


# Healthy Outlook Blog

## Wagering on Weight Loss: Diet Bet Websites

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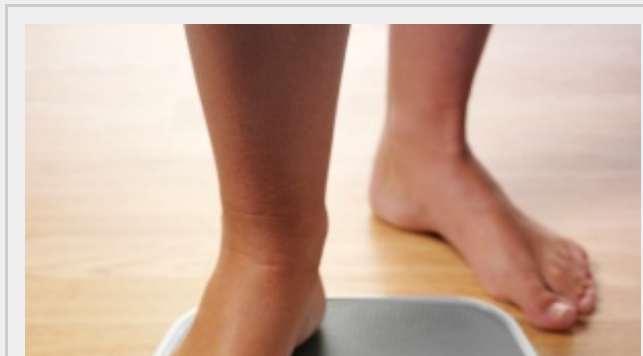
By Lynn Langway | Posted May 29 2012

[Diet](#), [Mobile Applications](#), [Social Media](#), [Weight Loss](#)

When she grew too winded to sing a lullaby to her little girl after climbing the stairs in her Brooklyn brownstone, blogger Amy Oztan decided it was time to kick her diet into higher gear. She turned to [dietbet.com](#), a new website that lets you wager on future weight loss. Although she'd previously managed to shed 18 lbs. on her own, Oztan figured that she'd be spurred on by the combined threat of online humiliation if she failed, plus the thrill of prize money if she succeeded.

"I tend to do better when things are competitive," says Oztan, who reports that she lost 12 more pounds during her first 4-week contest with fellow bloggers.

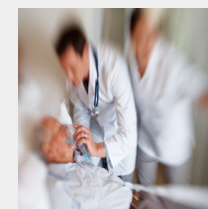
Diet contests themselves have long been staged informally among



### A B O U T O U R B L O G

Our blog is a collection of thoughts and stories that serve as inspiration for what healthymagination is—a shared commitment to creating better health for more people. It's written by the people behind healthymagination, as well as members of our advisory board and guest contributors from around the web.

### Y O U M I G H T L I K E



#### First Bedside Genetic Test Identifies Right Drug for Stent Patients

Now, Canadian biotech firm Spartan Bioscience has developed the first bedside genetic test for heart patients, the Spartan Rx. The device tests DNA from a simple swab of cheek saliva to identify star-2 allele carriers, allowing patients to be treated

friends or co-workers. But TV's reality hit, "The Biggest Loser," raised the profile of diet derbies and upped the ante with its \$250,000 jackpot. Now a growing number of weight-loss websites are shaking up the diet business, adding the fun of social gaming and making wagers easier to organize. In addition to dietbet.com, which launched in January, other weight-loss websites include [Fatbet](#), [StickK](#), [HealthyWage](#).



While their exact rules differ, all of these sites function along somewhat similar lines: a sponsor signs up competitors, who try to hit a certain weight-loss target by the deadline to win a specific reward (which might include babysitting or other non-monetary prizes). Registration is free, but most sites charge a small fee if asked to collect and supervise contributions. Any jackpot is shared among everyone who achieves the goal. The bets are not considered gambling, organizers say, because they're not purely games of chance.

StickK, the oldest entrant, was started by two Yale professors (in economics and law) to reinforce self-control with penalties as well as prizes—wielding the stick as well as the carrot. The site, which now reports more than \$10.3 million in wagers through 150,000 "commitment contracts," allows bets on quitting smoking or increasing exercise as well as weight loss. If you fail to make progress within a set time, you forfeit money, which may go to the kitty, a charity—or to an "anti-charity" which supports beliefs opposed to yours.

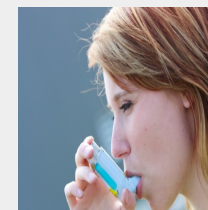
Recent research supports the idea that financial incentives—both positive and negative—can boost willpower. A [study of dieters](#) at the University of North Carolina indicated that weight loss rises with the size of the bonus. A [Cornell](#)

with the right anti-clotting medication.



### Smartphones Improve Disease Surveillance in the Developing World

One of the biggest challenges facing public health officials in developing nations is implementing systems to manage disease surveillance. Enter smartphones, which provide relatively inexpensive and powerful computing tools—combined with communications and GPS capabilities.



### New Asthma Treatments on the Horizon

Asthma sufferers may soon have expanded treatment options to prevent or control attacks. 74 new asthma medications are now in clinical trials or awaiting FDA review, according to a new report from America's Biopharmaceutical Research Companies.

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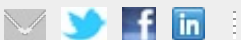
[study](#) showed that employees were more willing to stay with workplace diet programs if they might forfeit a bond. And an influential [study](#) at the University of Pennsylvania found that those with money at stake are five times more likely to reach their goal weight than those without.

But maintenance remains elusive, according to lead researcher Kevin Volpp, MD, Director of the Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics at Penn, who is now studying longer-term effectiveness. “The real health and economic benefits of weight loss only happen if people keep doing this long enough to form a habit,” he notes.

Will wagering websites still be popular years from now, or will they fade like the Cabbage Soup Diet of yesteryear? “This is not a gimmick—we’re not like Angry Birds,” declares Tina Basle, vice-president of strategic alliances at Dietbet. Over at StickK, CEO Jordan Goldberg suggests that life events may provide a steady stream of customers. “A lot of people come to the site when they have a wedding or a high school reunion coming up,” he says. As long as such stressful occasions keep happening, these websites hope, odds are the clients will follow.

## CONNECT THE DOTS

For tips on [smarter dieting](#), visit the American Heart Association website. To find the [diet that’s right for you](#), see the Mayo Clinic website. For more about keeping the pounds off and getting fit, read our blog posts, “[Best Strategies for Maintaining Long-Term Weight Loss](#),” “[Free Weight-Loss App Combines Calorie Counter and Diet Diary](#),” “[Fit Friendly Exercise Challenge App](#),” and “[Losing Weight: The Snack Strategy](#).”



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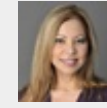
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