

The Challenge Is Over, Now What?

Firstly, congrats for hanging in there with us over the last 40 days! You did it! Eating clean and moving more is no small task. You've come out healthier and stronger in just forty short days. Way to go!!

But, now that we're done with the weekly emails and tracking, what's next? I think the biggest challenge that we all face after finishing any type of nutrition or fitness program is- in the beginning we're really excited, we're inspired, we do the program, we've made these healthy changes, and then it's over. As soon as it's over, we lose this momentum and accountability. There is nothing propelling us forward.

The secret to keeping that momentum going is to remind ourselves that living healthy is a lifestyle not a 40-day event. This program gives you an amazing jump-start, but you're not done yet. On days forty-one and beyond, you want to continue to put a lot of the same factors, which kept you motivated during the challenge, to work in your everyday life. Below are a few tips to help keep you moving forward:

- **Learn to Accept Ourselves.** Our weight is just a number. It's not a measure of our self-worth. Often times we let our weight hold us back from doing the things we love because we are worried of what others may think. To be successful at losing weight, we need to let go of caring what others think and instead live for ourselves. Put your blinders on and worry about you only! Acceptance plays a big role in being successful and feeling good. If you love yourself and care about yourself, you will want to take care of yourself!!
- **Listen to Your Body.** If you are listening to your body, you should naturally gravitate towards clean (unprocessed) foods because you feel better, have more energy when you eat them. Check-in with yourself before and during meals to assess your hunger/fullness levels. Work towards stopping when you are gently full versus overly stuffed. If you are not biologically hungry, find something else to do.
- **Eat for Health.** Food is fuel for our bodies. If we want our bodies to run well, we need to fill our bodies with nutritious foods most of the time. When you are listening to your body, you will discover that if you eat, for example, chips/chocolate all day long, you will feel blah, tired, heaviness, and maybe even some nausea but if you have a little, you feel okay. The key to eating for health is balance and moderation. Eighty percent of your intake should be healthy/clean (unprocessed) foods and the remaining 20% is what you might consider less healthy/play foods. That 20% could be ice cream, pretzels, chocolate, etc. The point is that most of your daily intake

should be good quality fuel for your body, but it is important to still give yourself a little room to enjoy the other things. And if you know that you can truly have the chocolate/chips (or whatever) whenever you desire, it doesn't take much to satisfy you and the cravings often subside.

- **Stay Active.** Exercise is a must for weight maintenance. To keep you motivated, find activities you enjoy doing. And mix it up to keep things interesting. Make exercise a priority and schedule it into your day just like any other appointment on your calendar. And most importantly don't just exercise to lose weight. Exercise has so many other health benefits helping to keep your mind and body right.
- **It's All About Attitude.** How we view things (the glass as half empty or half full) can have a huge impact on our life and can set you up for success (or failure) not only with losing weight but other challenges in your life. Some of us, when we get knocked down, we stay down. This discouragement can be a huge anchor that keeps you from going forward. To be successful, we need to find ways to challenge those negative thoughts. Positive thoughts = positive feelings = positive actions.
- **Find a buddy to concur your goals with.** Don't go at it alone. Social support can produce large changes in your health habits. Designate a person in your life to be your "buddy". If getting in shape is a goal, find an exercise buddy who will also help make fitness fun and hold you accountable.

Bottom line? Maintaining your results after a nutrition or fitness challenge is all about being in the right mindset. This challenge was for forty days, but leading a fit and healthy lifestyle is forever. Losing weight and changing lifestyle habits is hard work. It is not an easy task!! But just remember the end result and how you will feel is amazing!! There will be struggles and bumps in the road but as long as you don't stop, you will eventually cross the finish line. You can do anything (within reason) that you put your mind to!!

For more information on weight loss classes or the weight loss support group offered through Mount Nittany Health, please contact Heather Harpster at 814.231.7191 or hharpster@mountnittany.org.