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Making Healthy Choices

There are two important factors a person must consider when pursuing a healthier lifestyle. Those factors are diet and exercise. One of the best ways to keep the body healthy is to get involved in some type of physical activity, which may include sports that a person enjoys participating in. However, when it comes to dieting, most people struggle, because it is natural to want to eat favorite foods, which may not necessarily be good for the body, such as fast food and sweets. These items typically contain high levels of fat or sugar, which are counter to the goal of better health.

It is clear that staying in control of what one eats can be very challenging, but there are many ways to improve our relationship with food.

One method that has been proven to be quite effective is keeping a food journal. Often, when we become aware of just how much we're eating, and the choices we are making, it becomes clear that we are not motivated by hunger, but by an entire range of impulses that have little to no connection with physical hunger.

Emotions are a common eating trigger. If a person is happy, she might eat a treat to celebrate. If someone is feeling sad or angry, he may eat to soothe himself with comfort food. And comfort foods are seldom health foods. There is very little that is comforting about a salad, or eating an apple. What we tend to crave instead is something warm and soft, such as macaroni and cheese, or something sweet and creamy, like ice cream. But turning to food for emotional reasons is a

very temporary fix, and does not resolve the underlying issue of how you feel. It has the added negative consequence of affecting your weight and health. Tracking eating habits in a journal may be helpful if there is also a notation about the emotional state that caused those particular food choices. When you become aware of the triggers that cause emotional eating, you can put strategies in place to redirect those feelings into something helpful instead of harmful.

For many people, eating seems like a good solution when they have nothing better to do. Many people eat out of habit when they're watching television. But that kind of mindless eating is not conducive to health or weight loss, and it has the added drawback of wasting valuable time. If you have time to fill, have a list of strategies to keep yourself busy. Do something to improve your life, or the lives of others. Read a book, do yard work, volunteer in the community, or better yet, do something in the way of physical exercise with that extra time.

It is often tempting to deal with stress by overeating, but there are many healthier ways to relieve the pressure. Exercise may be one of the best ways to reduce stress. Any moderate to intense physical activity will lower stress levels and help you deal with your problems more directly instead of trying to distract yourself with food. Exercising regularly has the added benefit of preventing stress levels from building up to high levels in the first place. Practicing meditation, yoga, and visualization techniques will help you feel calmer and more relaxed.

None of this is easy to do; for most of us, a wide range of food is readily available at any time of the day. Getting controls of one's eating habits takes discipline, self-knowledge and commitment to a specific goal. But the payoff is significant – a healthy body and a productive life.

