

## **Mindful Weight Management**

Many (perhaps most) of us at some time in our lives have ended up overweight and out of shape. Getting there, in our fast-paced, busy lives, with high calorie, nutritionally deficient food being thrust at us from every angle and time such a precious and scarce commodity is oh too easy! Getting ourselves back in shape is much, much harder. However, I've come to believe through my own personal experience, that all too often the approaches we take to managing the situation actually makes it much harder than it needs to be. I'm not talking about individual mistakes, but the way the whole mainstream weight management industry encourages us to think and act.

Now, before you get too excited, no, I'm not about to reveal to you a simple 10 minute plan to banish weight from the comfort of your sofa. Life just doesn't work like that. It takes commitment and effort to change. But adopting a mindful and intuitive approach to eating and exercise can provide you with sustainable long-term gains in health and fitness.

For me, the biggest problem with most weight management systems on the market, and consequently most of the "advice" available to you, is that when it comes to eating they either focus solely on energy content and completely disregard the nutritional value of foods (for example some weight management plans that will allow you to drink as much diet soft drinks/soda as you like because they have no calorie content and many of them promote the use of highly processed foods or food substitutes) or they ban particular food groups entirely, leaving you with a diet that may not adequately address your body's nutritional needs.

What I found, and I'll admit in some ways it took me a bit by surprise, was that stopping completely from thinking about the calorie value of the foods I was eating or the balance between calorie intake from food and calories burned by exercise, and instead focusing on the nutritional value of what I was eating, and whether the foods I was eating and the mix of exercise I was doing were nourishing my body and promoting good health, had immediate weight loss results. I started looking beyond "yum, that tastes nice" to "what is this actually doing for my body, is it helpful or harmful?".

If you read that last paragraph carefully you'll have noticed that the starting point here is a change in thinking and focus. Gaining fitness and losing weight are mostly difficult because they require us to change ingrained habits, and that is true of this approach as much as any other. But if you can make a few changes in the way you view yourself and the issue of your weight I think you'll find the journey a much easier one.

Firstly, accept yourself. If you don't like yourself at the moment, you're not going to suddenly find that you do just because you're skinnier. If you're prone to self criticism then you'll just find something else about yourself to dislike if weight stops being your big issue. Accepting yourself doesn't mean losing the will to make change. It means loving and valuing yourself at a spiritual level and therefore believing that your physical body deserves to be respected and cared for to support you on this life journey.

Secondly, stop focusing on your weight and start focusing on your health and caring for and nourishing your body. Obsessing over controlling calories or the balance of energy in and energy expended may result in some or all of your desired outcomes, at least in the short term. But will it be sustainable? Will your body be nourished and healthy?

Thirdly, make this a true lifestyle change, not just about food and exercise. Become more mindful and listen to your body. Your body understands at an instinctual level what it needs to be healthy, but so often its voice is drowned out by our minds with their gratification based approach. Quieten your mind and really listen to your body and allow your intuition to guide you in making the best food and exercise choices for you. Use mindfulness not only in your approach to eating and exercise, but also make a more general change throughout your life to be living more in the moment, experiencing life as it unfolds not rehashing what has already been or daydreaming about what might be coming. Becoming more self-aware and more grounded helps us in achieving all of our goals.

Remember that although this approach won't necessarily give you fast results, it will give you sustainable results and a longterm a body that is definitely healthier, not just skinnier. Remember that being healthy is not just about weighing a certain amount. While weight extremes almost always will signal an unhealthy body, it's also perfectly possible to have a body weight in a "healthy" range and still have a completely unhealthy body.

Make a decision today to start truly nourishing and caring for your body – you're worth it!

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