

## Tired of Yo-Yo Dieting? A Lifestyle Makeover May Be in Order

Are you ready for the spring/summer shedding of our winter layers? Are you not where you want to be but are tired of dieting? A multifaceted lifestyle makeover may be just what you need.

Let's face it. There are many dimensions to our lives that can help or hinder our attempt to get fit and feel better. If we get a lousy night of sleep, we're cranky the next day and more likely to give in to food cravings to help us get by. If we move more, we'll burn more calories and the more we move, the more we feel like moving. And lastly, the better able we are to cope with stress, the less likely we are to stress eat for comfort. It's all interrelated. So here are some quick tips that can easily be factored into your daily routine.

### Adopt a Plant-Based Plate

Not only is a low-fat, minimally processed, plant-based plate a mouthful to say, it is a mouthful to eat. With an almost endless variety of menu ideas, it is a very satisfying way to dine. It is naturally more nutrient dense and calorie dilute than the standard American diet and encourages a gradual but more permanent shift toward a healthy weight.

Keep these suggestions in mind to make your transition as easy as possible:

- Enjoy a colorful variety of whole grains, legumes (beans, peas, and lentils), vegetables, and fruit. Also enjoy some raw nuts and seeds. Eat as close to the plant's natural package as possible. In other words, limit/omit processed food.
- Minimize or omit added oil.
- Make starches the centerpiece of your meal (brown rice, sweet potatoes, quinoa, corn, potatoes, squash, barley, pasta, whole grain bread). Starches are our primary source of energy and satiety.
- Start each meal with a piece of fruit, soup, salad, or vegetable to get your stomach's stretch receptors stretching.
- Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full, but not stuffed.
- Include a B12 supplement every day.
- Stay hydrated with 64 ounces of filtered water each day.

### Move More

Sneak simple ways of increasing your activity level into your everyday routine. When you're out running your errands, progressively park farther and farther away from your destination until you're competing against another health conscious person for the last spot in the lot! Take the steps instead of the elevator whenever possible, even if you start out stopping just one or two floors before your regular stop. Get off earlier and earlier as your stamina increases. Brisk walks outside are great this time of year. You get a great cardio workout, and a healthy dose of vitamin D between 10 and 2 as well.

If you are over 40, significantly overweight, or have health issues, get your doctor's blessing before beginning to exercise. Cardio, resistance, and stretching all offer specific benefits so try to incorporate all three.

## Sleep Like a Cat

Recuperative sleep is a critical component of feeling well, eating well, and fully functioning throughout your day without the crutch of caffeine and sugary snacks.

The average adult thrives on 7 hours each night. Getting too much sleep can be depressogenic. To encourage a restful night sleep:

- Avoid high protein foods in the evening.
- Watch the timing of your caffeine intake. Caffeine has a half life of about 6 hours, the time it takes for half of the caffeine to be metabolized.
- Limit fluids in the evening if it causes a midnight bathroom run.
- Keep yourself on a regular sleep schedule, even on your days off from work.

## Make Time to Breathe (with help from the work of Joan Borysenko, PhD)

Whether you call it meditation, conscious breathing, or quiet time, it can be a valuable tool in managing and reducing the stress that permeates all of our lives. At first it might seem awkward and forced, but with repeated practice, it can become a natural, nonperceptible response to our daily worries. Changing our breathing can increase or reduce our sympathetic nervous system reaction, either triggering our fight-or-flight response or our relaxation response. This sets the tone for the rest of the autonomic nervous system.

Picture a baby breathing. They have perfected the technique. When they inhale, their abdomen expands like a balloon and when they exhale it flattens out like a pancake. When we fall asleep at night, we breathe exactly the same way. In fact, we breathe like this whenever we are truly relaxed.

When stress begins to affect us physically, one of our responses is tense, shallow breathing or chest breathing. It can also occur when we hold our stomachs in to try to look slimmer or force ourselves into clothing that is too tight for us. We end up only breathing with the upper portion of our chest. We could move 8-10 times more air if we fully engage our lungs.

To practice abdominal breathing, follow these simple instructions from Dr. Borysenko:

- Take a deep breath, then blow it out completely through your mouth with an audible sigh to fully evacuate your lungs. Notice how your belly flattens as you expel every last bit of air. This will remove the stale air in the bottom of your lungs and the vacuum that results will automatically cause you to have a deep, diaphragmatic (abdominal) breath.
- Inhale through your nose, making sure that your abdomen not your chest is expanding as the air completely fills your lungs.
- Practice abdominal breathing for a short period every day and once it begins to feel like second nature, try it out in stressful situations. Notice how well your body responds. Done regularly, this will become your body's natural response to anxiety.

There's no time like the present to clean out old habits and replace them with new, health promoting ones. So make a plan and enjoy implementing it!