Health & Fitness

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Chris Mayer, Reporter 248-901-2589 | on the web: http: www.observer-occentric.com | Sunday, December 28, 1997

TALK TO THE MIRROR

FLORINE MARK

The new year can result in a healthier you

As we prepare to ring in the New Year, it's time to ask ourselves what changes we'd like to make to improve our lives. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let's think about those resolutions we made last year around this time and whether or not we stuck to them.

Many people tend to begin the year with high expectations and unrealistic goals. Beware! If you are one of those people you may be setting yourself up for failure. Every year more than two-thirds of Americans resolve to lose weight in the upcoming year. In fact, weight loss is the Number 1 resolution made as the ball drops at midnight. But every year many people discard those resolutions by February or March.

You don't have to be one of them. You truly can be a loser if you're serious about it!

After all the dinners, holiday parties and piles of leftovers, your belt may be fitting a bit tightly but there's no need to go out and buy new pants. Instead you just need to understand a few "universal truths" in order to stand a better chance of succeeding in your weight loss efforts. If trimming down your tummy is one of your goals for the New Year, keep these tips in mind to help you on your weight loss journey.

Tips for Weight Loss Success in '98:

•Get in Control-Develop a Plan. A good weight loss plan will put you in the driver's seat.

•It's Natural to be Overwhelmed. Take one step at a time and realize that you're learning some completely new behaviors which is a positive sign.

•Lose Weight Because You Choose To. Don't start a weight loss program because others tell you to.

•Go for Feeling Better, Not Just Looking Better.

•Group Support is Stronger than Individual Willpower. You're not in it alone and with support, your chances of success will be greater.

•Weight Management is forever. A key to success is finding a program that provides you with the tools to succeed in your weight loss efforts so that you can manage your weight throughout your life. You need to learn a new lifestyle. A New Year's resolution may get your started but it only provides short-term motivation. Weight management is a lifetime project.

•Healthy Living Equals Healthy Weight.

Eating well, being active, and managing stress are the cornerstones to maintaining a healthy weight.

If weight loss is not your goal for 1998, starting or maintaining a regular exercise program should definitely be high on everyone's "to do" list. You don't need to make an announcement of your intentions on Jan. 1. You only need to make a commitment to yourself to live a healthy lifestyle.

We all need to exercise and watch our diets because of the close link between diet and health. As the new millennium approaches, I'm hoping that we will have become enlightened enough to take action and drastically reduce that startling statistic! Since an estimated 20 percent of heart disease deaths could be avoided by improving dietary habits, why isn't everyone trying to shape up?

The most important thing to remember as you work toward your weight loss goal (or any goal for that matter) is to be flexible. We all make mistakes and "cheat" here or there but that does not mean we might as well give up. A slip does not mean failure.

It is very difficult to change habits and it won't happen overnight so don't expect it to. Instead you can learn from a slip-up. Take a look at what led you to eat that extra snack: stress?...boredom?... fatigue? Try to divert your actions the next time you feel that way or are in a similar situation. Then a "slip-up" becomes a learning experience.

So toot those horns and clink those glasses on New Year's Eve and set your sights on a healthier, happier you in '98 and for the rest of your life. Happy New Year!

I read every one of your letters and I love your comments! Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, Mich. 48334-2974, or fax: (248) 553-7108.

(Florine Mark is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation.)

Low Vision aids the near-blind

BY KIMBERLY A. MORTSON
STAFF WRITER

There's life after blindness, said Nancy Simmons, owner of Low Vision Solutions of Livonia.

Simmons, legally blind, was diagnosed at the age of 10 with retinitis pigmentosa – a disease that progressively deteriorates the retina.

Her vision problems, however, haven't stopped her from functioning just as someone with normal sight. In fact, the disease has had a dramatic effect on her career and life.

"I think I offer an inspiration to persons who are having a hard time coping with their vision loss," she said.

The Redford resident runs a company that sells equipment, such as video magnifiers and daily living aids, to individuals with extremely low vision. "Like myself," Simmons said.

For the past 11 years, she's been running the business out of her home – and many, if not most, of Simmons' clients are from Oakland County, she said.

Recently, however, she decided to make the leap and purchased a storefront business on W. Seven Mile near Inkster Road.

"My clients were always asking me if I had a place they could come and view the equipment instead of me coming to them because I could only bring two or three machines with me at a time."

The new 800-square-foot store enables her to display approximately eight to 10 machines, including handheld magnifiers, daily living aids, large print software and devices that read print back to those who are blind.

Despite the fact that Simmons now has a store, she said she will continue to provide at-home viewing services for persons who are unable to travel because of vision or other mobility impairments.

The black and white and color video magnifiers (brand names include Xerox, Magnisight and Optelec) aid persons who have lost their ability to read or write due to limited range of vision and focus.

Ranging in price from $1,800 to $3,500, the new equipment that Simmons sells magnifies written words and photographs up to 70 times normal size.

Users have the ability to enlarge and focus material in the positive and negative, making both black letters on a white background and white letters on a black background in focus.

She said there's a large population of people who don't know about the existence of these products and lead restricted lives because of vision impairment.

"You can't imagine the satisfaction I get from being able to provide a product that restores a person's ability to read a book, write a letter, or look at pictures of their grandchildren," Simmons said.

Low Vision Solutions also sells *used equipment at costs of between* $500 and $1,500.

Other visual aids and daily living devices include: talking watches and calculators, large print playing cards and clocks, speech synthesizers for computers and handheld magnifiers that cost approximately $20 to $30.

Mobile devices, such as some of the magnifiers Simmons sells, offer a convenient alternative for persons on the go, enabling users to read menus in restaurants and price labels in retail stores. Such access would be impossible with a video magnifier, Simmons said, since they're comparable to a computer monitor or a 19-inch television screen in size and weight.

"Persons should not be intimidated by the video magnifiers," said Simmons, "they're actually very easy to use. Senior citizens, who make up a majority of my clientele, may view the devices as computers. They are not computers and have, at the most, three buttons – the on/off switch, enlarge and focus."

Unfortunately, Simmons said, none of the low vision aids are covered by insurance or Medicare. But many options exist, such as used equipment, if you are on a limited budget, she said. "We offer something for everyone."

(Low Vision Solutions of Livonia is located at 27520 W. Seven Mile Road.

Store hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and by appointment Saturday and evenings.

Simmons and her staff are willing to answer questions over the phone if you call 313-387-1100 or 1-800-685-8802.)

STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JAGIELO

Power of magnification: *Nancy Simmons, owner of Low Vision Solutions of Livonia, demonstrates one of several video magnifies she sells at her new store in Livonia. Other inventory she retails for persons with extremely low vision includes handheld magnifiers and talking watches and calculators.*

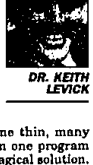
Develop 'skill power' to conquer weight problems

Overweight people are gluttons, irresponsible, sloppy and without will power – thin people have held this for years – but it perpetuates discrimination against those who are overweight and, in my opinion, reveals their own feelings of internal failure.

Several years ago, a study on children's perceptions of physical differences revealed unexpected results.

In the study, six-year-old children were asked to view pictures of five other children and rank them in the order of whom they would prefer as friends. Each pictured child had some form of physical impairment, including one child suffering from obesity. Others were pictured with crutches or seated in a wheelchair.

TO YOUR HEALTH



DR. KEITH LEVICK

Over 90 percent of the kids ranked the obese child last. When interviewed, the children stated that, while some impaired children couldn't control their misfortune, the obese child "chose to be that way."

Unfortunately, overweight children and adults face this kind of benign discrimination daily.

In the struggle to become thin, many individuals "diet surf" from one program to another, looking for a magical solution. Each failure, then, reinforces the misperception, "if you really wanted to be thin, you would have the willpower to lose weight."

The weight loss industry is a $30 billion a year business. However – for only one reason – overweight people really want to be thin.

Thinking in terms of "will power" sets up failure and propagates myths about overweight people. By analogy, if your performance review at work was below expectations, what would be done? You probably would identify weak areas, enhance the necessary skills for improvement and practice – none of which has anything to do with "will power."

Rather, the development and incorporation of skills into your work routine, develops what I call "skill power."

The first step in overcoming a weight challenge is to have appropriate – as opposed to myths, gimmicks and outdated techniques – education and skills. Five important "skill power" facts are:

1.Food is only a calorie — a number that you can control by understanding basic nutritional facts. For example, a turkey sandwich has less than half the calories of a corned beef sandwich.

2. In modifying behavior, remember lapses will occur — all people overeat, binge and so forth. Remember, a lapse does not equal failure.

3. Try to eliminate "should," "cheated," "bad," and other emotionally charged words from your vocabulary. These negative terms often lead to negative feelings and behavior. Do not believe, for example, that "guilty" people need to be punished for overeating.

4. Identify and prepare for "high risk" eating situations. Holidays, vacations, restaurant outings and other celebrations are such situations. Like a forest ranger, look for the potential fire. And if one occurs, put it out quickly.

5. Increase your exercise level — study after study clearly shows that dieting without exercise will only lead to more failure.

There are other important facts and skills that will strengthen your skill power. Overweight people are not overeaters who lack will power. Their will power is no more or less than anyone else challenged with the difficult task of modifying behavior, as most smokers, alcoholics, gamblers and nail biters will attest. We all possess the power to change and improve our behavior. Developing the skills to do so is just a crucial step in that process.

(Dr. Keith Levick is a health psychologist and the director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills. You can reach him at (248) 855-5771 or send him an e-mail at Klevick@aol.com.)

HEALTHY LIVING

TEEN SMOKING

Al Behar, President of PICS, Inc., has been spending a lot of time in high school lately. His mission: to find out what it will take to get kids to stop smoking.

PICS is best known for its LifeSign(R) stop smoking program, developed with grant funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which has helped over a million smokers in their efforts to quit smoking. In view of this success, PICS has won another NIH grant to develop a LifeSign to meet the special needs of teenage smokers. Students at Fairfax County high schools have been gaining real world experience in their effort to redesign the LifeSign unit and packaging concept in a way that will be more appealing to teen smokers.

"We know that young people respond to different stimuli than adults. The tobacco companies knew that when they designed icons like Joe Camel that influence kids to start smoking. We plan to use that same knowledge to help them stop. Perhaps the best way to come up with an idea that will get kids to stop smoking is to let them do it for you," Behar said.

Behar anticipates LifeSign to be very effective in the battle to help kids quit. "Every day in the U.S., 3,000 young people begin to smoke -- that's more than 1 million new smokers each year. These kids need help quitting and since Nicotine Replacement therapies are not an option for underage smokers, we see LifeSign as a perfect alternative."

The program has gained attention from both local newspapers and teachers, all of whom have had positive responses. The students are so enthused about the chance to help design the product that Behar is offering summer internships at PICS so that a few select students will be able to see the product take shape.

Information about the LifeSign products can be found on the PICS homepage at http://www.LifeSignUSA.com or by calling 1-800-LifeSign.

FITNESS STATION

The repetitive nature of aerobic exercise often turns even the best exercise equipment into a very expensive clothes hanger.

International exercise expert Gin Miller now brings a new approach to home fitness with Fitness Station – the interactive entertainment system that creates just the kind of distraction most at-home exercisers need to stay on track.

Fitness Station, developed by Assist Interactive Fitness Ltd. (1-800-468-2922), easily links any aerobic trainer to home televisions and features exciting activities that the user controls through his or her own workout pace. There are activities to suit every interest including trivia, sports, strategy,*card games and racing.

"Fitness Station provides more than the distraction of music or TV, but the positive diversion of interactive activities which appeal to adults, while also tracking the user's workout and progress," Miller says.

In addition to providing many different categories of activities, Fitness Station is a complete workout environment, enabling the user to switch to TV or other activities while working out. Users can start their workout playing a game of tennis, catch the highlights of the news, read a magazine and finish the workout with a game of trivia, while Fitness Station keeps track of fitness progress through the entire workout.

Exercise data is gathered through a specially designed sensor that measures the user's workout pace and progress in miles, minutes and calories. The Fitness Station handles are used to control each activity and activate each step of setup including game selection, member setup, exercise goal and many others. Fitness Station is available now ($130.00/one built-in game, $150.00 for two) in sporting goods and fitness specialty stores or by calling 1-800-468-2922.

The system will be available separately. The Fitness Station is compatible with all home stationary exercise equipment including bikes, treadmills, riders, walkers, steppers and skiers.