



Physical Health and Life Choices

Success Begets Success

by MARIE WALL

“Whether a person has high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure, or any other condition, physical fitness is one of the contributing factors where we can have personal control.”

Imagine for a moment that you are physically in the shape and health that you would like. You are the right weight and toning for your present age. Imagine what you may feel and think. Do you like what you notice when you see yourself physically healthy? Now take a look at your present physical fitness. Oftentimes we feel powerless about our fitness and weight. It seems like our present condition creeps up on us, rather than an outright decision to be the way we are. Think about the benefits of feeling more fit.

How do we get there? Exercise and nutrition, along with your personal time frame, are key factors in attaining a healthy lifestyle. I found out the hard way how each of these factors play out in the scheme of health. When I first began my program I started by embracing more activity in my daily routine. This continued for months, yet I was not getting in shape and did not lose any of the excess weight I was carrying. Then a life changing event occurred. I was told that my high cholesterol had not lowered in the past three years and it was necessary that I begin medication.

This may not sound like a life changing crisis but I knew in my heart that I had to take control of my life and my body. As a female in my late thirties, whose family history of heart disease comes from both sides of the family, I was told that I had a probability of having my first heart attack within ten years. Although I knew the dangers, I had not lost weight or changed my eating patterns. My immediate reaction was “no way”; if I began taking medication now it would mean for the rest of my life. This meant I would have to embrace life in a new way. At that moment I decided three things – to change my eating habits, to walk regularly, instead of going to the gym, and to give myself a full year to attain the healthy lifestyle I wanted.

The decision to take our physical health seriously often occurs when medical test results dictate radical changes. It is possible to choose to care for our physical health before medical warnings dictate. There are often reasons that have stopped us from taking action. Perhaps we have never had to work at it before, maybe

we don't know what steps to take, or possibly we do not have the support needed.

Let us look at exercise and nutrition, essential components for life and health. Later you can decide whether you want to take control of your body and your physical health.

Exercise

The human body is a machine. Think about the machine that we all use so often – the car. If a car is not used regularly it will seize up. This is also true for the human body. We have all heard that 20 - 30 minutes of exercise three times per week can have a positive impact on our health. Time is a key factor for regular exercise. Either we can fit exercise in when the opportunity arises or we can set a scheduled time.

I found a very interesting transition in making time for exercise. In the beginning I had to have a set time each day for walking. There was no flexibility for me. The reason was that I was beginning from a place of inertia. The law of inertia states that a moving object would keep moving but one that was standing still would have the tendency to remain in the immobile state. I had been an immobile object and it took a few months before exercise became a natural part of my week. By setting the time I did not have to make a decision every day. At a given time I went for a walk. Flexibility was present regarding how long I would exercise. At first I made a goal of 20 minutes per day, with a minimum of five minutes; meaning if I felt motivated to walk I would go; if on the other hand I was reluctant I committed to just five minutes. If after the five minutes I really did not want to exercise, I returned home. This gave me a great deal of freedom. After a couple of months I found that I enjoyed the exercise, whether it was walking, biking or other, and I was able to be more flexible with the timing and amount. Over a six month period the experience of exercising moved from being a chore to an enjoyable time in my day.

When you consider exercise remember to begin by doing something you are comfortable with, and if you

can, invite a friend to join you. Start with short time periods, regularly. It will take a period of time for this to become a natural part of your routine, so I encourage you to give yourself a time frame to feel results. I will discuss more on this later. Take a moment now to think about an activity that you can include in your daily routine and a time of day that you can take for yourself.

Nutrition

Just as the human machine needs to be exercised, we need fuel to keep the machine going. Changing my eating habits is the next thing that I had to do in order to move to a healthier lifestyle. I thought this was going to be difficult. There are so many diets available and so many stories of failure that I was skeptical at best. I can say I have been happily surprised. I realized it is not a diet I needed but a change in my eating lifestyle. The idea of cutting out all fats was not appealing, nor eating endless salad. What I discovered is a program that I can live with. They call it *The Formula: 40-30-30* (Daoust & Daoust, 2001). The whole premise is to eat in balance with ample amounts of protein and fat, along with carbohydrates. At all meals and snacks the calories come from 40% carbohydrates, 30% protein and 30% fat. The book is easily written with over 100 meals planned for you. I love it.

As for the cholesterol levels, in the first three months I shed 15 pounds and lowered my cholesterol from 6.7 to 6.0. Another three months have passed, I am 15 pounds lighter again, and I am ready for more blood work. Success begets success. One of the things which really helps with this or any plan is support. A loose network of people has developed – friends and family members who are interested in getting healthier. Rather than a chore it has become a fun part of my life.

Nutritional habits are central to good health. We are bombarded with advertising for quick meal solutions, most of which are not the optimal value to make our bodies healthy. There are numerous approaches to healthy eating. Find one that suits you and enjoy the fruits of living in a lifestyle that gives you personal control.

Time Frame

Time is an essential element for change. I know for a long time I wanted instantaneous results and when I did not get the immediate feedback it felt like failure. My attitude had to shift from immediate results to longer term goals. Setting goals and the time frame to reach the goals is effective for obtaining physical fitness. I began my pursuit with an 18 month plan. The year and a half gives enough time to look for real successes. In the first six months exercise was the focus. After that

time I knew I had to combine the more active lifestyle with dietary changes. Now that both of these are working I will begin toning.

The pursuit of physical health becomes more important as we mature. For myself the catalyst was a medical report. The results are personal satisfaction. Whether a person has high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure, or any other condition, physical fitness is one of the contributing factors where we can have personal control. Take time to consider where you would like to be physically in 12 or 18 months. Consider what changes you can start that will help you attain these goals. Lastly, if you ever need to chat with someone about your progress, just give me a call. I would love to help you on the way.

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Marie is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Marie Wall (ext. 265) or Claudette Coombs (ext. 242).

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