help you achieve the weight loss that would allow you to do that. I think most of us are more vague – how would you help someone figure out a proper goal that will inspire them?

Look for what you want out of it. Focus on where you want to be at the end of the journey and set yourself achievable goals so you enjoy getting there. You don’t have to climb Mount Everest or run a marathon, or row across the Channel. The important goals are the small ones, like going up the steps to a plane or getting to the top of a couple of flights of stairs without getting out of breath. Or it might be finishing your run a bit quicker, or going that bit further on a bike ride – or getting to the end of the day and realising you’ve 200 calories under your target calorie count. What an achievement that is! Those are the magic moments that happen throughout the day that make you feel great. So feel good about achieving those small goals and remind yourself why you’re doing this.