

Find Your Balance in an Out of Balance World

Here's a formula for change: MINDSET + ACTION = RESULTS. We normally focus on actions in the Envisioning Possibilities call; this month we focus on shifting our mindset during the month of March (remember, March = Mindset). More specifically, we are drawing a mind-body connection that can give us greater empowerment and joy in our lives, and boiling it down to a practice you can implement immediately.

This book suggests that the condition of our body indicates our level of balance as a result of our eating, activity, stress, sleep, beliefs, happiness, etc. The condition of our body is a loving indicator—a provider of information—not something we have to punish and control. Isn't that a pleasant thought?! In her book "Finding Your Balance in an Out of Balance World," author Barbara Tessari wants us to listen to our bodies. This, she says, is the key to finding balance.

Our lifestyles have evolved in such a way that it is very difficult NOT to fall victim to overeating and inactivity. Barbara points to these aspects of social and environmental evolution:

- 80% of Americans do not get the minimum recommended 5 fruits and vegetables a day.
- 23% get regular daily physical activity.
- Many of us live in a state of chronic stress
- It used to be that we had simple, unspoken, common-sense rules about excesses and good health. We listened to the body; now we listen to our heads.
- Today, you can fall victim to obesity without even knowing it.
- “Food is everywhere, served in large quantities and you don't even have to get out of your care to have it...we have lost respect for food, its purpose and our responsibility to take care of ourselves.”
- A typical coffee house muffin has the calories and nutrition of 12 Oreos. We know not to eat 12 Oreos, but eating a soft-ball size muffin, often in our car at a redlight, is now a mindless norm. Perhaps it is accompanied by a 300-calorie cup of coffee.
- In 1965, McDonalds sold Happy Meals as an adult dinner for about 600 calories. Today the typical adult meal is twice that amount. And back then, a trip to McDonalds was a special treat; today it is a whim between errands. We don't think about the calories we are consuming in our lifestyle.
- Food is no longer primarily prepared at home by mom.

Barbara's message is not just to people who are overweight because of food issues, but to anyone who is caught up in the unhealthy environment our society has created, and the resulting tug-of-war between us and our own bodies. She wants us to get back to Common-Sense Guidelines like these:

- Eat three square meals a day.
- You can't have dessert until you finish your supper.
- Eat your vegetables; an apple a day keeps the doctor away.
- Don't leave the house without breakfast.
- If you eat too much you'll have a bellyache.
- Don't talk with your mouth full.
- Don't spoil your dinner.
- Go out and play!
- Go work up an appetite.
- Go to bed!

The shift toward balance requires a shift in mindset. Barbara writes, “Blinders keep us from identifying the root of our problems that are sabotaging our efforts to change our behaviors. You can diet with blinders on, but you can’t change your lifestyle without open eyes.” Here are the three guiding principles that lead us toward this change in lifestyle:

o Accountability – remove blinders in the form of excuses, denial, justification and blame. You cannot solve problems if you don’t admit you have them.

- Are you in the habit of making excuses for not making good decisions?

-Are you guilty of denial—not admitting your actions?

- Have you resigned yourself to blame?

o Acknowledgement – look at how your decisions impact the way you feel. Every time you put something into your mouth, ask yourself:

-Do I really want this?

-Is it better off in the garbage than in my mouth?

-Will it spoil my next meal?

-How am I eating? Am I eating too fast?

-Why am I eating if I’m not even hungry?

-How ill I feel moments after I eat it and is it worth it?

o Awareness – listen to your body, not your mind.

-Accept responsibility for taking care of your body.

-Be patient and consistent with your changes.

-Practice gradual adaptation of taste and fullness.

-Consider how your body will feel after you have made your mental decision.

-View all food as equal.

-Learn to appreciate moving your body more as a reward, not a punishment.

Once we have contemplated mental obstacles that keep us from change, we can begin designing our lifestyle plan. Barbara promises, “By following the principles of moderation and balance, you will be able to eat, move and live in a way that works best for you—one that you can enjoy for the rest of your life.” She warns, though, that there are important factors influencing our negative lifestyle behaviors:

-Society views gluttonous and lethargic behaviors as normal, and balanced behaviors as sacrifice.

-We are coerced into eating “fake” food but don’t enough real food

-The food we choose consists primarily of fat and/or sugar in large portions

-Because we don’t eat at home, we don’t control what goes into our food

-We view moving our bodies as optional

-Our lives are so busy that we allow our own needs to suffer

A balanced lifestyle plan consists of:

Simply eating right

-Whole foods as dietary mainstay

-Processes foods as treats in moderation

-Lots of fruits and vegetables

Following simple weight loss guidelines

-Consume fewer calories than you use

-Know the calorie content of the food you typically eat

-Make sure you get good nutrition with your calories so you are satisfied

-Be consistent in your efforts

-Budget your calories and pay back “loans”

-A balanced diet is a natural result of overcoming your mental obstacles and listening to your body

Be aware of myths and misinformation

- Most diet theories are unconstructive and confusing
- Learn the real truth behind restaurant choices and don't believe marketing
- Eat at home as much as possible
- Aim for moderation and balance

Get Moving

- Getting started is the hardest part—break it down into steps
- Be thankful for the gift of mobility, and respect it
- View physical activity as necessary, just like brushing your teeth
- Enjoy this fact: the more physical activity you do, the more you want to do
- Consider weight training to rev your metabolism, look younger and feel stronger
- If you feel tired but have been inactive, it is your brain that is tired; your body needs to move
- Make physical activity a joyous part of your life, not a sacrifice

Manage stress

- Use tools that give perspective (“Count to 10” and “Don't Sweat the Small Stuff”)
- Recognize when you are overwhelmed, and focus and finish
- Manage your time better
- Delegate
- Sometimes just say “No”
- Make sure there is joy in your life
- Learn how to recognize and resolve conflict
- Get adequate, restful sleep
- Recognize the impacts stress may be having on your health and well-being

How can you begin the mental shift toward balanced living? Your Envisioning Possibilities practice for the month of March: Listen to your body. **Make your motivation be to feel good!** This might mean getting back to eating three balanced meals a day, focusing and finishing tasks at work to help decrease stress, getting enough sleep, and making simple physical activity an enjoyable part of life. Try it for 30 days and see how your life changes.