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Do you alternate between following a meal plan and losing weight (being “good”) and falling off the plan and regaining weight (being “bad”)? It’s a frustrating but common cycle. Nutrition experts Ellie Zografakis, RD, and Dale Huff, RD, CSCS, co-owners of NutriFormance Personal Training and Sports Nutrition in St. Louis, believe that behavior modification strategies—rather than diets—can help you break this self-defeating cycle and make lasting lifestyle changes.

Enlisting the aid of qualified professionals (e.g., a registered dietitian, a physician, a personal trainer and/or a psychologist) will make it easier to interrupt old behavior patterns. You can also begin to practice the following lifestyle change principles developed by Zografakis and Huff:

1. Stop Dieting. How can you lose weight if you don’t diet? Creating a deficit of about 500 calories a day for one week should result in a 1-pound weight loss. Most people

can incur a large part of this 500-calorie-a-day deficit by exercising and making moderate changes in food intake. In choosing this approach you avoid the negative consequences of rigid dieting.

2. Become Physically, Not Externally, Connected to Eating. Internal hunger cues—such as a rumbling stomach, a slight headache, fatigue, irritability and decreased concentration—are meant to remind you to meet your energy requirements and maintain your natural set point weight. Reconnecting with your physical signals of hunger and satiety can help you acquire the internal power to regulate your food intake.

3. Use the Rating of Perceived Hunger (RPH) Scale. Using this scale can make you more aware of your internal hunger and satiety cues. Think of 0 as indicating extreme hunger and 10 as signaling extreme fullness. With the scale in mind, begin to read your body’s signals. Your target range should be between 3 and 8. If you go to 0, you may eat too much too fast, particularly since it takes your brain 15 to 20 minutes to sense that your body is full. You should begin to eat at 3 on the RPH scale and stop at 7 or 8, when you’re comfortably full and satisfied.

4. Distinguish Between Emotional and Physical Hunger. Physical hunger is a physiological process that occurs every three to four hours. When you don’t listen to hunger

cues, your hunger subsides and your body begins to slow down to conserve energy. Emotional hunger involves eating when you’re sad, happy, anxious or bored. Understanding when you are trying to satisfy emotional needs with food can help you find more appropriate ways to meet those needs.

5. Neutralize Food. There are no good or bad foods—all foods are okay when eaten in moderation. Forbidding certain foods may simply make you want them all the more. If

portion control is a problem with particular foods, try specific strategies with these items—for example, measure out one serving of potato chips and put the bag back in the pantry.

6. Do Not Skip Meals. Eating frequently throughout the day (3 small meals and 2-3 snacks) will stimulate your metabolism. Skipping meals (including breakfast) can decrease your metabolism.

7. Dispel Myths; Do Not Create Them. A safe weight loss is 1 or 2 pounds a week,

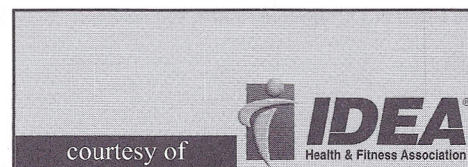
not 20. Be wary of supplements and meal replacement products. Product testimonials may or may not be true; spokespersons may or may not have any credentials. Remember, a healthy body comes from healthy eating.

8. Be Supportive, Not Critical. People lose weight at different rates. Weight may drop off quickly at first and then plateau, or vice versa. The important thing is that long-term healthy behavior gets results. Reassure yourself that you are working hard and remember that hard work pays off.

9. Watch Your Language. Do you find yourself thinking “I will never lose weight” or “I feel fat”? Watch for thoughts that are negative or irrational, rather than supportive of your goals. See if you can accurately describe your mood. Are you angry, sad, afraid? Understand that “fat” is not a feeling.

10. Change the Reward System. You are probably used to rewarding yourself and being rewarded by others for losing pounds, rather than for altering your behavior. Create a system of rewards for the positive changes you make, rather than the numbers you see on the scale.

10 Steps to Changing Your Eating Behavior



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