

The Power Of Food

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Most of life's circumstances are beyond our control. Family, work and busy schedules can bring all of us a certain amount of stress and anxiety. In my work with patients with difficulty managing their weight, stress is often reported as the number one thing that triggers emotional eating, which means reaching for food for comfort and support rather than asking for help. Why? Because asking for help is hard. We tell ourselves stories about what it means to not have it all figured out, and then feel embarrassed, ashamed and just plain afraid of what others will think of us because we are facing the same challenges we faced six months or a year ago.

What I'd like to emphasize is that most people are just so over scheduled, over committed and exhausted that asking for help also feels like one more thing to add to an extremely long "to do" list. However, research suggests that people are more likely to stick with any weight control program when a calorie controlled meal plan is combined with some form of group support. In fact, it doesn't have to be professional support, although that is a reliable source, it could be a committed team of family and friends who are emotionally available and know your struggles. The key factor in making a support system work for you is finding and educating people about how they can support you no matter what challenges you are facing. Here are a few simple steps that might make getting started easier:

1. What do I want? Spend a few moments making a specific list of things that you want to accomplish. This is where you set some goals for yourself. Keep the list visible, refer back to it and create Outlook reminders to get you started.
2. What do I need? Next write down the kinds of things that you will need help with: menu planning, exercise motivation, inspirational materials, more sleep.
3. Who is best suited for what? Make another list of people who are good at the things you want to be doing. Ask for their help with certain things. No one wants to be solely responsible for your program. However, most people can follow through with a request for something specific.
4. When will I need help? Target certain times of the day when you'll need support (would a call from a friend on the way home from work be helpful in planning the evening?). It might be that too much alone time on a Sunday means boredom eating. Maybe scheduling a walk with a friend for the next three Sundays would be a good strategy to get out of that pattern.

It is imperative to set up a plan before you begin feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed or just plain hungry. Stay proactive rather than reactive when stressful circumstances head your way, because they will.

Source: Methodist Hospital Houston

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