

Making it Work – Diet and Exercise

Whether you have no health issues or you have a chronic issue like diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, using healthy eating and exercise habits are a must.

But how?

First, keep your eye on the prize. Second, make it simple. And lastly, engage in what you enjoy.

Keep your eye on the prize – make a goal for yourself. Is it to lose weight? If you are overweight, did you know losing seven percent of your body weight provides huge health benefits? So, if you're a woman who weighs 160 – losing just over 11 pounds would be a great goal for you. Is your goal just to have better nutrition? Working toward a low-fat or vegetarian diet may be your prize. Whatever it is ... name it, claim it, and go for it.



Second, keep it simple. Say you want to improve your physical fitness. The first week, add 10 minutes of activity a day. The next week, add 15 minutes to the weekend days. And track it. Walking during a lunch break is an easy fix to this simple formula. Add 10 minutes of stretching to your morning or after your regular workout. Squeeze in a 30-minute bicycle ride with your family this weekend. Easy.

Trying to lose weight? Take one thing at a time. A great first step is tracking your food intake – just the exercise of having to log each and every morsel and drink item will give you pause and cause you to pay attention to the excess calories you are taking in. If that is too much trouble, and you like social support – join the TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) group at your church or Weight Watchers at work. Enroll in a Humana health coaching program. Select one outlet and stick with it. Simple.

Engage in what you enjoy.

You like potato chips – ok, eat them. But limit the number. Take a look at the nutrition label. Does it say 210 calories? Think about limiting the amount you eat to 100 calories, instead. And get the kind that have some nutrition – you might find Vitamin C? Or fiber?

Or is it chocolate you like – ok, again limit to 100 calories, and make it dark chocolate, rich in anti-oxidants.

You used to love to play tennis before you had kids – well, get back out there. Join the local Y if you don't have courts nearby. If you enjoy what you're doing, you're far more likely to stick with it.

Still finding it hard to reach your goal?

Ask yourself what is the biggest challenge in reaching your goal? Do you simply feel drained from your everyday stress from work and family obligations? Is your mood getting in the way? Is it the arthritic pain?

Figure out the one challenge you find the most difficult. Create a plan to face it – and act!

Let's take my mother – she has arthritis and trouble dealing with everyday pain – but she likes to dance. She talked my father into learning square dancing with her, and she goes line dancing with friends at least once a week. During those one-hour sessions of exercise, her enjoyment of the social interaction and physical activity erases the pain. Plus, the more regularly she does these activities, the more her pain is reduced.

No more excuses

The good news is that the social norms are shifting. You won't have room for excuses. Healthcare reform is creating new health promoting policies and funding for safe and inviting spaces so you and your family have access to healthy foods and environments that support physical activity – for instance, more access to fresh produce, required nutrition information at restaurants, safe sidewalks, bike paths, and parks.

If you are looking for tools to help you set your goal, keep it simple and get back into the things you enjoy, check out the following print, online, and mobile phone opportunities.

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Tonja is part of Humana's Clinical Strategies and Program Design Area and focuses on proactive care, preventive health measures, and self-management. She has 15 years of experience on health promotion and health education initiatives and has worked with the health solutions industry, government, and higher education. Tonja has a master's in public health from the University of South

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