



Healthy Eating Tip

Redefine the Relationship Between *Eating* and *Exercise*

Have you ever thought about the relationship between food and physical activity in your life? For many people, eating and exercise habits are inextricably connected – sometimes in a way that can undermine our ability to enjoy either of them. If you have struggled with food, exercise or your weight, you may already know what I mean.

Often times, when we are “being good” with food (emphasis on the air quotes!) – whether it is a formal diet or some other eating plan designed for weight loss or to eat more healthfully – we may also be exercising too rigidly. For example, performing grueling daily training sessions at the gym whether our body says it is right for us or not, obsessively counting steps, or becoming over-focused on calories burned or time committed - often with an all or nothing attitude.

On the other hand, if we are regularly overeating or eating too many foods that do not leave us feeling our best, we might use exercise as penance or punishment for our eating habits. (“I pigged out on pizza tonight so I’ll have to do 10 more minutes on the elliptical tomorrow.”) Or, if we are feeling out of control or ashamed about our eating or body, we might just skip exercise altogether and then feel guilty about it.

Even if we have a healthy relationship with food – not dieting *or* regularly overeating – it is still common to view exercise as a “*have to*” rather than a “*get to*”. With so many messages about strict exercise guidelines and caloric expenditure and exercise being a mathematical necessity for weight maintenance...it is easy to see how countless people have trouble exercising regularly as well as truly enjoying it.

In all of these scenarios, there is tension and conflict around eating and physical activity that could be resolved for a greater sense of peace and wellbeing.

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From Corporate Fitness Works Director of Wellness Services, Rebecca Johnson

Healthy Eating Continued...

Consider these ideas:

Examine the link between exercise and eating habits in your life.

If exercise feels like penance or punishment to you, begin to take stock of whether this might be a result of pairing it too closely with your eating habits or your weight. Remember that regular physical activity will improve your wellbeing, your quality of life and how you feel right now, *regardless of what is happening with your eating or what you weigh*. Positioning exercise as a means to an end (i.e. a must-do for weight loss or to offset excess food intake) is likely to create an on-again, off-again exercise style focused on the end outcome rather than the process itself. Not only does this create inconsistency, it is likely to lead to more negative feelings about activity.

Get to the heart of the matter.

If you find that your yo-yo exercising (i.e. exercising compulsively or not at all) is in response to your yo-yo eating, try to identify what these patterns are really about. Rather than making another willpower-fueled resolution to change your behaviors around exercise, start by digging more deeply to understand the root cause of your struggle. *Does your attention really need to be focused on the emotional eating you have counteracted with exercise? Have you fallen prey to unreasonable social norms about what your body “should” look like? Or is it simply that you have not yet identified ways to make moving feel good on your body while also engaging your mind and spirit?*

Develop your own unique way of being physically active that allows you to experience joy and vitality.

Especially if you have spent years or decades thinking you hate exercise, this can be hard to imagine. Even so, it is absolutely possible! To start, drop the concern about meeting certain recommended minimum guidelines or doing exercise “right”. Remember that *any movement* is better than *no movement*. Leaving guilt behind and cultivating positive feelings about physical activity is an important first step in this process. As you unravel the relationship between food and exercise and craft your intentions for enjoyable physical activity, honor your unique preferences, lifestyle, strengths and limitations. *What types of movements would feel GOOD on your body? What might you be able to do that you actually enjoy working out? What is a reasonable amount of exercise that you can do considering your fitness level and life situation right now?*

If you are one of the lucky few for whom regular and enjoyable physical activity comes naturally – kudos to you! Consider passing this article on to someone in your life who struggles with it. If you are struggling yourself, imagine the joy and freedom that comes from developing an enjoyable and sustainable way to move your body as it was designed to do! Start by breaking the chain between eating and exercise, leaving the guilt behind, and honoring your own preferences and lifestyle. The rest will fall into place.

