

Break the Diet Cycle

You know how it goes: You go on a diet. Soon you feel deprived of the foods you like. Then you cheat. So you go on a more extreme diet, cheat again and feel even worse about your failure. As the cycle continues, you feel increasingly unhappy with your body and out of control with food. The extra pounds don't really decrease, but your self-esteem certainly takes a dive.

Lisa Druxman, MA, creator of the Learning Eating Awareness and Nutrition program, gives these reasons why the very common yet vicious dieting cycle may be more harmful than you imagined:

- Eating between 500 to 1,200 calories per day (typical of diets) slows your metabolism, may result in loss of muscle (which you don't want to lose) and may not supply the nutrients you need to be healthy.
- Some studies suggest that dieting may prevent your body from producing enough serotonin to maintain your mood level, leading to food cravings and overconsumption of carbohydrates and sugar.
- Some experts believe the body fights to maintain a natural set point, regardless of food intake, and diets might even *elevate* the set point and increase the size and number of fat cells.
- The dieting cycle can produce feelings of deprivation, self-blame, lowered self-esteem, stress and depression.

Druxman offers these 10 steps for breaking the diet cycle and starting a healthy, new relationship with food:

1 Redefine Health. Start to measure your well-being by *how* you feel rather than by what number you see on the scale. Are you strong? Do you have energy throughout the day? Can you walk up stairs without being out of breath? How is your cholesterol level and blood pressure?

2 Counteract Societal Pressure. Stop basing your goals on the images you see around you. TV ads for wrinkle cream feature 25-year-olds. Magazine pictures are commonly manipulated to portray ideals, not reality.

3 Choose a Realistic Target Weight. Are you shooting for a weight that you have not had since high school or college? Take an honest look at your beliefs about your ideal weight. Do you think it will result in a perfect body and a perfect life? Recognize the difference between your fantasies of weight loss and reality. Health care professionals such as nutritionists, physicians and personal trainers can help you achieve a new perspective.

4 Make Sure the Timing Is Right. If you are facing multiple stressors or looking for short-term results (that upcoming reunion or a new relationship), move slowly. Real change takes long-term commitment and a supportive environment. By taking small steps you will avoid becoming overwhelmed and sabotaging long-term success.

5 End Deprivation. Do you feel addicted to certain foods? Chocolate? Cheese? You may actually be responding to deprivation. Take foods off your forbidden list and, in time, you are likely to stop overindulging. However, this process is slow and professional guidance may help.

6 Shift the Paradigm. Start concentrating on eating healthier, feeling better and being more active. Stop focusing on "good" and "bad" foods.

7 Take Baby Steps Toward Better Choices. Instead of giving up pizza altogether, try ordering one with chicken rather than pepperoni, or go lighter on the cheese topping. You get the idea.

8 Set Different Goals. Make physical activity—not dieting—your priority. Again, take small steps so you feel successful, rather than trying too much and setting yourself up for failure.

9 Build a Support System. Find supportive people, and teach them how to give you support, such as providing feedback for positive changes you've made, rather than negative comments for slips.

10 Find Positive Reinforcers. Make a list of positive reinforcers for encouragement, such as a massage, a new book or a bubble bath. Treat yourself after periods of regular exercise or other sustained healthy new behaviors. Remember, you can break the diet cycle!

Kimberly A. Searl
www.mindbodybalance.com
 By Appointment Only
 Phone: 734 - 241 - 7457
 Fax: 734 - 241 - 7457
kim@mindbodybalance.com

