



Be Well Aware – Health Article



Structure vs. Spontaneity: Balancing your Health Goals

Finding a balance between structure and spontaneity is essential for success in living a healthy lifestyle. With too much or too little of either, life might lean toward rigid and monotonous, or sporadic and directionless. Cultivating balance between the two tends to be easier said than done and will look different for every person. Let's review the benefits of both structure and spontaneity, and how to ultimately find a balance to set and achieve your health goals.

Benefits of Structure:

- **Increased Chance of Success:** Having a schedule or routine to follow increases the chances of success for many health goals. Consistency is key, especially for goals like weight loss, muscle gain, and flexibility. Understanding that progress takes time and being willing to put in the work on a regular basis will increase chances of success.
- **Stress Relief:** With a regular schedule comes less stress. No need to worry about what to do or when to do it, which means more time to relax and less anxiety. Routine also tends to include a more regular sleep schedule which can aid in stress relief.
- **Time Management:** Without routine, time tends to run out and tasks that need to be completed can get overlooked. Creating and following a schedule allows responsibilities to be prioritized and ensures that time is dedicated for to the things that matter.

Benefits of Spontaneity:

- **Fun:** Changing things up feels exciting and can increase motivation! Bouts of spontaneity can be just enough to curb any dissatisfaction that might come from adhering to a schedule and too much monotony. While too much structure can create boredom, spontaneity swoops in to provide some fun.
- **Adaptability:** Incorporating spontaneity in life requires a mindset that is flexible and adaptable. When plans change or last-minute opportunities arise, we learn to go with the flow. Rather than being rigid in the way we think about plans, spontaneity provides a chance for a fluid and adaptable mindset.
- **Increased Activity:** With so many American's leading a sedentary lifestyle, any spontaneous activities that involve movement are great for health! Whether it's joining a pickup game of basketball, going for a bike ride with the family, or swimming in the ocean, the physical activity will benefit the mind and body. Unplanned activity and seizing the opportunity to move can improve mood, prevent disease, control weight, and more.

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Putting it into Practice:

Let's use a common goal, weight loss, as an example. In order to lose weight, fitness professionals recommend a calorie deficit. A calorie deficit can be created by increasing energy expenditure (moving more) and/or decreasing energy consumption (reducing calorie intake).

Structured Sally might restrict calories by cutting out foods that create enjoyment, unenthusiastically complete the same workout every day, and feel guilty about missing a workout or eating a "bad" food.

Spontaneous Sam might exercise inconsistently with no plan, be unaware of caloric intake, and be disappointed in a lack of results.

A balanced approach to weight loss with both structure and spontaneity might look like this:

1. Adhering to a regular exercise schedule that is enjoyable and matches your availability and lifestyle
2. Finding time for fun activity like taking a new fitness class, hiking, or playing a sport, once per week or on weekends
3. Creating a nutritional plan that focuses on eating mostly nutrient dense foods while allowing for the occasional guilt-free treat to minimize feelings of restriction

Keep in mind that every person will land on a different place within the structure-spontaneity spectrum. There is no one size fits all. You know yourself best and should seek out a balance that is sustainable for your body and mind over time!

General Tips for Finding Your Balance:

- Have a loose plan/to-do list for the day centered around your goals that leaves room for spontaneity and unplanned activity.
- Work with your strengths. Assess what has and has not worked for you in the past to create a game plan.
- Keep a journal to record your progress over time. Complete regular weekly or monthly check-ins to identify areas for improvement.
- Make changes in small increments. Ask yourself "Can I see myself living this way for the rest of my life?" If the answer is no, the changes may be too restrictive.



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