



Making positive associations



When you know something is good for you

Knowing something is good for you and changing your behaviour accordingly is easier said than done. For instance, over the past 10 - 20 years there has been an increase in government spending on advertising to promote the benefits of health and fitness, however the incidents of obesity and being overweight continue to rise throughout the Western World (and increasingly in non-Western countries that have been influenced by the Western diet). Thus, simply knowing you 'should' be physically active and eat healthy food does not necessarily influence your behaviour to do so.

Negative associations

One of the main issues with living a healthy life is the negative associations you connect with dieting and exercise. Fad diets have a lot to answer for, because they draw people in with the promise of quick - pain free weight loss, which is usually overexaggerated, difficult to sustain and often results in further weight increase once the diet has been completed. It's easy to be motivated to begin a program that promises the loss of 10 kilograms in 10 days - for instance. Most people can rationalise that 10 days is not that long to commit to, without thinking about the long term effects beginning such a diet will have on their motivation, emotions and physical appearance. These diets also perpetuate the negative association between 'healthy' living and dieting, as one starts to (incorrectly) believe that to be healthy it's necessary to go through the pain of a fad diet. Further, self-esteem is tremendously affected as one starts to feel like a failure for not being able to maintain the unrealistic requirements of the fad diet in the first place.

Making new associations

Motivation can be increased when you start to see results. However, even though loss of fluid retention may initially make you feel as though you're losing weight on a fad diet, this weight loss becomes more difficult to sustain over a long period of time. These diets are so restrictive that many people start to 'cheat', eventually give up and finally put on more weight than they had to begin with. As a result, the motivation to become fit and healthy is soon decreased. The key is to be PATIENT and have a long term approach to living healthy. This is where the small step mentality is vital. The minute you start focusing on losing weight rapidly, your body will not respond in a manner that will result in long term weight loss. After all - isn't that the ultimate goal?

So how do you make a new association between eating well/being active and feeling good? The first step is to look into the foods that give you energy and vitality. It's vital to start noticing how you feel after eating particular foods. For instance, do you feel sluggish after a high carbohydrate meal, or mentally alert after a high protein meal? Does sugar make you feel agitated, or does the lactose in milk make you feel bloated? One of the simplest ways to do this is to question every time you notice both extremes (e.g. really energetic and really agitated or tired). You can also keep a diary, however, most people find they are too busy to record all their food intake and feelings after food, so an easier way is to focus on your moods in the immediate instance and then trace back your steps to the foods you have recently eaten. After a while you will notice a pattern and will begin to create a more positive association with the foods that make you feel better. Then you will have more control over your diet and reduce the effects that foods can have on your mood.

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