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Maintaining Willpower While Losing Weight

Going on a diet is easy; it is so easy that millions of people start dieting every month. So if going on a diet is so simple, then why do studies indicate that such a high percentage of adults are overweight or obese?

The answer is simple: Going on a diet may be easy, but actually sticking to the diet can be very difficult. Many people lack the willpower, decisiveness and internal strength to change their lifestyle and avoid lapsing back into bad eating habits. Others decide to exercise more to improve their fitness, but they stop working out if the weather is bad or if something "comes up." Soon, they are back to spending time sitting on the couch instead of working out.

There are things people can do to improve their willpower, increasing the likelihood that they will adhere to their new lifestyle changes. Here are some suggestions on how to keep your willpower when dieting and exercising.

- Have a Realistic Approach and Goal
- Keep the Benefits in Mind
- Replace Bad Habits with Good Ones
- Make Your Workouts Fun
- Have a Diet/Exercise Partner
- Reward Yourself
- Resources

Have a Realistic Approach and Goal

Having realistic goals is one of the most important aspects of dieting and weight loss. If you start your weight loss regimen with the goal of losing 10 pounds each week, you are going to grow disheartened when the first week passes and you have not reached your goal.

Goals should be attainable, but this is not to say that they should be easy. An appropriate weight loss goal may be the number of pounds you can lose as long as you follow an appropriate diet and exercise schedule. An appropriate weight loss approach could be simple lifestyle changes, such as "I will not eat fried food for a month," or "I will take the stairs instead of the elevator." These kinds of goals and approaches are healthy and attainable, and they will help you achieve your ultimate goal of losing weight.

Keep the Benefits in Mind

Remind yourself every day of the health and life benefits you will reap as you lose weight. Too often, dieters are overcome with thoughts about how hard it is to lose weight. Try replacing these negative thoughts with positive ones, such as:

- You will feel better physically and emotionally.
- You will be less susceptible to injuries, illnesses and certain diseases.
- You will feel more energized.
- You will be able to wear clothing you had previously outgrown.
- You will not get tired so easily.

Replace Bad Habits with Good Ones

One of the hardest things about staying on a diet or weight loss plan is overcoming your bad habits. Whether it is having a candy bar in the middle of the afternoon or choosing to eat fast-food instead of making something healthy for dinner, bad habits are probably responsible for much of your weight gain.

Bad habits are not easily overcome, but one method many people find useful is replacing bad habits with good ones. For example, if your morning routine involves driving to the donut shop for coffee and a bear claw, perhaps you can try a new morning routine of brewing your own coffee and having a bowl of oatmeal. If you have a hamburger for lunch at a restaurant several times each week, try implementing a new routine of bringing a salad from home with a different dressing for each day.

If you do not replace your existing bad habits with new habits, it will be difficult to make a change.

Make Your Workouts Fun

Many dieters are unsuccessful because they view exercise as work, but if you think of it as a fun activity or hobby, you will be more likely to enjoy it. There are several ways to do this:

- **Join a sports team or league:** Exercise does not have to be a solitary hike up a stair-climbing machine. Most cities and municipalities offer different sports and recreation leagues, while many larger cities are home to leagues run by private companies. Join a league and play a sport you enjoyed in your youth, like softball, flag football, volleyball, basketball or soccer.
- **Participate in non-traditional activities:** Some sports organizations offer leagues in non-traditional games like kickball and dodgeball. Try playing dodgeball for a half hour, and you will be quickly convinced that what you are doing is both playing and working out.
- **Join a club:** In many cities, there are clubs for people who like to run, bike and rollerblade. Whether you are just beginning or have been doing these activities for a while, they are often much more fun when done with one or more enthusiasts.

Have a Diet/Exercise Partner

Dieting and losing weight is not something that is easily done alone. If you have a diet or exercise partner, it will significantly increase your chances of being successful. Your partner will be there to coax you out of the house to jog on the days when you just do not feel like it and to offer congratulations when you achieve one of your diet goals.

Likewise, you should provide the same encouragement and support to your partner, applauding their accomplishments and helping to push them toward achieving their goals. You might even find that there is a healthy competition between the two of you that pushes you both toward your personal goals.

Your partner can be a spouse, partner, co-worker, friend, neighbor, or just someone you met who shares the same goal of losing weight and adopting a healthier lifestyle.

Reward Yourself

Diets and weight loss plans are not about depriving yourself of things that taste good. They are about changing behaviors so that you do not rely heavily on unhealthy foods for nourishment and spend such a high percentage of your time doing sedentary activities like watching television

and surfing the internet.

If you adopt healthier eating habits, there will be room in your diet for a piece of cheesecake every once in a while. Implement a regular exercise program in your life, and afternoons spent lounging on the couch watching football will become the exceptional days of your life rather than the standard. The rewards that you will have earned through hard work and dedication will taste so much better than those you used to subsist on.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>)
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov (<http://www.fda.gov>)
- Nutrition.gov: www.nutrition.gov (<http://www.nutrition.gov>)
- National Institutes of Health: <http://nih.gov> (<http://nih.gov>)
- WomensHealth.gov: www.womenshealth.gov (<http://www.womenshealth.gov>)

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