Small Changes Make a Big Difference

Anything you can do today that moves you toward better health is a step in the right direction!

1. Make small, simple, steady changes.
   It is hard to believe that small changes can make a big difference in your health. In fact, you are more likely to be successful when you focus on small, realistic, easy-to-accomplish goals. Give yourself permission to focus on small changes. Many times when you start small, you end up accomplishing more.

2. Live in the grey zone.
   Avoid the “all or nothing” mind set. An all or nothing approach to lifestyle change rarely lasts. Instead, try the “something is better than nothing” approach. If you can’t find the time to go to the gym, can you go for a 15-minute walk instead?

3. Remind yourself that even small changes can lead to big improvements in health.
   Small changes in a number of health behaviors can have a powerful effect on your health. Change in one area can lead to change in another area and they build on each other. You might try skipping dessert and instead going for a short walk during your lunch break. Even if you do this just a few days a week, you’ve made a positive change for your health.

4. Pay attention.
   Most of us operate on autopilot a lot of the time. As a result, we get stuck in our old habits. Simply paying attention to our choices can help us be more aware of our decisions and develop new healthy habits. Get yourself an inexpensive brightly colored bracelet. Even a rubber band will do. Each time you notice the bracelet, stop and ask yourself if there is something that you could do at that moment to take better care of yourself. Take the stairs instead of the elevator? Swap white bread for fiber rich whole wheat? Take a few less bites, especially if you are already full? Take a deep breath and let go of some tension?
   Pay attention to your hunger level over the course of the day, rating it from 1 – 10 and record it in a notebook during meal and snack times. By tuning into your level of “fullness” you can help identify mindless eating patterns.

5. Reduce portions.
   Leave 3 or 4 bites on your plate at most meals. Or if you can’t leave food on your plate, dish up your usual portion and put a few spoonsful in a “left over” container. Chances are you will not even notice that you are eating less. Most “diets” leave you feeling hungry and deprived, especially when your favorite foods are restricted. Try this instead of another drastic diet.

Total Health Resources: Encouraging Stepwise Changes Over Time
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6 Get Support.
Join a group of like-minded people. Consider Weight Watchers™ or a walking club. Is there a “Couch to 5K™” group meeting in your area? How about a YMCA Silver Sneakers™ group? Ask a health professional for support. If you can’t find a group, consider starting one. Perhaps other church members would join you in a weekly walk and healthy lunch after the service? When you make a date with a friend to go for a walk, you are less likely to cancel, even when you don’t feel like walking! Most often, you will be glad you did!

7 Keep moving.
Get a pedometer. These gadgets are a great way to get a concrete measure of your daily activity. Record your steps per day at the start. Then, challenge yourself. How can you take more steps per day? Try for a little more each day. Park farther away. Take the stairs. March in place while watching TV. Get your family or friends to join in. Make it a fun and healthy competition.

8 Track your progress.
Keep a journal or log of your activity or eating habits. Pen and paper is fine or you can use a tracking tool on your computer or smart phone. Taking the time to write it down makes you more aware of your daily habits and think about where you might be able to make changes. A journal or log also helps you measure your progress over time. You’ll be surprised to look back and see how far you’ve come in just a short time.

9 Don’t give up.
Any lifestyle change is bound to have pitfalls or barriers that get in the way of progress. Remember to practice the “something is better than nothing” mindset. Going home for the holidays or vacationing on a cruise ship may make it difficult to eat as healthy as you like, but that doesn’t mean you can’t get back to your healthy habits when you get back home. A bad back or sore knee might prevent you from doing your usual exercise, but could you find a substitute? Instead of walking, could you swim?

10 Celebrate success.
Give yourself a gift or throw a party to celebrate your success! Let others know what you’ve accomplished. Taking the time to recognize and appreciate yourself for having reached your goals helps you to continue your healthy habits and may inspire others as well!

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