

FIGHTING FAT

The people we pay to make us look good in budgie smugglers or bikinis have vastly different approaches to beating obesity.

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January is the weight-loss industry's busiest period, as many people tackle new year's slimming resolutions. As every other TV ad pleads with us to sign up for a foolproof weight-loss plan, NSW Fair Trading Minister Reba Meagher has warned people to "think carefully" about committing to upfront gym fees.

No matter the time of year, the statistics are grim: 60 per cent of adults are overweight, while 21 per cent are considered obese, according to the Australian Heart Foundation.

There is a glut of slimming-related jobs, from nutritionists and Weight Watchers leaders to psychologists, surgeons and medical researchers.

Radar spoke to four experts who've made a career out of helping punters shed those kilograms and found very different approaches to the bulge.

Dr Sandra Cabot and Sheree Ward, clinical nutrition consultants at the Dr Cabot Holistic Clinic, Camden

Your wobbly bits are: a puzzle to be solved.

"We take a holistic approach to weight loss," Cabot explains. She has written books on health and nutrition and has several clinics where naturopaths, doctors and nutritionists help people lose weight. "We look at all the causes and it's not always the amount of calories that someone is consuming. It's like a jigsaw puzzle – it could be anything from a fatty liver to a hormonal imbalance."

Banish them by: using a personalised program. Ward explains the signature Cabot weight-loss approach: "We refer clients to our doctors for blood tests to check for diabetes, hormonal imbalances, etc. Then we tailor a diet to a person's needs."

Ward says supplements and a good liver tonic can help, as well avoiding alcohol, red meat, refined sugars and fried, fatty food. "We also suggest that people get active and do weight-bearing exercise."

It will cost: \$75 for the initial one-hour consultation, \$40 for each half-hour follow-up session or \$239 for a three-month weight-loss plan (blood tests and supplements are extra).

Jennifer Garth, psychologist and Good Medicine magazine's weight-loss advice columnist

Your wobbly bits are: tied to your emotions.

"There are emotional overeaters, compulsive overeaters and those who've simply developed and maintained bad eating habits," Garth says.

"In psychology, we try to deal with the underlying causes that lead to being overweight or obese, whether it's stress, depression or anger. I mainly use Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, which helps people to rethink their actions and be more pro-active."

Banish them by: changing your lifestyle.

Garth contends that many people are triggered by day-to-day stresses such as an aggressive boss, arguments with their partner or an unruly adolescent child. "They reach for food as a comfort or distraction, as a way to deal with the stress.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy can help people to become aware of and change their behaviour, like

going for a walk, cleaning out their shoe cupboard instead of eating. It's not about dieting – it's about making positive lifestyle changes. You've got to make peace with food. It's important to have self-acceptance no matter what and not to have unrealistic expectations."

It will cost: \$100 for a one-hour psychological consultation (it takes a few sessions for weight loss). Private health fund rebates may be available.

Tenecy Ho, Chinese medical practitioner, Wonder Life clinic, Bondi Junction

Your wobbly bits are: unique to you.

"There are so many different types of 'overweight'," Ho says, "from a low metabolism to depression, hormonal imbalances, stress-related binge eating or severe fluid retention. Eating a lot of so-called 'fat-free' foods can contribute to binge eating because you don't get that feeling of satisfaction after eating." When someone is overweight, Ho says, Chinese medicine tries to treat the related spleen and liver system – the "middle burner" area.

Banish them by: using herbs and acupuncture.

"I try to bring the body systems back into balance with acupuncture and herbs," Ho says. "The internal organs are part of an interconnecting system – from the nervous system to the metabolism and hormone levels. I do a thorough assessment and then prescribe a personalised herbal mixture. I also recommend regular exercise and diet changes – no more 'non-fat' foods, no coffee, refined sugars, etc."

It will cost: \$60 for the initial consultation.

Subsequent consultations start at \$40.

Laparoscopic surgery specialist Dr James D. Ritchie of the Keyhole Surgery Centre, city

Your wobbly bits are: the result of many factors.

"The cause of obesity is multifactorial, of course," Ritchie says. "In many patients it's genetic; you can see that it runs in families. Depression and boredom can contribute. It's the environment we live in, too; there is a glut of cheap, high-fat food about and we spend long hours sitting in front of a computer screen and get very little exercise."

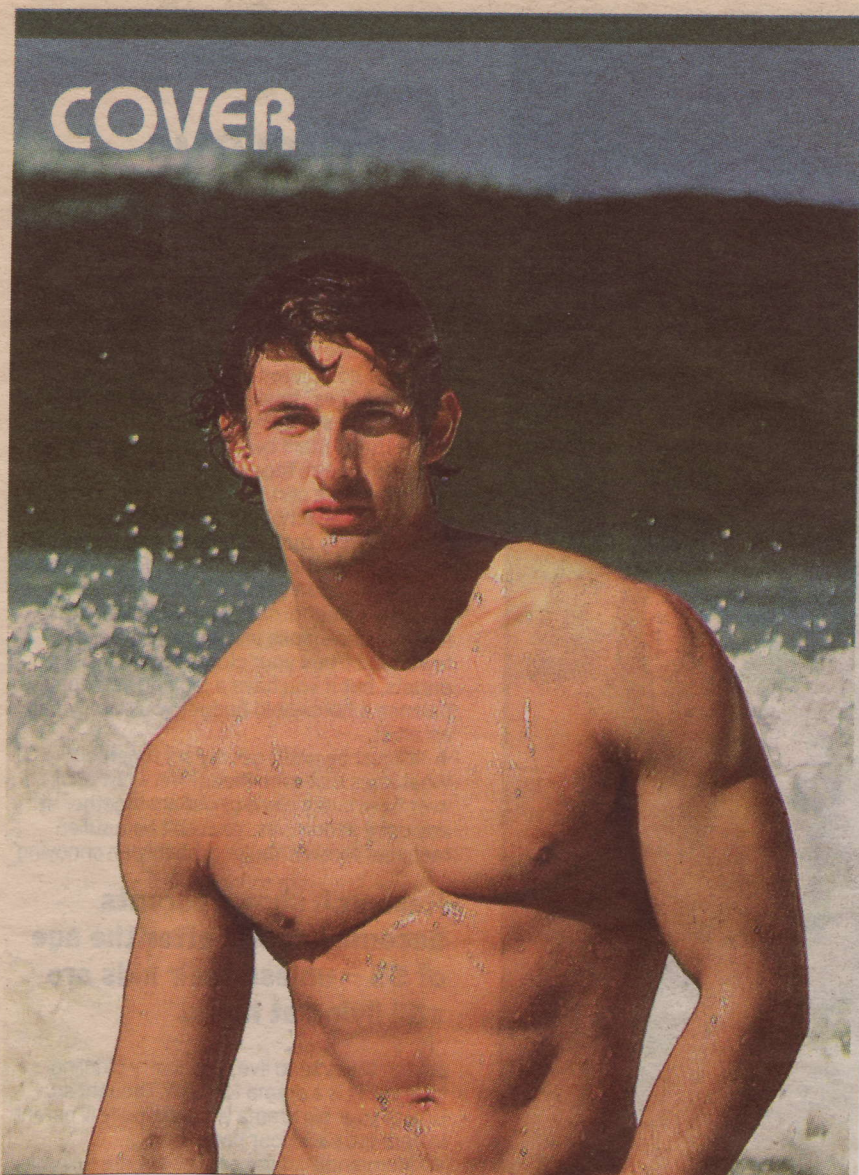
Banish them by: undergoing obesity surgery.

Ritchie insists that obesity surgery (biliopancreatic diversion, gastric banding) is not to be taken lightly. "Any operation is a last resort," he says. "A person considering this type of surgery has to have been trying to lose weight through conventional methods, like diet and exercise, for at least five years. They must also be motivated and willing to follow some rules because if they don't, there are more risks and side-effects." Ritchie only accepts obesity surgery candidates who are morbidly obese, which is defined as being either 80 per cent or 45 kilograms above one's ideal body weight.

It will cost: anywhere from \$4000 (if you have the right private health insurance) to \$17,000 (if you are not insured).



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AND THEN THERE'S ...

✦ **The old favourite: Weight Watchers**
Weight Watchers was founded by enterprising blonde bombshell Jean Nidetch in the early '60s in Queens, New York. Today, Weight Watchers operates in 30 countries and its simple programs of portion control, peer support and motivation have inspired millions to jump on the weekly weigh-in bandwagon.

✦ **Fad diets: friends or foes?**
There's the Atkins diet, the South Beach diet, the Hamptons diet, the Beverly Hills diet, the grapefruit diet, the blood type diet, the zone diet, the raw food diet, even the caveman diet. Buyers beware: today's health craze may be tomorrow's health risk.

✦ **The quick fix: from pills to pseudo-meals**
Don't mind putting up with potentially life-threatening side-effects or pretending that a milkshake is a meal? Diet pills, which often contain amphetamine-like compounds, have

been blamed for everything from panic attacks to strokes. Although less extreme, meal replacement programs such as Slim Fast or Ultra Slim are a short-term solution – do you really want to ingest those pre-packaged milkshakes every day for the rest of your life?

✦ **Zen and the art of fat acceptance: a growing movement is saying "let it be"**
Jodie Hunter, of Perth, started her web group, Don't Tell Me What Size I Must Be, in 2000 and it now has 1400 members. Hunter says fat acceptance and slow lifestyle changes are key. "Many people don't realise that fad dieting is far worse for you than maintaining your weight and increasing exercise over the long term." She describes her online community as "a supportive and encouraging group which focuses on living a physically and emotionally healthy life, no matter what size you are". See www.geocities.com/tenorqueen/