

21st February 2007 - Bad Habits

We've all tried to change "bad" habits for the better, often with little or limited success. **WeightMatters** would like to show you how to recognize those habits that undermine your weight loss and fitness goals and make small, manageable changes that can change your life, and habits, for the better.

diet



Five Common "Bad" Eating Habits

"When we recognize our bad eating habits, we are empowered," according to Dietician Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD. "Do something new for 21 days, and you can break the habit."

But where to start? Consider these five common "bad" habits and the slow, steady changes you can make to transform them into healthy habits.

1. Mindless or "Amnesia" Eating. This tends to happen when you are otherwise distracted, watching TV, working at your desk, or chatting at a party. There are snacks within reach and before you realize it, the bowl is empty.

Consider sipping tea or sparkling water while you watch TV and keep the snacks in the kitchen. If you must munch, have carrot and celery sticks. Position yourself near the fruit and veg tray at a party and keep your distance from the crisps and sweets.

2. Sleep Deprivation. Studies show that the lack of a good night's sleep can make you feel hungry even if you're full. This is due to the fact that sleep loss affects the secretion of cortisol, a hormone that regulates appetite.

Slowly change your habits for the best results. Switch to decaf after noon each day. Go to bed 15 minutes earlier for a few weeks and then 15 minutes earlier still. Before long you'll be sleeping more and more easily recognizing those habits that interfere with keeping a reasonable bedtime.

3. Grab and Go. You're at work, in the airport, anywhere, and hunger sets in. Easiest thing is to grab what's convenient -- and too often, junk food wins. Better bets are a homemade sandwich, a few carrots, fresh fruit, a smoothie, or trail mix. Plan ahead. Have healthy snacks at your fingertips and you'll be less likely to stray from your eating plan.

4. Drinking without Thinking. Beer, alcohol, wine, fizzy drinks, and gourmet coffees are all easy and enjoyable to consume. But the calories can quickly add up. Plan ahead and make a conscience decision of how much you are going to drink. Once you've reached your limit, switch to diet soda. At the coffee shop, buy a smaller size and order the non-fat or light options.

5. Portion Distortion. We tend to eat everything served to us whether at home or on the go. Restaurant and take away portions are often huge. Make a habit when dining out of immediately cutting the entrée in half and either sharing it with a friend or having it boxed to take home.

exercise



Building Sustainable Habits.

The reasons to start exercising are countless and well known. Even the most dedicated couch potato can list the benefits of regular exercise. But knowing is one thing, doing is another. The only thing more difficult than making major changes to your diet is starting an exercise routine and sticking to it. But have hope; there are small habits you can develop that can set you on the track for success and a lifetime of fitness.

1. Do What You Like. If you have never enjoyed running, don't plan on starting an early morning running regime. Think of what you would enjoy doing. Do you like to bike, swim, and dance? Perhaps an exercise class that focuses on dance moves might be enjoyable enough to keep you coming!

2. Start Slowly. Don't expect to exercise everyday. Plan to exercise one day this week and each week add another day or two. After a couple of weeks start increasing the duration of your sessions. Build on the success of the previous week. Plan ahead to succeed instead of setting yourself up for failure by not being able to meet an overly demanding schedule.

3. Get a Buddy. If you decide to start walking enlist a friend to come with you. Support each other. Your are more likely to exercise if you know someone is waiting for you.

4. Train for Something. Sign up for a walk or run that benefits a charity. Book a challenging holiday such as a ski trip or a walking tour. By having something to work toward you are more likely to exercise and challenge yourself.

5. Reward Yourself. Pick out rewards for your fitness and weight loss efforts and successes. Book a spa day. Allow yourself to try something you've always dreamed of doing. Take a ski lesson, a skating lesson, or a swimming lesson. Book a balloon ride. Celebrate your new stamina and body, and your motivation to build healthy habits will grow.

mind



Where Do Old Habits Go?

According to Ann Graybiel, the Walter A. Rosenblith professor of neuroscience in MIT's Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences any habitual activity -- smoking, eating fatty foods, gambling—actually changes neural activity patterns in the brain. Graybiel points out that though the habits become somewhat "hard-wired", the neural **patterns created by habit can be changed or altered.**

But be aware that even after all your hard work to change for the better when stimulus from the old days is present, the old habit can step up and take over. The dormant pattern of the habit can reassert itself, according to a new study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, putting an individual in a neural state akin to being on autopilot.

"It is as though, somehow, **the brain retains a memory of the habit** context, and this pattern can be triggered if the right habit cues come back," Graybiel comments. "This situation is familiar to anyone who is trying to lose weight or to control a well-engrained habit. **Just the sight of a piece of chocolate can reset all those good intentions.**"

So if you are serious about change, keep temptation at bay. Don't stock the house with goodies that previously triggered over-eating. Be sure to tell friends and family what you are trying to change and enlist their help. But be sure to be kind to yourself and realize you will have those moments when you slip back into old habits. Just don't allow them to become new again.

Sources: CNET News.com, and WebMD.com



Recipe of the month

Soup is not only a comfort food during the cold dark days of winter but this low GI recipe can also make a satisfying, healthy meal.

Ham and Lentil Soup

- 15 ml (1 tbsp.) canola oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 120g diced celery
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1.5 liters chicken stock, low fat
- 2 cans (540ml each) lentils drained & rinsed, or 250g dried lentils
- 170 g Ham, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 2 tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 2 tbsp. chopped fresh Italian parsley

1. In soup pot, heat oil over medium heat and cook onion, celery and garlic for about 5 mins, or until softened.

2. Add stock, lentils, ham and red pepper; bring to boil. Reduce heat and add tomatoes.

3. Cover and simmer for 20 mins. Stir in parsley. (if using dried lentils, simmer for 30 mins. or until tender)



Quote of the month

"Habit is habit and not to be flung out the window... but coaxed downstairs a step at a time." Mark Twain



WM Fact #24

"We help our clients understand their motivations for change, for without this, change will not occur."

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Free Weight Management Seminar, Wimpole Street, W1

A short seminar with facts and tips to help you lose weight, and keep it off.

The following seminars are **FREE**. You will receive take-home notes and refreshments. Each seminar is 60 minutes long; location Wimpole St and places are limited. To sign-up, please contact us

'Understanding Eating Triggers' – Wed March 7th @ 12pm

'The Promedis Diet - Lose 15lbs in 3 weeks!' – Tues March 13th @ 1pm

'Dealing with Childhood Obesity' – Fri March 23rd @ 1pm

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