

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

By Owen Rothstein

As the Marketing Director for Performance Food Centers (now Simple Again), rarely do I write in my own voice about a topic, any topic. I am constantly writing copy about products or services and always editing stories and editorials, so my influence is all over our writing, but never this way. The reason I've chosen to write the first Fitness Flyer of the New Year is the topic...Lifestyle Changes.

Because I am constantly (really, incessantly) reading articles about nutrition, diet, athletic performance, etc., I get a very broad view of not only the science involved in what and how we eat, I get a real sense of consumers expectations and desires. It will come as no surprise that the stereotype of the American consumer is fairly accurate. Many Americans want a "magic pill" that will keep them fit and healthy throughout their lives without having to watch what they eat and without exercising. Sorry Charlie, it just doesn't work that way. There is no such pill.

What's more, most of what Americans have been told over the past few decades about low-fat/no fat, low carb diets and how they can help us lose weight is also completely misinformed. It turns out that current research is supporting what my grandparents seemed to instinctively know – a "meal" should consist of a protein, a vegetable and a "starch" with some liberally applied fat. That's what was on the plate every time that my grandmother fed me (and my grandmother was an amazing cook).

Whereas it may have seemed instinctive for my gran to do that, it was, in fact, hundreds of generations worth of my forebears that not only evolved to eat this way, but who had a closer (more communicative) relationship with their bodies that influenced these choices. When they ate this way, they felt better. When they had a craving for something, it was because they're bodies were missing key nutrients from that food. They ate accordingly. They ate local foods because there was no other option. They ate seasonal foods for the same reason.

Since World War 2, things have changed. Women in the workplace, global economies and cheaper air freight are just a few of the factors that have changed the way we eat. Microwaves, fast-food restaurants and agribusiness are a few more. During this time period, we've gotten busier, more urbanized and a bit more removed from our food sources. We also need to do less physical labor as a population. Finally, the ubiquitous nature of digital entertainment has made (allowed) us to become more sedentary. These combined factors had resulted in a country that was gaining weight at an alarming rate.

It turns out that while Americans like getting fat, they don't like being fat, so next came the diets. Almost every popular diet focused on a segment of the truth. "Cut fat and you'll lose weight", or "Carbs are the reason for your belly". These statements, which may have some kernel of "common sense" in them are simply not true. People get results when they stick to

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these diets, but so frequently they gain the weight back when they went off the diets. The reality is that sticking to any calorically-controlled diet will result in weight loss, but they are not eternally sustainable because of the body's need for all of the nutrients that are in some of the foods that are being omitted. Diets aren't the answer.

So what is the answer? Lifestyle changes are the answer. Not a magic pill, just lifestyle changes. Here are a few simple facts:

- Your Metabolism (metabolic rate) determines how quickly your body burns calories.
- While genetics do play a role in metabolic rate, a very small percentage of the population has a clinically low metabolic rate.
- Metabolic rate is primarily determined by the ratio of lean muscle mass in your body to everything else (organs, bones, fat...).
- You can affect your metabolism (in either direction).

Changing the way you look at these facts and your entire situation is the first Lifestyle Change. You're not a victim. This didn't happen to you. You may have been given some bad information along the way, but ultimately you are a result of your decisions.

Another Lifestyle Change is to stop restricting food. Add food. Yup... ADD FOOD. By this I mean that you can eat anything you want if you just modify your timing, quantities and ratios of what you're eating. If you eat frequent meals that are full of natural, whole-foods and have all three macronutrients (proteins, carbs & fats) in every meal, you won't feel hungry. You won't crave nutrients because you'll be getting all that your body needs. If you try to envision your entire diet as one big picture, it'll help. This isn't one single decision, but an endless series of little decisions. Lifestyle = the style of your LIFE.

Next Lifestyle Change is to move your body, often. It really is the small changes that matter here. It would be great if you got to the gym 3 times a week for a serious workout, but at very least take the stairs occasionally. Ride your bike to the movies sometimes. Do 15 minutes of gentle yoga away from your desk on some days. It is the same principle as with food...it's an endless series of little decisions. A little extra movement will help your metabolic rate, thus making it easier to get and stay fit.

Two additional Lifestyle Changes are more mental than physical. First, be realistic. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will the ideal body be. If you've gotten out of shape, it's going to take a while to get back into shape. Have some patience and remember that these are LIFeStyle changes. Finally, be kind to yourself. You're not a horrible person if you've gotten out of shape, you've just made some less-than-perfect choices. Now you're making some better choices, so acknowledge that. Keeping positive is an illness that everyone should want to catch. Being kind to yourself means allowing yourself to have that slice of birthday cake and trusting that you're going to still be ok and will care for yourself later that day, tomorrow and the next day. You can do this. You've got this.



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