

Stress Bytes Newsletter

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"WHEN STRESS BITES, BITE BACK!"

THE NEWSLETTER OF ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.
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Please Fail at Your New Year's Diet

Did you ever notice how many TV commercials for weight loss products come on right after Christmas? I assume that's because so many people are making New Year's resolutions to lose weight and advertisers are striking "while the iron is hot." What troubles me about this is that we're being lied to. Quick fixes for complex problems like obesity don't produce lasting change. Worse yet using such products may pull people into the unhealthy cycle of "yo-yo" dieting, with extremes of weight loss and subsequent weight gain. This is not only unhealthy for your physically, it also leads to tremendous discouragement, shame, and lowered self-esteem.

In many ways, yo-yo dieting is similar to an obsessive-compulsive disorder. An obsession is characterized by distressing, intrusive thoughts, usually about food or body image, i.e. "I really, really want some chocolate!" or "I'm too fat" or "I hate my thighs." A compulsion is the behavior or tasks which attempt to

neutralize the obsessions, such as restricting food intake, avoiding certain foods, and excessive exercise. The more we do it and fail at it, the more anxiety is created. This "failure" fuels more obsessive thoughts and the cycle goes round and round.

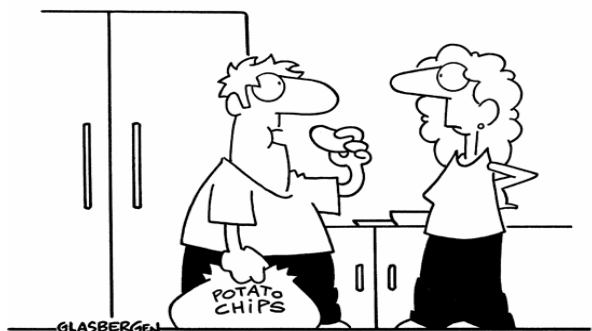
The best way to fail at your New Year's Resolution to lose weight is to look for a quick fix or do something unhealthy that your body cannot tolerate for long, like severely restricting calorie intake or avoiding certain foods because we incorrectly think they are "bad." Even if you institute a healthy diet and exercise plan, the next best way to fail at your New Year's Resolution is to stop all the positive lifestyle changes you've made once you've reached your desired weight.

The one "secret" you need to know about maintaining weight loss is that there is no quick fixes. Even people who have gastric bypass surgery can regain the weight if they have emotional issues that are

not addressed and resolved. Keeping New Year's Resolutions is hard because what we need to know is how to make and sustain change for the rest of your life, not just until you lose the weight.

Related to this, I recorded and watched a television show I didn't know I'd find so fascinating. It was the marathon replay of season three of "The Biggest Loser," a "reality" show where severely overweight contestants

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"Dieting makes me feel too weak and tired to exercise. But snacking gives me enough guilt to fuel a great workout!"

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Please Fail..... —cont'd

are brought to a ranch for a rigorous dietary and fitness makeover. Although most contestants voiced a desire to lose weight for health reasons, the extra incentive of earning \$250,000 if they won the game, still didn't appear to be adequate motivation for most of the contestants. That's what fascinated me. If maintaining your health and extending your life and winning \$250,000 isn't motivation enough, what is?

I noticed that contestants on The Biggest Loser all had the hard work of planning, preparing meals and maintaining motivation for diet and exercise, done by someone else. In other words, the contestants were isolated from their normal lives and responsibilities and handed everything they needed to be successful. Yes, they had to actually do the exercise and adhere to the eating plan, but they had oodles of external support. They were provided a personal trainer, a dietician, and physicians to monitor their health. If they had a "bad" day, they had staff to boost them, motivate them, and keep the show going. I wondered what happened to those contestants when they went home, when all that external support and motivation were gone. Did they learn how to motivate themselves? Did they learn how to prepare healthier meals? Did they learn how to schedule a workout into a full and busy life?

After watching the finale, I decided to go to the NBC website for the show and look around. I was relieved to find that there was a clinical psychologist, Dr. Alexa Altman, hired to consult on the show. Though she didn't appear in any of the episodes that I watched, her role was to "assist contestants in learning how to overcome emotional eating, improve coping skills, increase self-esteem and learn how to manage negative thinking and behaviors." Of course, I had to go learn more about Dr. Altman. I found her website and learned that she's a psychodynamically oriented, who is also trained in EMDR, which is a type of therapy used for people who have suffered traumatic experiences in their lives. I began to wonder if the contestants on The Biggest Loser were there partly because of unresolved past trauma in their lives that they coped with by overeating. So I emailed Dr. Altman. Her email came back as undeliverable. Hmmmm....

Over the years I have often said that weight loss have very little to do with not knowing what to eat and how to exercise. Most people who have struggled with weight all their lives know what to do and have lost weight. They just don't know how to maintain the weight loss. They reach their goal and then drop all the changes that helped them achieve their goal in the first place. Why? Maybe the "diet" was unsustainable from a physical perspective: you can't starve yourself forever. More likely the emotional issues, low self-esteem, inner shame, and learning patterns that created the problem in the first place had not been addressed or resolved.

The problem, whose symptom is obesity, from a psychological perspective, seems to be more one of emotional resistance to making or maintaining the needed changes, impulse control, lack of knowledge and or skills to self-motivate, and unresolved emotional issues.

To reiterate, excessive weight is usually just the symptom of an underlying problem that can be quite complex. To replace one health problem (excessive weight) with another (yo-yo dieting) is not my idea of a solution. That's why I say, "PLEASE fail at your New Year's Diet!"

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Do You See A Human Being When You Look At Me?

Do you see a human being
when you look at me?
Or just a thing
to be changed,
carved,
molded
into some form
of cookie-cutter perfectionism?

Do you see me?
Or an expanse
of skin
and flesh
to be painted with make-up
and covered
with appropriate fashion?

Do you see a person
with hopes
and dreams
thoughts and feelings?
Or just your own ideas
of who I should be?

Do you see me
for who I am?
Or do you just see
what you wish I were,
what you think I could be?

Do you see
my strengths
my beauty
my passion?

Do you see
my struggles
my pain?

Do you see
a human being?

Do you see me?

Do I exist?

Am I here?

by Kathy Barron
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**“Don’t tell me to improve my diet. I ate
a carrot once and nothing happened!”**

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The Stress Doctor is IN!!!

“FOOD IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF A BALANCED DIET.”

FRAN LEBOWITZ

“I’VE BEEN ON A DIET FOR TWO WEEKS AND ALL I’VE LOST IS TWO WEEKS.”

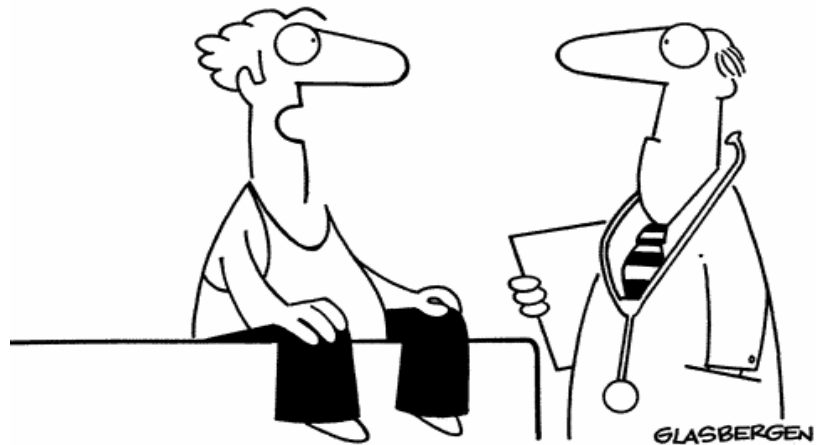
TOTIE FIELDS

“WHAT SOME CALL HEALTH, IF PURCHASED BY PERPETUAL ANXIETY ABOUT DIET, ISN’T MUCH BETTER THAN TEDIOUS DISEASE.”

GEORGE DENNISON
PRENTICE

“I FEEL ABOUT AIRPLANES THE WAY I FEEL ABOUT DIETS. IT SEEMS TO ME THEY ARE WONDERFUL THINGS FOR OTHER PEOPLE TO GO ON.”

JEAN KERR



“Eat less and exercise more? That’s the most ridiculous fad diet I’ve heard of yet!”

ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.

LICENSED CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

- Gently helping individuals, couples and groups resolve personal problems, manage stress, and reach their full potential since 1990.
- Specializing in Women’s Issues and Stress Management
- Emotional Freedom Technique for Weight Management

Call **(618) 549-5935** to set up an appointment

READING RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning to Love Yourself: Finding Your Self-Worth by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Learning to Love Yourself is a journey to self worth. It is necessary for us to get rid of our toxic self-defeating messages, and choose positive changes.

Change the Way You See Everything: Through Asset-Based Thinking by Kathryn D. Cramer and Hank Wasiak

This brilliantly simple book on the philosophy known as Asset-Based Thinking, instills success-oriented habits in even the most die-hard cynic. Its transformational lessons--conveyed through unique photographic metaphors and inspiring stories from real people--reveal how the slightest shift in perception can lead to monumental results in both business and in life. ABT is not just positive thinking, but rather a systematic observation of "what works." Kathryn Cramer, an acclaimed corporate consultant, and Hank Wasiak, a creative icon of the advertising industry, have produced a work that looks and works like no other business or self-help book--because it IS like no other book. Change the Way You See Everything is a revolutionary approach to every aspect of life that bears not just reading, but re-reading, and sharing with people in your circle. You'll never look at the world the same way again.