

## 7 Days to a Healthier Lifestyle

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We can probably agree on a definition of "healthy lifestyle" that includes proper diet, adequate exercise and rest, stress reduction, strong self esteem, and general happiness. Here are a few tips that will have you feeling healthier in seven days.

You probably know that staying active and eating right are critical for long-term health and wellness -- and that an ounce of prevention is worth a TON of cure.

So why do we procrastinate, change our minds, and allow ourselves to give in to temptation?

We need to educate ourselves so we better understand how our lifestyle choices affect our bodies, minds, emotions and thoughts. We can reorganize our lives to set ourselves up for success.

First of all, choose the right time to start your new regimen. Don't pick a time when you are stressed out at work or with social obligations; choose a time when there are minimal demands on you, when you feel positive and empowered, and when you truly want to begin a new life.

Practice standing in front of the mirror every day, look yourself in the eye, and say, "I love you!" Even though you know you want to lose 20 pounds and feel better, appreciate who you are.

Decide on your goals, and keep a journal to record your results. Set up a schedule of when you will eat, exercise and sleep and try your best to stick to it.

Then go to your kitchen and clear out all the foods you don't want to eat. Replace them with food you DO want to eat. Replace fatty junk food with cream cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, fresh and canned fruit, vegetable finger foods (carrots, celery, snap peas, cherry tomatoes, slices of bell pepper, mushrooms), whole grain crackers.

Prepare 3 meals a day for yourself. Incorporate palm-sized proteins like lean meats, fish, eggs and dairy products, fist-sized portions of complex carbohydrates like whole-wheat bread and pasta, wild rice, multigrain cereal and potatoes, and fist-sized portions of vegetable and fruits.

On Sunday, prepare a few days' worth of lunches ahead of time. Don't groan, it's really quite easy. Here are some suggestions: prepare two cups of hummus and bake 3 potatoes. Now you have 7 lunches, all you add is crackers and/or pita bread, salad, assorted finger vegies, sour cream, and you can combine them in many ways: reheat a potato in the microwave, make potato salad, eat hummus and vegies. Vary this with cottage cheese and fruit, maybe baked chicken breast, baked fish, whole wheat bread, and you have lots of snack and lunch variations at your fingertips.

The key to making changes in your eating habits is making sure you have healthy choices already prepared and available at all times. Then you're not tempted to grab that piece of cake or handful of cookies and call it lunch!

The more you have educated yourself about how your body responds to your lifestyle choices, the better able you are to plan ahead and customize a nutrition and exercise plan that is just right for you. When you combine healthy eating habits with adequate rest and

exercise, you are sending signals to your body that you want to burn a substantial amount of fuel. Your body will then burn fat more efficiently to create energy.

When you diet and do not exercise properly, your body loses water and muscle tone. You realize a net loss in energy, and you will compensate by eating more. You will gain back what pounds you have lost, only it will be fat.

Your ultimate goal is to boost your metabolism, which, in turn gives you more energy throughout the day and allows you to do more physical work with less effort. Every time you exercise, you strengthen your metabolism, aerobic capacity, strength and overall health. Your body responds by burning more fat 24/7 - now that's a goal to go for!

Exercise doesn't have to be intense to work for you, but it does need to be consistent. You may prefer walking 20 minutes a day to walking longer. Why? Because if you keep it short, you're more apt to keep your promise to yourself to actually do it. If you live in a hilly place, you can increase the aerobic value by increasing your speed only slightly. Also, you can walk to the grocery store etc. and then carrying extra weight increases the value of the walk.

You can expect optimum results by engaging in regular cardiovascular exercise three or four times per week for 20 to 30 minutes per session, and resistance training three or four times per week for 20 to 25 minutes per session. This balanced regimen may not drop the pounds off you quickly, but it does increase your overall health. What you lose in fat you may very well gain in muscle, at least at first.

Here's a sample exercise program that may work for you:

\* Warm Up -- seven to eight minutes of light aerobic activity intended to increase blood flow and lubricate and warm-up your tendons and joints. You can call this fast housecleaning - vacuuming, sweeping, mopping. :-)

\* Resistance Training -- Train all major muscle groups. One to two sets of each exercise. Do one set at first, then rest for a minute when you advance to two sets.

\* Aerobic Exercise -- Pick two favorite activities, they could be walking, jogging, rowing, biking, inline skating, cross-country skiing, whatever fits your lifestyle. Perform 12 to 15 minutes of the first activity and continue with 10 minutes of the second activity. Cool down during the last five minutes. You can do some exercises in your home, then go for a brisk and slow down for the last few minutes.

\* Stretching -- Wrap up your exercise session by stretching, breathing deeply, relaxing and meditating.

When starting an exercise program, it is important to have realistic expectations. Depending on your initial fitness level, you should expect the following changes:

\* From one to eight weeks -- Feel better and have more energy.

\* From two to six months -- Lose size and inches while becoming leaner. Clothes begin to fit more loosely. You are gaining muscle and losing fat.

\* After six months -- Start losing weight quite rapidly.

This is a very conservative estimate. It is possible to lose weight the very first week, it just depends on how completely you follow the plan and on your own metabolism.

Instead of counting calories, weighing meals, counting points or whatever other systems various diets use that almost require a bookkeeper, use these easy-to-follow guidelines:

\* The key to eating well is variety and advance preparation.

\* Eat three small meals and three small snacks throughout the day. Don't let this overwhelm you; you are discovering a whole new concept of the word "meal". If you've prepared ahead as explained above, this should be no problem. It doesn't need to include extensive cooking and preparation time.

\* Limit your fat intake to only what's necessary for adequate flavor - a dab of butter and a little bit of sour cream on that baked potato, a quick spray of cooking oil on a frying pan, and so on.

\* Drink at least eight 8-oz. glasses of water throughout the day. You can vary this too. Add a squeeze of fresh lemon or a couple tablespoons of bottled fruit juice to a glass of water, just for added interest interest.

\* Take a multi-vitamin each day to ensure you are getting all the vitamins and minerals your body needs.

There is so much more to share, but this will get you off to a healthy start. You should see positive results in how you feel in the first 7 days.

To your health!