

You on a Diet

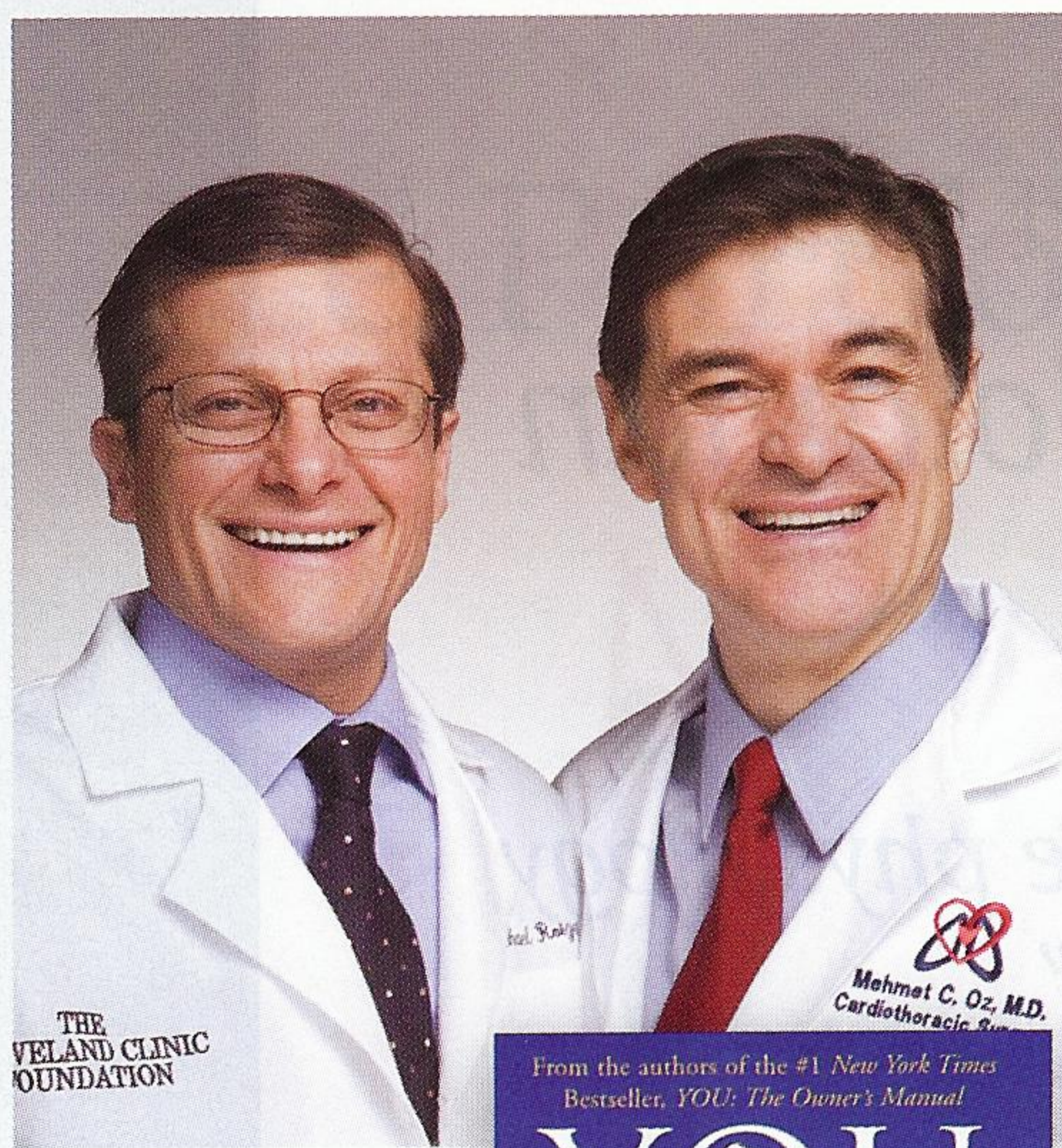
Mehmet C. Oz, MD, is medical director of the Integrated Medicine Center and director of the Heart Institute at New York Presbyterian-Columbia Medical Center. He is also professor and vice chairman of surgery at Columbia University. In 2005, Dr. Oz and his colleague, Michael F. Roizen, MD, co-authored international bestseller, *YOU: the Owner's Manual*. Mehmet Oz talks to Portfolio's editor-in-chief Anne Spencer about the duo's latest collaboration, *YOU On a Diet: The Owner's Manual for Waist Management* (Free Press); the fourth book in the series, which Oz says was written to "shed light on a topic that 65% of people struggle with."

Q Many people weigh in to keep track of their dieting. Are the numbers on your scales the best measure of a successful diet?

A It turns out for obesity the best number is your waist size and the reason for that is because your waist size teaches you about the omentum. It is a layer of fat that becomes a live organ that's like a fish net hanging off your stomach, that catches fat fish, and those fat cells, if they accumulate in the omentum, become metabolically active and secrete chemicals that change how we behave and put pressure on our kidneys, which causes high blood pressure. It sends fats to our liver that cause the elevation of the unhealthy or lousy LDL cholesterol and at the same time suck up the insulin and block the insulin, which causes diabetes. So the omentum comes alive and actually causes a lot of the pathology that we see with obesity.

Q There are some important chemical reactions you think we need to consider before we sit down for dinner. Describe the importance of the hormone ghrelin.

A Ghrelin is a chemical that is secreted.



Mehmet C. Oz, MD, with *YOU* co-author Michael F. Roizen, MD. (pictured left)

It stimulates your stomach to churn, so you actually feel discomfort when you get hungry. And so the ghrelin levels will go up higher and higher if you don't eat, until you finally have to eat. Ghrelin doesn't tell you how much to eat, it just says eat. So for the average person, you start to eat and then your ghrelin level will come down about half-an-hour later. Well, guess what? Half-an-hour later you've eaten three meals, so one of the tricks is to have some calories — nuts are perfect — about half-an-hour before a meal so by the time you sit down at the meal you're not famished. Your ghrelin levels have already started to come down. And so you can eat and enjoy the food but you're not feeling this pressure that gulps and wolfs down every single thing in front of you.

Q Why is it important to start the day with fibre, such as the flaxseed you add to your Breakfast Blaster shake recipe?

A Fibre slows down the transit of food through your intestines, and because it does that it slows down the regrowing of your appetite, so if you have a high fibre diet, you won't be hungry for six hours, which means that all morning long you can work effortlessly, and not feel like you've got to wolf some more food down.

Q You say there are simple tricks we can do to govern our appetites. Could you share a few?

A You can take plates that are 9 inches in diameter, instead of being 13 inches or 11 inches in diameter, which of course a proportionally much smaller amount of food fills, and you will eat that food, it will give you time to readjust your biology, and oftentimes you want more but if you fill up the 11 inch plate you're going to eat it all usually and by the time you've realized it you've taken in an extra 200 calories. Now why is that important? Because the entire obesity epidemic is about 100 calories more a day.

Q And you say forget the candlelit dinners?

A Folks don't appreciate how the environment changes their appetite and if you eat with the lights on, if you eat in a warm room, you will naturally eat less than a cold or dark room. Historically, humans would have wanted to eat more in a cold, dark environment because it probably would have meant they didn't have as much food and so you want to get the balance so that the body's naturally taking you where you want to be.

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