

# Habits for a Healthy Life

## Sustaining Healthy Habits

By Elizabeth George MD

Since last September we have presented a series of articles presenting 12 healthy habits, each of which can make a significant difference in your well being.

Hopefully you've been adding each healthy habit, one at a time, and they are starting to feel familiar. Even if you've added just a few of the healthy ideas into your daily life, that's great. Here are some thoughts on how to sustain those changes.

First, it helps to remind yourself of the real purpose of food - to nourish your body. Food is the source of the building blocks and energy for your body and all its functions. Your body is complex, and it takes the right balance and kinds of food to run properly - it needs the balance of minerals, vitamins, protein, healthy fats, water and other nutrients for cellular structure and function, maintenance and repair and for the energy that makes us go.

To sustain healthy habits, be committed to something beyond "losing weight" or "looking good." What's important to you in your life? You might want to have the energy and flexibility to have fun playing with your kids. Or maybe your healthy habits can make a difference in the health of your spouse or your children, or friends or employees. Perhaps you want to manage your diabetes and hypertension more effectively and with fewer (or even no) medications. Maybe you want to be fit enough to hike a mountain, bike along the whole canal, or do a triathlon.

Measure your progress by acknowledging yourself for each day of healthy habits and by noticing your improved energy and strength; notice your brighter mood. Using your weight as your only measure sets an unrealistic expectation, with only short term goals; it lets you think in terms of "going on a diet," instead of establishing lifelong healthy habits. Just watching the scale also leads to let-downs and giving up when you're not happy with the numbers.

You're creating healthy habits for a lifetime, but take one day at a time. Rather than waking up and saying, "Ah gee, I can never have a soda again," just go for, "Today I'm replacing sodas with water." Each day you just have to decide to stick to the meals and snacks you've planned, for just today. Encourage yourself throughout the day.

Do the same with your exercise schedule -

wake up and say, "I just need to exercise today." Start the day with your laughter habit.

If you hit a barrier and old habits show up again, don't let that be the end of your efforts. Say, "you sneaky old habits," chuckle, and kick them out. Keep practicing - you've had years of old habits, so give the new ones time to take hold and replace the old.

Learning something new takes time. No one is surprised that to learn and memorize a piano piece, you have to play it over and over again until it comes naturally. Sometimes during practice you make mistakes and have to try again and keep encouraging yourself.

As you adopt your new habits, write them down; be mindful of the changes you make. Later, if you catch yourself slipping or notice your belt getting tighter, you won't fall for "I lost the weight but gained it all back, and don't know why." Instead you can look at your healthy habit list, readjust and recommit. And remember to congratulate yourself for your commitment to wellness.

Over the next months, we're going to support you as you sustain your healthy habits with an article series: "What's on the Menu?" These articles will focus on making healthy choices when eating out. Our plan is to enjoy a lunch at each eating establishment in town and then write an article on how to navigate the menu and food choices to create a healthy meal. The articles will not in any way be critiques; they are intended to help people eat at any eating establishment in Mercersburg, make healthy choices and sustain their healthy habits.

"What's on the Menu" will support your goals to:

- 1) Eat five or more fruits plus veggies daily,
- 2) Choose healthy fats (mostly from plants),
- 3) Eat fish at least twice a week,
- 4) Include legumes,
- 5) Minimize salt,
- 6) Skip the sugary drinks and snacks,
- 7) Choose whole grains,
- 8) Eat healthy portions, and
- 9) Laugh!



ELIZABETH  
GEORGE MD

This series is created by Mercersburg Area Council for Wellness. Contact us at [MAC4Wellness@gmail.com](mailto:MAC4Wellness@gmail.com) with your questions or comments and if you are interested in being involved with council activities.