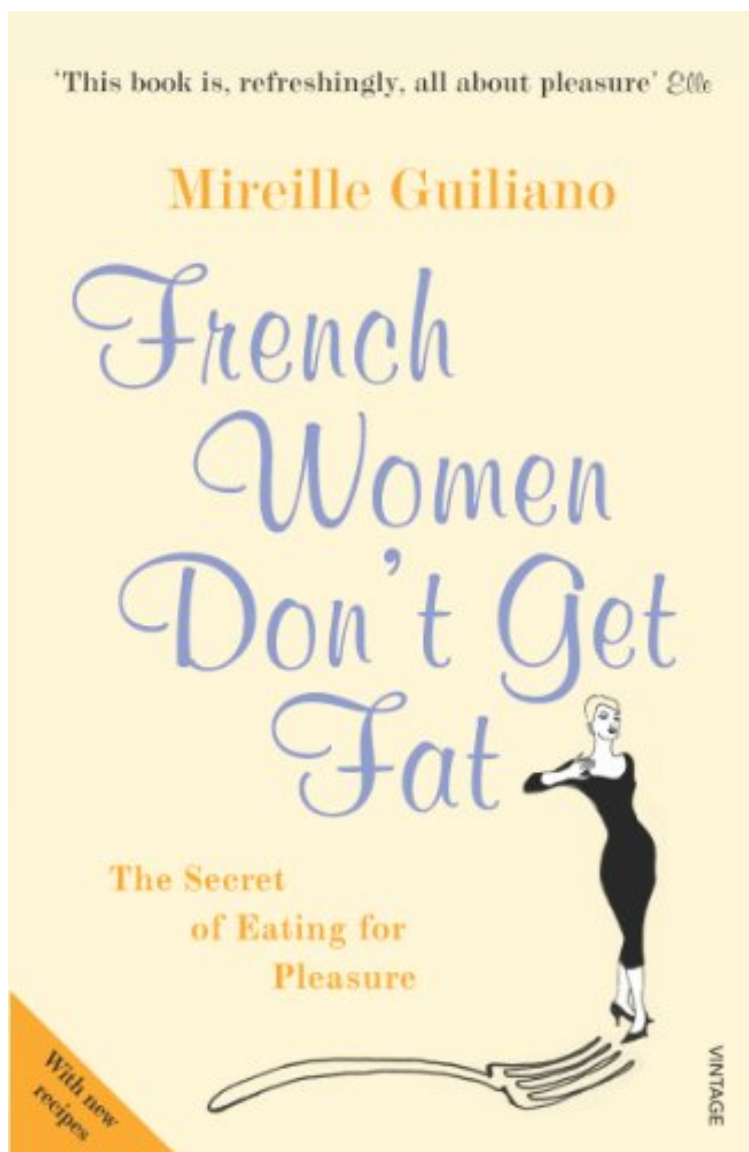


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French Women Don't Get Fat



*Par Mireille Guiliano
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe book we've all (certainly every woman between 25 and 75) been waiting for. Classy, chic, convincing, funny, wise, well-written and very timely. It's the ultimate non-diet book, which nonetheless shows us how to eat with balance, control and above all pleasure. Chuck out all the radical diet books, think about what you eat and why, and then enjoy eating the right things (and some of the wrong ones) intelligently, and in smaller portions. Eat, like a French woman, with your head not your stomach. Guiliano, French-born and bred, gets the tone absolutely right. She succeeds in that rare high-wire act of being really serious about her subject but without taking herself too seriously; manages to encourage and inspire and amuse, without being bossy or earnest. This is a book that will make you laugh out loud and yet

have you following several of her practical precepts within days - everyone who reads it becomes evangelical(French women don't go to the gym, they climb the stairs...). It combines just the right balance of memoir, wisdom, wit, delicious recipes, and French common sense.Guiliano emphasizes the virtues of freshness, variety, personal taste, enjoyment and, above all, portion control (research shows that dishes served in US restaurants are 25% larger than those served in restaurants in France!).ExtraitChapter 1 VIVE LAMRIQUE:THE BEGINNING . . . I AM OVERWEIGHTI love my adopted homeland. But first, as an exchange student in Massachusetts, I learned to love chocolate-chip cookies and brownies. And I gained twenty pounds.My love affair with America had begun with my love of the English language; we met at the lyce (junior high and high school) when I turned eleven. English was my favorite class after French literature, and I simply adored my English teacher. He had never been abroad but spoke English without a French accent or even a British one. He had learned it during World War II, when he found himself in a POW camp with a high school teacher from Weston, Massachusetts (I suspect they had long hours to practice). Without knowing whether theyd make it out alive, they decided that if they did, they would start an exchange program for high school seniors. Each year, one student from the United States would come to our town and one of us would go to Weston. The exchange continues to this day, and the competition is keen.During my last year at the lyce, I had good enough grades to apply, but I wasnt interested. With dreams of becoming an English teacher or professor, I was eager to start undergraduate studies at the local university. And at eighteen, naturally I had also convinced myself I was madly in love with a boy in my town. He was the handsomest though admittedly not the brightest boy around, the coqueluche (the darling) of all the girls. I couldnt dream of parting from him, so I didnt even think of applying for Weston. But in the schoolyard, between classes, there was hardly another topic of conversation. Among my friends, the odds-on favorite to go was Monique; she wanted it so badly, and besides, she was the best in our class, a fact not lost on the selection committee, which was chaired by my English teacher and included among its distinguished ranks PTA members, other teachers, the mayor, and the local Catholic priest, balanced by the Protestant minister. But on the Monday morning when the announcement was expected, the only thing announced was that no decision had been made.At home that Thursday morning (those days, there was no school on Thursdays but half days on Saturday), my English teacher appeared at the door. He had come to see my mother, which seemed rather strange, considering my good grades. As soon as he left, with a big, satisfied smile but not a word to me except hello, my mother called me. Something was trs important.The selection committee had not found a suitable candidate. When I asked about Monique, my mother tried to explain something not easily fathomed at my age: My friend had everything going for her, but her parents were Communists, and that would not fly in America. The committee had debated at great length (it was a small town, where everybody was fully informed about everybody else), but they could not escape concluding that a daughter of Communists could never represent France!My teacher had proposed me as an alternative, and the other members had agreed. But since I had not even applied, he had to come and persuade my parents to let me go. My overadoring father, who would never have condoned my running away for a year, was not home. Perhaps my teacher was counting on this fact; but in any event, he managed to sell the idea to my mother. The real work then fell to her, because she had to persuade not only my father, but me as well. Not that she was without her own misgivings about seeing me go, but Mamie was always wise and farsighted; and she usually got her way. I was terribly anxious about what Monique would say, but once word got out, she was first to declare what a fine ambassador I would make. Apparently, Communist families were quite open and practical about such matters, and she had already been given to understand that family ideology had made her a dark horse from the start.And so I went. It was a wonderful yearone of the best of my adolescenceand it certainly changed the course of my entire life. To a young French girl, Weston, a wealthy Boston suburb, seemed an American dreamgreen, manicured, spread out, with huge gorgeous homes and well-to-do, well-schooled families. There was tennis, horseback riding, swimming pools, golf, and two or three cars per familia far, far cry from any town in eastern France, then or now. The time was so full of new, unimagined things, but finally too rich, and I dont mean demographically. For all the priceless new friends and experiences I was embracing, something else altogether, something sinister, was slowly taking shape. Almost before I could notice, it had turned into fifteen pounds, more or less . . . and quite probably more. It was August, my last month before the return voyage to France. I was in Nantucket with one of my adoptive families when I suffered the first blow: I caught a reflection of myself in a bathing suit. My American mother, who had perhaps been through something like this before with another daughter, instinctively registered my distress. A good seamstress, she bought a bolt of the most lovely linen and made me a summer

shift. It seemed to solve the problem but really only bought me a little time. In my final American weeks, I had become very sad at the thought of leaving all my new pals and relations, but I was also quite apprehensive of what my French friends and family would say at the sight of the new me. I had never mentioned the weight gain in letters and somehow managed to send photos showing me only from the waist up. The moment of truth was approaching.

2LA FILLE PRODIGUE: RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER

My father brought my brother with him to Le Havre to collect me. I was traveling on the SS Rotterdam. The ocean liner was still the transatlantic standard preferred by many French people in the late 1960s. With me was the new American exchange student from Weston, who would be spending the year in our town. Since he had not seen me for a whole year, I expected my father, who always wore his heart on his face, would embarrass me, bounding up the gangway for the first hug and kiss. But when I spied the diminutive French man in his familiar beretyes, a berethe looked stunned. As I approached, now a little hesitantly, he just stared at me, and as we came near, after a few seconds that seemed endless, there in front of my brother and my American shipmate, all he could manage to say to his cherished little girl come home was, Tu ressembles un sac de patates (You look like a sack of potatoes). Some things dont sound any prettier in French. I knew what he had in mind: not a market-size sack, but one of the big, 150-pound burlap affairs that are delivered to grocery stores and restaurants! Fortunately the girl from Weston spoke little French, else she would have had a troubling first impression of French family life. At age nineteen, I could not have imagined anything more hurtful, and to this day the sting has not been topped. But my father was not being mean. True, tact was never his strength; and the teenage girls hypersensitivity about weight and looks wasnt yet the proverbial pothole every parent today knows to steer around. The devastating welcome sprang more than anything from his having been caught off guard. Still, it was more than I could take. I was at once sad, furious, vexed, and helpless. At the time, I could not even measure the impact. On our way home to eastern France, we stopped in Paris for a few days, just to show my friend from Weston the City of Light, but my inexorable grumpiness made everyone eager to hit the road again. I ruined Paris for all of us. I was a mess. The coming months were bitter and awkward. I didnt want anyone to see me, but everyone wanted to greet l'Amricaine. My mother understood right away not only how and why I had gained the weight, but also how I felt. She treaded lightly, avoiding the unavoidable topic, perhaps particularly because I had soon given her something more dire to worry about. Having seen a bit of the world, I had lost my taste for attending the local university. I now wanted to study languages in a Grande cole (like an Ivy League school) in Paris and, on top of that, to take a literary track at the Sorbonne at the same time. It was unusual and really an insane workload. My parents were not at all keen on the idea of Paris: if I got in (hardly a given, as the competition is legendary), it was going to be a big emotional and financial sacrifice to have me three and a half hours from home. So I had to campaign hard, but thanks in part to the obvious persistence of my raw nerves, in the end they let me go back to Paris for the famously grueling entrance exam. I passed, and in late September I moved to Paris. My parents always wanted the best for me. By All Saints Day (November 1), I had gained another five pounds, and by Christmas, five more still. At five feet three, I was now overweight by any standard, and nothing I owned fit, not even my American mothers summer shift. I had two flannel onessame design, but roomiermade to cover up my lumpiness. I told the dressmaker to hurry and hated myself every minute of the day. More and more, my fathers faux pas at Le Havre seemed justified. Those were blurry days of crying myself to sleep and zipping past all mirrors. It may not seem so strange an experience for a nineteen-year-old, but none of my French girlfriends was going through it. Then something of a Yuletide miracle occurred. Or perhaps I should say, Dr. Miracle, who showed up thanks to my mamie. Over the long holiday break, she asked the family physician, Dr. Meyer, to pay a call. She did this most discreetly, careful not to bruise me further. Dr. Meyer had watched me grow up, and he was the kindest gentleman on earth. He assured me that getting back in shape would be really easy and just a matter of a few old French tricks. By Easter, he promised, Id be almost back to my old self, and certainly by the end of the school year in June Id be ready to wear my old bathing suit, the one Id packed for America. As in a fairy tale, it was going to be our secret. (No use boring anyone else with the particulars of our plan, he said.) And the weight would go away much faster than it came. Sounded great to me. Of course, I wanted to put my faith in Dr. Meyer, and fortunately, there didnt seem to be many options at the time.

DR. MIRACLES WEEKEND PRESCRIPTION

For the next three weeks, I was to keep a diary of everything I ate. This is a strategy that will sound familiar from some American diet programs, such as Weight Watchers. I was to record not only what and how much, but also when and where. There was no calorie counting, not that I could have done that. The stated purpose was simply for him to gauge the nutritional value of what I was eating (it was the

first time I ever heard the word). Since nothing more was asked of me, I was only too happy to comply. This is the first thing you should do, too. Dr. Meyer demanded no great precision in measurement. Just estimate, he said, stipulating a portion as the only unit of quantity and roughly equal to a medium-size apple. In America, where the greatest enemy of balanced eating is ever bigger portions, I suggest a little more precision. Here's where the small kitchen scale comes in. (Bread, which sometimes comes in huge slices here, might be more easily weighed than compared with an apple, which seems bigger here, too!) Three weeks later, I was home again for the weekend. Just before noon, Dr. Miracle, distinguished, gray-topped, made his second house call. He also stayed for lunch. Afterward, reviewing my diary, he immediately identified a pattern utterly obvious to him but hiding somehow from me, as I blithely recorded every crumb I put in my mouth. On the walk between school and the room I was renting in the Seventh Arrondissement, there were no fewer than sixteen pastry shops. Without my having much noticed, my meals were more and more revolving around pastry. As I was living in Paris, my family could not know this, so when I came home, my mother naturally prepared my favorites, unaware I was eating extra desserts on the sly, even under her roof. My Parisian pastry gluttony was wonderfully diverse. In the morning there was croissant or pain au chocolat or chouquette or tarte au sucre. Lunch was preceded by a stop at Polane, the famous breadmakers shop, where I could not resist the pain aux raisins or tarte aux pommes (apple tart) or petits sablés. Next stop was at a café for the ubiquitous jambon-beurre (ham on a buttered baguette) and what remained of the Polane pastry with coffee. Dinner always included and sometimes simply was an éclair, Paris Brest, religieuse, or mille-feuille (curiously called a napoleon outside France), always some form of creamy, buttery sweetness. Sometimes I would even stop off for a palmier (a big puff pastry sugar-covered cookie) for my goûter (afternoon snack). As a student, I was living off things I could eat on the go. Hardly any greens were passing my lips, and my daily serving of fruit was coming from fruit tarts. I was eating this strangely lopsided fare without the slightest thought and with utter contentment except, of course, for how I looked. Now this was obviously not a diet I had picked up in America, where one could hardly say the streets are lined with irresistible patisseries (though then, as now, there was no shortage of tempting hot chocolate-chip cookie stands and sellers of rich ice cream, to say nothing of a mind-boggling variety of supermarket sweets made with things infinitely worse for you than cream and butter). But as I was to learn, it was my adoptive American way of eating that had gone to my head and opened me up to the dangers of this delicious Parisian minefield. For in America, I had gotten into some habits: eating standing up, not making my own food, living off whatever (n'importe quoi, as the French say), as other kids were doing. Brownies and bagels were particular hazards; we had nothing quite like them at home, so who could tell how rich they were? *Revue de presse* Its hard not to be enlivened by a [weight-control] book that celebrates both chocolate and bread, and espouses such wisdom as Life without pasta? Perish the thought. Lily Burana, *Washington Post Book World* The perfect book for the more literate dieter . . . A blueprint for building a healthy attitude toward food and exercise . . . Full of down-to-earth advice . . . We'd all be thinner (and happier) if we followed it. Miriam Wolf, *San Francisco Chronicle* You've heard it before . . . But somehow, when the advice comes from Mireille Guiliano, you actually listen. A perfect, slim (and slimming) read for dieters and bon vivants alike. Marie Claire Ah, Paris, the ideal destination for museum-hopping, couture shopping and quick weight loss? Mais oui, insists Mireille Guiliano . . . For those who can't hop a plane whenever their zippers won't close . . . her new memoir-cum-nondiet book [is] filled with slimming secrets. Kim Hubbard, *People* She spurs readers to give up the guilt and dieting extremes, to eat smarter and more joyfully . . . Readers can practically hear the rustling of fallen leaves beneath the narrators feet as she forages for mushrooms . . . Her writing, like her three-meals-a-day diet, is all part of her joie de vivre. Rosemary Feitelberg, *Womens Wear Daily* Delightful . . . Hands down, this is the best of the newest crop of weight-control books. Nancy Hellmich, *USA Today* The past few years have been dominated by scientific diets . . . I welcome this break from the usual kind of quick-fix diet book . . . Will this book transform one's eating habits? Its good sense is unanswerable and, personally, I love the bit about not going to the gym. Lynne Truss, bestselling author of *Eats, Shoots Leaves*, *The Times* (London) Part Proustian memoir, part guide to living well, part recipe for Miracle Leek Soup, this book announces its distance from the Zone, the Atkins and all the rest on the very first page . . . Even the most skeptical and envious woman will find it hard to hold out against the charms of a beautifully written book that features both chocolate and love as key ingredients in a balanced diet. Allison Pearson, *The Daily Telegraph* (London) Mireille Guiliano's book is slender, elegant, well-spoken, sensible, and unembarrassed by the frank embrace of stratagems just like the French women whom she holds up to the reader to admire and, if we can, to emulate. Adam Gopnik, author of *Paris to the Moon* I recognized things

from my own French background and discovered quite a bit more. An important and fascinating book for all those people out there who've ridden the vicious diet roller coaster to failure. Nicole Miller Not only delicious, but a true story from one of the greatest ladies in the world. Chef Emeril Lagasse French Women Dont Get Fat is not only charming and witty, but useful. It made me want to run out and buy a pound of leeks and a bottle of Champagne! Sharon Boorstin, author of Cooking for Love and Let Us Eat Cake