



Little changes make good habits easier

Habits – we all have them. Some habits are good and some habits are bad. Once we’ve formed a habit, they become second nature. Learning good habits is sometimes difficult, but gets easier with time.

Food habits and exercise habits are no different. It would appear that many Americans have developed some very bad food and exercise habits. And regretfully we are handling these bad habits on to our children.

When we do something over and over again, the action becomes “normal” for us.

How long it takes to make or break a habit depends on the habit and on the individual. If we eat a piece of fruit every morning for a month, eating fruit will become a habit. Skipping fruit will seem abnormal.

If we take even a 1-minute walk every evening, we will miss that exercise when we don’t do it.

Mark Twain wrote “Habit is habit and not to be flung out the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs one step at a time” (Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar).

With this in mind, here are five ways to help you make better food and exercise habits.

1. Identify clearly the

changes you want to make and produce a daily reminder.

This reminder can be a sign on the bathroom mirror or any place that you will see it. The sign can be as simple as: “Have you eaten your fruit today?” or a picture of a piece of fruit.

2. Make changes realistically and slowly.

To prevent the typical breaking of resolutions as seen by millions shortly after the beginning of each New Year, work on changing one habit at a time. If you are used to eating a large high-fat high-calorie dessert every night, then eliminating the dessert completely will likely produce cravings. If on the other hand, you gradually decrease the size of your dessert portion by 1 tablespoon a week, you will hardly notice the change.

3. Try to replace bad habits with good ones.

It is often easier to replace a bad habit with a good habit than it is to simply eliminate that bad habit. Instead of a cookie, eat a cold crunchy sweet apple. Instead of drinking a soda, drink a glass of fruit juice. Instead of eating as you prepare food or in front of the television set, take 10 minutes to sit at a table and experience the taste, aroma and textures of the food.

4. Make sure that new-habit

rewards are good for you.

Eating a candy bar after exercise may seem like a good reward, but if you stop exercising you may still crave the candy bar. Therefore make sure the rewards you choose won’t turn into bad habits in later years. Instead take 10 minutes to listen to music, to read your favorite book, to talk with a friend, or even to watch a sunset. These simple repeated acts can turn into habits rather than luxuries.

5. Make exercise a social event.

Exercising with someone almost always seems easier than doing it alone. And because time may be our most limited resource, we want to use it wisely. We are more likely to exercise frequently when it’s combined with a chance to talk with a friend. If it is too difficult to coordinate busy schedules, then listening to a book on tape may add to the quality of the time.

Of course, everyone’s excuse is “I’m too busy to exercise” or “I’m too busy to prepare a good meal”. Not taking enough time to develop even small healthy habits sends mixed messages to your children and yourself.

Setting health as a priority now is always a good decision.

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