

# go on... make a pig of yourself!

If you want to achieve optimum health – take a lesson from Petal the pig. Our porky pals have plenty of tips on how to live life to the full – healthily and happily.

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Above: Petal the healthy porker.

“Petal carries herself with a beguiling mix of ungainly waddle and saucy swagger, with not a hint of “does my bum look big in this?” angst.”

**W**hen I confess that I’ve fallen in love with a pig, people generally nod sympathetically.

It’s not surprising really. Pigs have a rather unattractive reputation – after all, the cartoonists aren’t trying to be nice when they emphasise Peter Costello’s ears and other porcine features.

It’s so unfair. Having watched our dear little piglet grow over the past 10 months into a dear, big porker, I can report that pigs are one of the loveliest of companions.

If Petal is any guide, they are affectionate, curious, smart and endlessly entertaining creatures. And, believe it or not, they also have plenty to teach humans about healthy living. Maybe Petal is no ordinary pig (and doting me is quite prepared to concede this), but she knows more than many humans about how to eat.

She enjoys her tucker immensely but also knows when she’s had enough. She quite often walks away from food, happy to leave it for later, when hunger calls.

And she’s far from a slob. Petal has a whole vocabulary of grunts, but there are none so communicative as those towards the end of the day. It’s time for our walk, NOW, she demands.

In fact, so much of Petal’s behaviour reminds me of what I learnt from the research literature

about the factors contributing to healthy eating and lifestyles, while writing a book about obesity.

Research suggests that much of our intuitive response to the obesity epidemic has the potential to be counterproductive. Forcing children to eat their greens or to play sport is unlikely to be effective at creating lifelong healthy habits. And making children worried about their weight is just likely to end up giving them a problem, by encouraging weight-promoting eating patterns, such as dieting.

Instead, we should be making it easier for people to discover their inner pigs. That means really enjoying delicious fresh produce – but also knowing when to stop eating and when to start moving.

Petal, who lives next door to the vegetable patch, is particularly fond of spinach. Visitors quickly learn that the way to her heart is to pass handfuls of the stuff through the fence.

Even a one-eyed pig lover such as myself will know that this is not necessarily a sign of inherent virtue. Petal has grown up alongside a bountiful spinach supply, learning to associate our visits and her tummy rubs with a leafy treat. It is entirely likely that if she lived next door to fast food joint, she’d be equally happy with greasy gifts.

It’s a reminder that we are all, whether pig or human, products of our environments, as well



as our genes. While modern life makes it all too easy for humans to eat too much, especially of the wrong stuff, and walk too little, the same is sadly true for most modern pigs.

Petal also reminds me that a healthy weight is about far more than such clinical measures as body mass index. It’s also about being comfortable in your own skin, and I’ve never seen a girl quite so comfortable with hers. Petal carries herself with a beguiling mix of ungainly waddle and saucy swagger, with not a hint of “does my bum look big in this?” angst.

Petal is also a reminder of the value of the simple pleasures of life. There is much vicarious

pleasure to be had in watching a pig wallow luxuriously in her mudbath. And there’s nothing so hilariously absurd (unless you’re a small, terrified child, perhaps) as a pig thundering across the paddock towards you, her stiff-jointed gait flopping the big ears. Petal is always making us laugh.

Well, almost always. It turns out there is some truth to at least one aspect of a piggish reputation. No-one is quite so pigheaded as a Petal up to her eyes in bits of the garden that definitely don’t need digging.

‘Pet’, as her nickname has inevitably become, is sometimes better known as ‘Petulant!’ ♦

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## A good book...

Melissa Sweet lives in rural NSW and is the author of *The Big Fat Conspiracy: How To Protect Your Family's Health* (ABC Books. RRP \$32.95).

Melissa now wishes it was called “Eat Like A Pig, Enjoy Life More and Live Longer”.