

7 Questions

to change your life

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NOW IS A TIME FOR REFLECTION, BUT ALSO A TIME TO LOOK AHEAD. PERHAPS YOU DIDN'T ACCOMPLISH EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO THIS PAST YEAR BUT THAT'S OKAY. So what if you lost 20 pounds instead of 40. Don't discount your accomplishment; you still have reason to celebrate! If you lowered your cholesterol even by a few points, you're still doing better than you did this time last year. So, chin up and smile. The wonderful thing about life is that it keeps presenting us with one opportunity after another to do better.

What do you want to accomplish in the new year? Before you establish your specific goals or resolutions for 2010, stop to consider what has happened to bring you to a place where you need to lose weight or get in better shape. Need help getting started? Think about the habits that caused the problem you are trying to improve.



WHY ARE YOU OVEREATING?

Are you bored? Spend some time creating a list of activities you would enjoy that don't involve eating. Keep busy with puzzles, reading, needlework or other hobbies. Change your environment by going for a walk, playing miniature golf or window shopping. Play with kids, walk the dog, clean out the closets, weed the garden, volunteer for a good cause. Once you get going, you'll find it easier and easier to stay busy.

If you aren't keeping a food diary to record what you eat as you eat it, your estimate of how much you ate could be off by as much as 40 percent. That can be the difference between losing and gaining weight. There are many hard cover, soft cover and online food diaries available. Or you can use an inexpensive notebook. Decide what works best for your lifestyle and then consistently use it.

for no one but yourself. You cannot achieve lasting change if you set goals for yourself to satisfy the desires of your spouse, relatives or friends. Goals must be personal and yours alone. Why do you want this? What will make the hard work worthwhile for you?

"I want to lose weight" or "I want to be a healthier person" are great ideas, but you can't be ambiguous in your approach to goal setting. An effective goal must be "SMART": Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. A poorly written goal statement would be "I will exercise more." A specific, clearly defined goal would be, "I will walk the path around the park this Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 6 to 6:30 a.m."

take a closer look at...you

ARE YOUR STRESS LEVELS HIGH? Learn techniques to help you deal with stress. At the very least, plan and then take time for relaxation in your day. Even 15 minutes of quiet time doing something you enjoy can make a difference. Consider counseling to help you learn and practice stress management.

ARE YOUR THOUGHTS HELPING YOU OR HURTING YOU? Realize that thoughts precede action and observe your thoughts about food. Do you romanticize foods? Do you feel you can't enjoy an activity or have fun if you aren't eating or drinking? Are you too hard on yourself when you aren't perfect? When negative thoughts pop into your head, immediately create positive ones. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to your best friend.

Include motivators in your goal planning. Motivators are simply your rewards for being successful. By giving yourself small rewards along the way, you will make yourself feel better as you travel the path to a healthier lifestyle. It is best to find non-food rewards that will be motivating, such as a manicure or a new piece of clothing.

DO YOU EAT INAPPROPRIATELY AT CERTAIN EVENTS? Do you have to have popcorn when watching a movie? Do you wander to the food table at parties because you are nervous, anxious or bored? Is watching a ballgame no fun without nachos? Events can be fun and worthwhile without turning them into an opportunity to overindulge. You don't have to eat just because food is available or because it's the way you've always done it. Though it's difficult at first, you'll find the more often you avoid eating in these circumstances, the easier it gets until you no longer associate eating with it.

IS YOUR ENVIRONMENT ENCOURAGING YOU TO EAT INAPPROPRIATELY? Make your home a no junk food zone. Throw away the stashes of candy and unhealthy snacks. Avoid places with readily available snacks. Have healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables visible and available. Plan realistic, healthy meals and give yourself time for grocery shopping.

It is important to write out your goals. When objectives are clearly written on paper, something magical happens in the subconscious mind that urges us to act and achieve our desires.

IS EATING A HABIT? Is a stop at the drive-thru automatic on the way home from work? Is the refrigerator your first place you go when you walk in the house? Do you eat anything offered to you? Do you have to have snacks in the evening? Change your patterns to avoid eating extra food when you are really not hungry. Find driving routes that don't pass fast food restaurants. Don't keep high calorie, non-nutritious food in your house. Practice saying "no" when offered food. Avoid exposure to high calorie food items and situations that cause an eating reflex.

WHAT IS YOUR EXERCISE PLAN? Establish a practical exercise plan and designate a specific time to implement it. Have an alternative plan for when life gets in the way. Make sure that you have appropriate clothing and shoes available in an easily accessible spot. Participate in daily activities such as housekeeping, yard work, and walking to burn even more calories.

ARE YOU YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY? Making change is difficult and recovering from a lapse is the most important step in reaching your goals. Never view a lapse as a character flaw that cannot be corrected. A lapse simply means that the plan is flawed, not the individual.

DO YOU TEND TO OVEREAT AROUND CERTAIN PEOPLE? Do they make you feel stressed? Do they pressure you to eat? Does eating or drinking to excess make spending time with them fun? Find new ways to deal with people who drive you to eat. Perhaps you need to talk with the person to let him or her know how you feel and why that makes you overeat. If someone continues to sabotage your efforts to develop a new healthy lifestyle, you may have to limit your time with him or her. You can't change other people but you can change the way you react.

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL GOALS? An optimistic attitude is everything. Think in terms of what you need to do instead of what you shouldn't be doing. Avoid negative thoughts such as "I'll never...", "I must not...", "I'll cut out all...". Instead, phrase your resolutions in positive terms of what you can and will do.

Many times people lapse because they become overwhelmed. A large challenge is daunting but you can break it down into manageable pieces. You cannot leap to the top of a staircase in one bound but you can, with minimal effort, walk up one step at a time. Your journey to good health will begin with the first step and you will achieve your goal by taking one step after another in the right direction.

See yourself as a person who prefers to eat healthy foods in appropriate sized portions. Imagine you are a person who loves to exercise because it is an opportunity to be healthy and helps you achieve your goals. Picture yourself as the person who makes the best choices because it has become what you prefer, not what you must do. Your confident belief at becoming the person you want to be will determine your success.

Another cause of lapses is when goals are set that are in conflict with each other. For example, it is not possible to achieve a goal of creating a healthy weight through lifestyle change and simultaneously achieve a goal of losing 20 pounds in a single month. Frequently, people fail because they think in absolutes. Creating a healthy lifestyle, losing weight and getting fit is not a switch that you flip on and off. Instead it is a dimmer switch with some days brighter than others.

ARE YOU AWARE OF HOW MUCH YOU ARE EATING?

Do you eat unconsciously while watching TV, reading or socializing? Are you eating so quickly that you consume more than you need before you realize you are full? How much snacking are you really doing? Do you realize how many calories you are consuming when you take a few candies out of someone's candy bowl, nibble as you prepare dinner or finish your children's plates?

Everyone wants a quick fix but, unfortunately, you won't see results overnight. Many people try to sprint towards the destination but effective change is gradual. Let go of the belief that there is a shortcut because, as in many areas of life, in the long run what appears to be the most difficult will end up being easier than you thought. And more effective. Set goals

When you have a lapse, and you will, consider it no more than an inconvenience on your road to health. Sure it can be annoying and slow your progress but that is okay. Consider these challenges as life's little strengthening lessons. Never feel guilty or beat yourself up when things do not go as planned. Making a lifestyle change is hard but the longer a healthy lifestyle is practiced, the more normal it will feel. Your journey will not always be smooth but this doesn't mean that you are ever a failure. It means you must pull out the map, figure out where you went wrong and then plot another course. It's not the destination that is important; it's the journey.