Take It One Day At A Time

HEALTH ACTION GUIDE

Adopting new habits and making changes to your lifestyle in order to improve your health can be exciting and, of course, challenging. One approach is to take things *"one day at a time."*

Taking things *one day at a time* means focusing only on today's challenges, and getting as much satisfaction and pleasure out of today as you can. It means letting go of the past and the future, just for today. It means living today in the best way you can. It means deciding not to think about how hard it might be to live the rest of your life. You don't have to live the rest of your life today. You only have to get through today.

One day at a time can be a helpful philosophy for any lifestyle change. It can be especially useful when you are trying to lose weight. You can see how it works by taking a look at how two women, who both have 40 pounds to lose, approach their challenge.

AMY

Amy is totally overwhelmed by all the weight she needs to lose, so she's made up her mind that she will "get it over with as soon as possible." She's decided to give up all of her favorite treats and eat only "diet" foods, such as gelatin and rice cakes. She's switched from whole to non-fat milk and no longer uses any salad dressing. She's also decided to avoid all social events where food will be served.

To motivate herself, Amy bought several dresses that are four sizes too small (10 pounds is equivalent to approximately one size). Until she loses the 40 pounds, she'll have to wear the same dull, baggy outfits she's worn for years. Amy plans to add some physical activity to her daily routine. Although she hasn't been active in years, she plans to jump right in and go jogging four miles every day. Amy figures that making all of these lifestyle changes will help her drop about four pounds per week. At that rate she hopes to have the 40 pounds off in less than three months.

MARIA

Maria, on the other hand, accepts the fact that weight loss is a slow process. While she has not set a rigid time schedule, she would like to lose about one pound a week. At that rate, she figures it will probably take her about a year to lose the 40 pounds.

Maria has decided to approach her weight loss in a balanced and moderate way—*one day at a time.* Since ice cream has always been her biggest downfall, she plans on having one scoop, twice a week, instead of the two scoops a night she now consumes. She will choose a reduced-fat version of her favorite premium ice cream on these two weekly occasions. She loves whole milk, but has decided to cut back on fat and calories by switching to 2% reduced fat milk. She knows that when she feels comfortable with this version, she can try the 1% lowfat form. Maria plans to substitute lower-fat, lower-calorie versions of the foods she commonly eats, such as mayonnaise and salad dressings, as well as slightly reduce her portion sizes.

Maria wants to become more physically active, but since she's out of shape, she plans to start by taking 15- to 20-minute walks at least three times a week. She knows that she can gradually build up to 60–90 minutes most days of the week. To help motivate herself to follow through with her weight management plans, Maria bought herself two new outfits that she looks and feels great in now, and that will also look great on her when she's five pounds lighter.

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Think about the difference in approaches between the two women. Who is likely to be more successful? Probably Maria. She's neither denying nor punishing herself, and her gradual incorporation of more healthful habits into her lifestyle is more likely to last.

ARE YOU TAKING THINGS ONE DAY AT A TIME?

How do you approach making changes in your lifestyle? Do you take it *one day at a time* or do you make it "a race to the end?" Some examples of the *one day at a time* approach include:

- having smaller portions of your favorite high-calorie foods.
- eating out a little less frequently.
- replacing a high-fat food with a lower-fat alternative.
- adding just a little more physical activity to your daily routine (a 10-minute daily walk, for example).
- identifying two to five minutes a day you can do some deep breathing and/or visualization to help manage stress.

Do you use any *one day at a time* strategies? Note them here:

_____

_____

Race to the end activities are more extreme. Some good examples of these "do it all right now" strategies include:

- totally eliminating all high-calorie foods from your diet.
- refusing all dinner invitations.
- starting a vigorous, 60-minute daily workout—even though you haven't exercised in years.

Do you use any *race to the end* tactics? Note two of them here:

#1. _____

#2. _____

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SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

How could you break each of those *race to the end* strategies into smaller steps so that you can phase them into your life a little more gradually? For example, instead of never eating another cookie, you could:

Step A: Cut back to three cookies a day

Step B: Select a lower-fat, lower-calorie cookie

Step C: Eat a cookie you really enjoy a few times a week. On other days when you want a cookie, you could eat a piece of fruit instead.

#1 Instead of _____ (insert your first *race to the end* tactic), I could:

Step A: _____

Step B: _____

Step C: _____

#2 Instead of _____ (insert your second *race to the end* tactic), I could:

Step A: _____

Step B: _____

Step C: _____

MINIMIZE THE WORRY FACTOR

Taking things *one day at a time* can also help you stop worrying so much about the past or the future. Although we all worry sometimes, worry is often neither productive nor beneficial. This is especially true when we keep repeating the same negative thoughts over and over again, instead of taking action.

Some people worry that they will never be able to stick with a healthy eating plan or being physically active. Others worry about their family's or friends' reactions when they tell them they are attempting to lose weight again.

What two things do you worry about when it comes to developing new healthy habits?

#1: _____

#2: _____

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ALTERNATIVES TO WORRYING

There are several ways to reduce your worries. One is to do some problem solving, which is taking action to improve a situation. Let's say that you're worried about finding time to fit in physical activity because of work and family obligations. You could try any one of the following actions to solve this potential problem:

- Wake up 30 minutes earlier in the morning and get in a brisk walk.
- Share your concerns with your family and gain their support. Maybe they'd like to join you for a bicycle ride or walk after dinner each evening.
- Use your breaks or lunch time at work to squeeze in some physical activity each day.

What practical actions could you take to reduce the two worries you identified?

For Worry #1, I could: _____

For Worry #2, I could: _____

Sometimes we have worries that we just can't do much about. In these cases, the following techniques may give you some relief:

- **Thought Stopping.** Whenever you catch yourself worrying about something you can't do anything about, say to yourself: *"STOP!"* Redirect your attention to something positive or useful.
- **Humor.** Try focusing on the funny side of your worry, if there is one. Tell a joke or a funny story to someone or deliberately poke fun at yourself. Laughter can be a wonderful remedy for worry and a great stress reducer.
- **Relax Yourself.** Engage in some enjoyable physical activity or use another physical relaxation technique, such as deep breathing or yoga, to reduce your tension and take your mind off your worries.

WHAT NEXT?

As you begin focusing on adopting new habits, remind yourself of the ***one day at a time*** approach. You may even want to write the phrase down and post it several places so that you can see it frequently throughout the day!

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