

# Don't change, Oprah

**T**ake the much-admired Oprah. She's rich and powerful. This woman can have everything she wants. She employs a chef to stock her pantry and cook for her. Another takes her to the gym. Her loyal staff pamper her every whim.

Every day on the small screen, Oprah, the mighty Oprah, the post-laundry president of the TV world, preaches transformation to millions of viewers who want to be Oprah-sized rich and Oprah-sized beautiful and Oprah-sized happy. But nobody is more dissatisfied with being Oprah-sized than Oprah herself.

It seems that Oprah, oh-so rich, oh-so powerful, is reduced to a puddle when confronted with a Cheezie. Oprah is a bit larger than life, you see, and there seems to be nothing she can do about it.

Who cares if she's a heavyweight? Not me. Not you. But she does. She continually makes references to her inability to exercise and stop stuffing her face. What gives, Oprah?

I don't know about you, but if Oprah can't lose a few pounds the world is in deep trouble. Here is a woman, a very powerful woman, a woman admired and successful, but she cannot really change herself in the way she wants. No matter what, she cannot accept what she is: smart, beautiful and a little chunky.

What kind of message is that? The cynic in me asks if Oprah, with all her strength and resources, can't change, why should you or I? If Oprah can't change herself, how can she change the world? After all, the great Mahatma Gandhi exhorts us "to be the change we want to see in the world."

As much as I admire Oprah, her good works, her focus on serious books, her support of the idealist Obama, I wonder — especially after her crazy new night-time show where charitable behaviour has a retrograde million-dollar reward — if Oprah is truly helping us poor slobs. Is watching television and buying her magazine a good way to become a global citizen, a champion of yourself and the unwashed? Is going Oprah, the global brand, anything more than a savvy formula for telling you to be dissatisfied with yourself, the colour of your hair, the breadth of your library, and the size of your thighs?

If you are in the forest and nobody hears the sound of your thighs rubbing together, does that mean your chubbiness does not really exist?

Of course, deep in the forest, you're not going to find any plasma flat-screens. There is only one channel you get when you go outside:



S T A N  
**CHUNG**  
*Global Citizen*

The here and now.

Things happen slowly in the here and now, and the colours aren't as sharp as HD. Every day, every hour is ALL NEW programming. It can be terrifying. Oh, let's not go out there! Let's stay behind our windshields and TV screens where it's safe and passive.

No wonder people pack their televisions when they go camping. What else is there to do?

Yes, I confess. I have measured out my life in episodes of Law and Order. I grew up on television, and I admit that I'm a helpless addict. I have the audio-visual equipment and the sedentary evenings to prove it.

Like any addict, all I can do is practice management: get my fix as quickly and efficiently as possible. I skip commercials. I try not to watch forensic porn or anything involving voting someone off. And, yes, I do watch the incredible phenomenon that is Oprah once in awhile. It's research, I tell you! I'm a cultural academic, an impassionate observer of the human condition. (Plus, I love Dr. Oz.)

So let's give the woman a break. Oprah is splendidly human, so change is just as difficult for her as it is for us. Just like you or me, she puts on her support hose one leg at a time. I admit it. I couldn't lose 20 pounds if my life depended on it. I haven't given up on exercising, for I know it is a mandatory part of life. I just can't give up on Oreos or those designer jelly beans or chocolate pudding. I just can't give up on crispy chow mein. I just can't give up on the soul-gratifying substance known as bacon or, as they like to call it America, Canadian bacon.

Even just typing the word "bacon" puts my brain in a sensual state of uncontrollable longing. Bacon, bacon, bacon. Try it with scallops. Or salad or ice cream. Try it naked.

Food habits die hard. I know people who salt their food with maniacal hyper-precision. My old friend, Ron, dips individual fries into ketchup and then into a pile of salt. Another pal of mine, a guy with no taste buds,

must end each day with a litre of Pepsi and a towering, seven-inch pile of Pringles.

Me, I'm no better. Ask my wife: I have few hobbies outside of playing tennis, watching Idol (for cultural scholarship), and searching for that perfect shrimp tempura.

My darn belly has been growing and it can't be stopped. I pat the darn thing and ask it to stop growing, but it just won't listen. My digestion problems have been increasing, too. I'm backed up, I'm not backed up, I'm backed up again — oh, geez, it must be Wednesday — time to have a long sit-down. My bowels move on a lunar cycle.

While I try to eat organic and local, I often sneak out of my office and head for the nearest all-you-can-eat fish and chips. What can I say? I've got a touch of the Oprah in me.

I have friends who are not like me or Oprah. They go to bed at 8:30 p.m. They've never watched Dexter. They jog five kilometres in the morning while I'm still drooling into my buckwheat pillow. I have a 46-year-old friend who has six-pack abs and weighs only 138 pounds — lighter than he was in high school. The man is despicable. He swims every day, and sometimes even at lunch. Even at lunch, I tell you! He is doing laps while I circle KFC with my car window open. Breathe in. Breathe out. Please, Oprah, give me strength.

I don't pretend to understand the lives of the so-called perfect people. Their smiles are all shiny white and they look impossibly good at the beach. I don't know how they do it. I don't want to know, either. I have yellow teeth and a superb paunch. What am I going to do? Am I going to get all military on myself and go to one of those boot camps? Nope. Will I ever go to hot yoga? You first, Oprah. I want to see you in sweat-stained LuluLemon.

Listen, I'm curious about many things, but one of the things I am really tired of is my dissatisfaction with myself. Gee willickers, I'm all I have. Why poke yourself in the eye with a Pogo stick? Why beat yourself about the head with a Toblerone?

I don't mean to offend the mighty Oprah, and I don't want the Oprah-styled "fat-wah," given to all those like Letterman who displease her or her fans. I just want Oprah to accept herself, so we can accept ourselves. In the meantime, I'm pulling up a chair, unpinching my bag of Oreos, and watching Ellen.

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