Resolve To Maintain A Healthy Weight In The New Year

Did you make a New Year’s resolution this year? If you did, odds are very good you resolved to do something positive about your health. In fact, of all the resolutions made each year, adopting healthier habits (i.e., quitting smoking, exercising more, eating healthier) always makes the list of top ten resolutions. Poll after poll shows the number one resolution is to lose weight, which is not surprising given the fact that obesity is rapidly becoming one of the most serious health problems in the United States. The FDA calls the problem an “epidemic,” which is an apt description considering some 65 percent of American adults are overweight, and more than 30 percent are obese.

Weight is more than just an aesthetic issue, of course. Most of us are well aware that extra pounds can make us vulnerable to developing a variety of health problems, from cardiovascular problems to diabetes to joint problems. Being able to potentially lower your risk for serious ailments makes a compelling argument for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.

Where do you start? While there is no lack of weight-loss advice on the web, in print, and on television, much of the advice is conflicting, with the low-carb versus low-fat debate being just one of the many ongoing discussions out in the diet world. However, there are some basic principles of healthy eating that nearly all experts and organizations subscribe to. These principles could make a fine starting point if you’ve made a resolution to reach a healthier weight this year, and you are now trying to figure out exactly how to accomplish that.

Eating fewer calories than you burn through activity — or, conversely, burning more calories through activity than you consume through food — is the mathematical formula to begin every successful weight loss program. Activities such as biking, jogging, tennis or an aerobics class will burn calories. But you don’t have to be an athlete to get moving. Calorie-burning exercise can take the form of a brisk walk around the neighborhood or doing active yard work. Aiming for 30 to 60 minutes of exercise a minimum of three times a week is a great goal.

But exercise is only half the equation. The other half is strength training. Strength training can help in a weight loss program because it builds lean body mass, and lean body mass burns more calories, pound for pound, than fat tissue does.

While the low-carb and low-fat folks may be at odds about a lot of things, one thing they do seem to agree upon is the fact that sugar can sabotage any weight-loss effort. Especially when it comes to candies, cookies and the like, these are empty calories that should be eliminated or eaten only in moderation.

It’s universally agreed that breakfast is important. Eating breakfast provides the fuel a body needs after “fasting” overnight. It can kick-start your metabolism in the morning, and may also help you from succumbing to that mid-morning donut, or to overeating at lunch.

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In fact, the simple routine of eating regularly is in itself an important principle. Whether you choose to eat three regular meals, or several smaller meals and snacks throughout the day, the key is to eat on a regular basis. Someone who eats regularly will feel fuller and be less likely to binge. On the other hand, going long periods without food may cause your body to go into a conservation mode, which is just the opposite of what you want.

Water is an important component of many diets, and for good reason. It can help produce a feeling of fullness that may help keep you from overeating. It is also widely believed that being fully hydrated is beneficial to a dieter; one reason being it can help flush toxins that are released when stored fat is burned.

Although it may not be the first weight-control strategy that comes to your mind, stress is one topic that should certainly be addressed. Stress is widely accepted as a potential culprit for weight gain, and not just because some people overeat as a reaction to stress. Stress can cause the body to release cortisol, which in turn encourages the body to store fat, especially around the waist. If you embark on a stress reduction program, you might enjoy the residual benefit of losing some weight.

Have you been working long hours and burning the candle at both ends? Did you ever imagine that not getting enough sleep could sabotage your weight management? It could. Recent research indicates that more sleep might actually help you maintain a healthy weight. People who are chronically deprived of sleep appear to be statistically more prone to obesity, although all the reasons are not clear. There is some indication that sleep deprivation impacts hormones that regulate appetite. There is also evidence that people who stay up later tend to snack and be sedentary during those wee hours, an obvious scenario for weight gain. Whatever the reason, having adequate sleep is so crucial to your overall well-being, it should certainly be considered a component of a healthy eating lifestyle.

Of course, there is no substitute for consulting a physician before making major diet and exercise changes. The ACEC Life/Health Trust realizes the importance of routine physicals and provides a Wellness Benefit with many ACEC Life/Health Trust medical plans to help participants lead a healthy lifestyle, including a healthy eating lifestyle.

In conclusion, the phrase — “healthy eating lifestyle” — should replace “diet” in the vocabulary of those who are serious about attaining and maintaining a healthy weight. It’s an ongoing, long-term mission…with ongoing and long-term benefits.