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Chef Virginia Willis Talks Life Guardrails, Health and Wellness in AARP Magazine



(ATLANTA, GA) Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Sally Field and Rita Moreno rule the cover of AARP Magazine this month, promoting “80 for Brady”, their new film about four fans and their trek to see their football hero Tom Brady, but inside the pages you’ll find one of *their* biggest fans, Chef Virginia Willis. In an essay titled “The Best Weight-Loss Goal is No Goal”, Virginia chronicles how a focus on wellness rather than weight-loss has helped her maintain a 65-pound weight loss for more than two years.

“To be featured in the same magazine as four of my Hollywood idols is a thrill, and it’s an even bigger thrill to see older women having long and vibrant careers. They’re inspirational!,” says Virginia, 56, whose philosophy about aging plays a key role in managing her health, wellness and career. “You’re never too young or too old to start thinking about living a better life.

In the AARP story, Virginia describes her personal trek of successes and setbacks in the weight loss arena and one particularly painful and humbling career experience that served as the tipping point that led to a commitment to making fundamental, sustainable lifestyle changes.

When Virginia realized she needed to lose 65 pounds, the task seemed scary if not impossible, “65 pounds, really?!” She decided to aim for healthy and strong.



To reach her wellness goal, Virginia developed practices that would later become her [“Life Guardrails for Real Life Self-Care and Weight Loss.”](#) She started walking for exercise and slowly changed her relationship with food, shifting to using food for nourishment rather than to numb feelings or deal with stress.

“Real guardrails keep your car out of the ditch. In the same way, my life guardrails help me stay on track. My three main guardrails are to eat healthy, exercise and practice mindful behavior every day. With habit, repetition, and consistency, I gradually lost 65 pounds and have kept them off for 2 1/2 years. My goal is to share with others that they can do this, too. ”

You won’t find deprivation, or even a list of “don’ts” for that matter, in Virginia’s guardrails. The guardrails are positive, proactive, and practical by design. Virginia’s healthy eating guardrail includes lots of fruits and vegetables in her daily diet, but she’s not afraid to enjoy an occasional [Buttermilk Biscuit](#) or bowl of [Chocolate Pudding](#). “ You can still eat foods that are delicious — even sometimes indulgent and decadent — and lose weight. I am a real-life example that this can be done, as long as you stay mindful of what you’re eating.”

(more)

For day to day eating, Virginia amped up plant-based foods and leaner proteins. She routinely modifies classic recipes to cut down on fats or sugar-- without sacrificing flavor. “Who wants to eat sad food? It’s got to taste good!” You’ll find her Lower in Fat Carrot Cake recipe in the magazine. She tweaked the ingredients by replacing some of the oil with crushed pineapple, but no one would ever guess it’s better-for you-baking.

Virginia has found that meditation and journaling enhance her ability to remain mindful throughout the day and she emphasizes that physical, mental, and spiritual wellness are all important. An avid walker, Virginia uses her time on the trail to exercise and socialize. “I keep daily walking dates. It creates accountability – and I get to see my friends, be outdoors in nature, and exercise.”

Virginia’s the first to admit that even with guardrails, the path to wellness is challenging and no one is perfect, but she believes that if you stay on the path more often than not, you’re doing all right. Virginia shares more about Life Guardrails on her blog [Cooking with Virginia](#). And, look for tips, techniques, and real life recipes on her [Instagram](#) feed.

About Virginia Willis

Georgia-born French-trained chef Virginia Willis has foraged for berries in the Alaskan wilderness, harvested capers in the shadow of a smoldering volcano in Sicily, and beguiled celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Bill Clinton, Trace Adkins, Nicole the Nomad, and Morgan Freeman with her cooking.



She is a chef instructor for the streaming service **Food Network Kitchen** as well as a James Beard award-winning cookbook author. Her books include **Fresh Start: Cooking with Virginia My Real Life Daily Guide to Healthy Eating and Weight Loss**; **Secrets of the Southern Table**, **Lighten Up, Y'all**, **Bon Appétit, Y'all**, **Basic to Brilliant, Y'all**, **Okra**, and **Grits**.

She is the former TV kitchen director for Martha Stewart, Bobby Flay, and Nathalie Dupree; has worked in Michelin-starred restaurants; and traveled the world producing food stories – from making cheese in California to escargot farming in France. She has appeared on Food Network's *Chopped*, *CBS This Morning*, *Fox Family and Friends*, *Martha Stewart Living*, and as a judge on *Throwdown with Bobby Flay*.

Virginia has also been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *People Magazine*, *Eater*, and *Food52* and has contributed to *Eating Well*, *Garden & Gun*, and *Bon Appétit*, and more. The Chicago Tribune praised her as one of "Seven Food Writers You Need to Know." Her legion of fans loves her down-to-earth attitude and approachable spirit. Learn more about Virginia and follow her good and good for you recipes and traveling exploits at www.virginiawillis.com.

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Virginia is available for interviews, TV and video cooking demos, product collaborations, motivational speaking and health and wellness coaching.

Virginia can talk about:

- Women, aging, and weight loss
- Weight loss after 50
- How she lost 65 pounds and kept it off
- Culinary health and wellness
- Gen-x women, weight and fitness
- Secrets for eating healthier and feeling better
- Healthy recipes that taste good
- How to get a grip on portion control
- Personalizing a healthy eating and fitness lifestyle
- Tips for keeping a healthy pantry and fridge
- Healthy proteins and why they matter