

Stress Free Healthy Eating

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Carol knows that diets work. The amount of pounds she has lost in her life is equal to her current weight sixteen times over. She figures she is populating her own parallel universe of Carols. It makes her happy. It makes her feel much less alone in the world.

Carol is of course fictitious. You, on the other hand, are real. Go ahead; pinch yourself just to be sure. And you know a dirty little secret: *diets don't work*. No! I am shocked, amazed, perplexed. How can this be? We spend the equivalent of the GNP of all third world countries on diet books each year. We will buy *any* supplement that promises to help us lose weight - even if we have heard it might kill us. And we will eat the most absurd, and pathetic combinations of food in the belief that maybe, just maybe, we will achieve our ideal weight.

Do you really enjoy eating like a rabbit? Do you believe it will work in the long run? Maybe. Perhaps you believe you just really stink in the willpower department. If you were a good person, you could indeed eat like a rabbit for the rest of your life and be perfectly happy.

Or, is there something else going on here which might explain why, try as you may, you lose weight but you can't keep it off. Stop for a moment and realize that your body is brilliantly designed to consume, digest, absorb, and metabolize food. It may then occur to you that there has to be an effective way to achieve a healthy relationship with food without making yourself miserable. Because that is what you are designed to do.

The way you eat is intimately connected to the way you live. If you are eating the healthiest diet in the world, but you are eating it under chronic stress, your body will not be able to make use of all those good nutrients you are so conscientiously feeding it. Chronic stress dramatically effects our digestion and metabolism. It also throws out of balance all of our food related brain signals, so we may feel hungry all the time, or we may crave foods that we know are not healthy.

What then is the solution to your eating issues? My favorite nutritionist, Marc David, says we need to "slow down life to speed up metabolism". Slowing down, Marc explains, "is becoming aware: Open. Centered. Present. Balanced. Immediate changes will occur in the nervous, endocrine, immune systems, as well as the neuropeptide network throughout the body. The result is that you will burn calories at an optimum rate. . . . Immunity will be enhanced. . . . Couple this with quality food choices and you'll begin to create the kind of metabolism that deep down inside you know you were meant to have."

At this point you may be saying to yourself, "I only want to find out how to lose enough weight to look good at my daughter's wedding!" Okay, being realistic, short term goals are sometimes fine. They give you the motivation to get started. They serve as the carrot, and maybe even the stick.

Short term goals though are short term solutions. They don't last and soon you are back where you started. To make the changes that will last, you need to work from the ground up, building a healthy life for yourself. Focusing *only* on what you put in your mouth may actually do more harm than good as it feeds into the chronic stress problem. Food becomes something else to be

anxious about, when it is meant to be something you savor and enjoy, eaten in the company of family and friends whenever possible. Food is life giving, life sustaining, and is interwoven into all of our cultural and religious traditions.

In the “Stress Free Healthy Eating™” program I developed, I walk each of my clients through the process of reorienting their core beliefs about food. Rather than doing “nutrition by the numbers” – looking only at calorie count, carbs, fats, proteins, BMI, etc. – we look at food in the context of your whole life. What does food mean to you, and how can you shift that meaning in a positive direction? In the course of this work you begin to form a healthy relationship with food, perhaps for the first time in your life.

If every attempt you have made to clean up your food act has been a dismal failure, or has felt like hard, punishing work, I have a surprise for you. The best way to learn healthy eating habits is, and should be, enjoyable – maybe even fun. Hard to believe given our Puritanical cultural belief that anything good for you must be difficult and require a certain degree of stoicism. Tell that to the Europeans who know full well that food is one of life’s great pleasures. It is a blessing, not a curse. When you allow yourself to fully enjoy food – its flavors, textures, aromas, and colors – with all of your senses, you will begin to gravitate naturally toward healthy food. You will find yourself satiated with far less than when you stuff yourself mindlessly with junk food.

The bottom line is this: When you move towards a healthy, healing lifestyle, your relationship with food will naturally follow. The changes you make will last, because they are not about denial, blame, or suffering. They are about enjoying life, enjoying food, and learning to nourish and nurture your body, mind, and spirit.

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