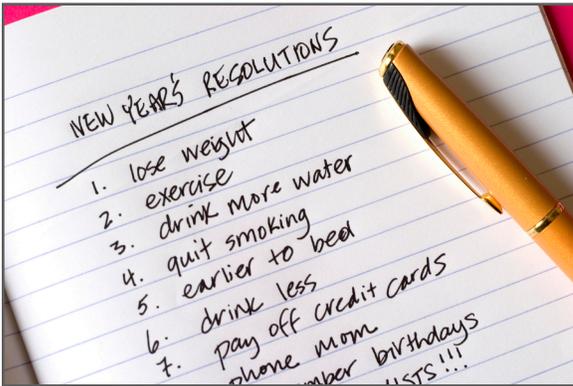


Eat Right Boston



How to Break a Habit

By now, well-intended New Year resolutions may have gone by the wayside. It's either too cold or too dark outside to exercise; or both! And who doesn't like hearty comfort foods like chicken potpie and beef stew versus grilling outdoors in a parka and gloves when the thermometer is registering 20 degrees on your deck? You are not alone. It's easy to give into some good ole' habits; especially when you live in cold climates.



If you do an Internet search for breaking habits, you will see something called the "21-day Myth." The idea of it taking 21 days to form a habit stems back to a 1960 self-help book by cosmetic surgeon Dr. Maxwell Maltz. Apparently, there is no scientific reason why it would take three weeks to break an old habit and since then, more studies have evolved that dispute such a notion. According to a 2010 UK study, led by a University College London research psychologist, it took people 66 days for

a new healthy habit to feel comfortable. So, it's more like two months, and up to as much as six months, to form new habits. It might seem easy in the beginning but it's not long before the honeymoon phase is over and reality checks in. Or when life throws you some curve balls like: Stress. Time. Emotions. Celebrations. Even hormones and blood sugar fluctuations can throw you for a loop.

Here is some sound advice to help you through Habit Hurdles:

- It's ok to make (some) mistakes but don't relapse and fall back on the "old habits die hard" bandwagon.
- Repeat the same action (everyday) at the same time. The more often a behavior is repeated, the more likely it will become habitual.
- Do some detective work on your own (or with a dietitian!) and try to figure out what's triggering the recurrence of a bad habit or behavior. (...continues on Page 3)

More on the Saturated Fat Debate

Since Ancel Keys reported an adversarial relationship between saturated fats and heart disease in 1940, the message has been the same: "Saturated fats are bad for you." Today, this relationship is not such a straightforward one. Even health care experts can't agree on any one specific dietary cause for heart disease.



Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats have a good effect on LDLs while saturated fats have been on the firing line for elevating them. While scientific evidence still continues to support this unhealthy relationship, experts are debating that not all saturated fats are created equal and some may not be so bad.

Saturated fats such as lauric acid, myristic acid, and palmitic acid increase LDL, while stearic acid (found in cocoa) may have a neutral effect on LDL levels. Coconut oil predominately contains lauric acid and myristic acid. And while scientists know that coconut oil raises LDL-cholesterol, it also raises the good HDL cholesterol as noted in a Malaysian study. They are not sure if raising HDLs lowers risk of heart disease and Dr Dariush Mozaffarian at Tufts University concluded that "there's no strong data or evidence that coconut oil is better or worse for you than any other source of saturated fat."

There are also studies indicating that dairy fats may be good for our health. One recent study showed that odd-chain saturated fatty acids (pentadecanoic and heptadecanoic acids) were linked with a lower incidence of Type 2 diabetes, whereas even-chained saturated fats (myristic, palmitic, and stearic) were linked with an increased incidence of Type 2 diabetes. Again, researchers don't know whether the odd chain saturated fatty acids have direct benefits in the body or whether other substances in dairy products are providing the cardiovascular benefits (i.e. probiotics, specifically, *L.reuteri*.)

While the role of diet is still unclear, medical experts are identifying the types of lipoproteins that are circulating around the blood stream to determine one's cardiovascular risk. Labs can now measure the number of LDL and HDL particles, as well as their size. The worst kind of LDL is the small, dense LDL (Type B) while Type A is the least harmful. Large, buoyant alpha-1 and alpha-2 HDL are the most protective against cardiovascular disease, whereas small, dense HDL3 is the least protective. These specialized lipid profile tests can be ordered by your primary care physician.

Dr. Walter Willett, chair of the Department of Nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health feels that refined carbohydrates and saturated fat may equally be harmful to heart health, as noted in Dr Chowdhury's study (see Summer Newsletter 2014).

For now, health experts agree that overall dietary patterns, rather than individualized nutrients, hold the key to better health. Reducing saturated fats in one's diet leaves more room for the healthier, nutritionally dense foods. The take home message is to exercise regularly and to consume a minimally, processed diet that consists of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes to ensure a heart healthy lifestyle.

How to Break a Habit (continued from page 1)

- Replace a bad habit with a better one. Instead of potato chips with lunch, cut up some veggie sticks.
- Take small steps versus leaps and bounds. Commit to one day of exercise to start versus four days a week.
- Change one habit at a time. Just stop buying ice cream, if that's a nemesis.
- Keeping a journal helps some people stay the course. Praise yourself for your positive accomplishments at the end of the day. Go back and review your journal on those "down" days for a quick pick-me-up and read that you felt pretty good about yourself at some other time!
- Enlist the help of a friend or family member. You're not the only one with habits that need changing. Depend on each other to get through tough times.
- Healthy habits need a mental commitment. They are hard work and require a daily dose of commitment and discipline. Those are key components that athletes rely on to succeed.

Remember- changing old habits don't just happen by the turn of a calendar page. Maintain a healthy lifestyle every day of the year, and you will have one less resolution to make on December 31st next year!

Prediabetes

One in four people in America are diagnosed with prediabetes; a condition where one's fasting blood sugar (glucose) is 100-125mg/dl. Above that, and hello diabetes! The pancreas produces the hormone, insulin, that transports sugar out of the blood and into cells where it can be burned for fuel or stored. In some people, this mechanism either doesn't work at all, or it's not working efficiently. Insulin resistance results when the pancreas compensates and pumps out more insulin to lower blood sugar. Weight and genetics can increase the risk of developing both pre- and diabetes but researchers are beginning to look at specific vitamins that may play a role. Here are a few in the works:

Getting more magnesium in one's diet appears to lower insulin levels. Magnesium-rich foods include: whole grains, leafy greens, seeds, nuts, and beans.

Preliminary studies show that vitamin D may improve insulin secretion and help lower the risk of developing diabetes. Researchers at Tuft's Medical Center have just launched a clinical trial taking place in 21 cities across America looking at larger doses of Vitamin D (4000 IU). Stay tuned!

For coffee lovers, researchers are consistently finding that coffee is linked to a reduced risk of Type 2 diabetes. In one study, both regular and decaf coffee curbed insulin resistance triggered by six days on a high fructose diet. Dose of coffee was not noted. Drink up, but skip the cream & sugar!



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