

CHAPTER SEVEN

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. – *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, page 85*

Self-Care

In the workshop sessions so far, we have talked about a lot of different kinds of self-care: step work, emotional sobriety work, HP work, physical feel-good strategies, social feel-good strategies and spiritual feel-good strategies. Now we are going to explore the self-care strategies of sleep, hydration and exercise.

I don't know if this is true for you, but I used to believe the lie that I should take care of others before I take care of myself. I believed taking care of myself first was selfish. I have come to know that I can't care for others UNTIL I nourish myself first. My ability to be of service depends on my own self-care. Self-care is absolutely vital to managing my disease. Self-care affects both my physical allergy and my mental obsession.

Sleep

I have come to view sleep as the very foundation for all other self-care. Sleep happens to be incredibly important in obesity and weight management. It is an important part of my program. Poor quality sleep or sleep deprivation significantly affects food intake. More specifically, it causes an increase in

high-calorie food intake. It does this in many different ways.

Poor quality and insufficient sleep increase cortisol secretion because the body interprets lack of sleep as a significant physical stressor. We know from the last chapter that cortisol increases our comfort food/binge food intake.

Sleep problems also increase the secretion of the hunger hormone ghrelin. This naturally increases the value our nonconscious brain puts on food which makes us MUCH more susceptible to food cues. All of a sudden you start noticing all of the food around you - the drive-thrus, the candy dishes on people's desks, what other people have on their plates. Food starts calling to you much more loudly.

Sleep problems also reduce leptin in the brain. We know from previous sessions that low levels of leptin in our brain makes us feel like we are STARVING. Lower levels of leptin also screw up our lipostat making our bodies defend our excess weight and fat.

Sleep problems also change the way our bodies metabolize food. Sleep deprivation decreases our insulin sensitivity – pushing our baseline levels of insulin higher – keeping us fat. Our energy expenditure (the number of calories we burn at rest and with activity) is also decreased. This happens because sleep deprivation decreases our TSH or thyroid hormone levels. And remember, decreasing our thyroid hormone levels decreases our overall metabolic rate – the number of calories we burn for normal body function and maintenance.



Lastly, sleep problems also impair the overall functioning of our brains. This impairs our ability to control impulses – like wanting to eat a dozen donuts all at one time. Poor sleep also impairs our body's and brain's ability to do important repair and maintenance work. This leads to increased overall inflammation which damages our brain and body functioning even more.



Hydration

Everybody knows you need to drink water to stay healthy, but there are specific reasons to stay hydrated with regard to our disease. When dehydrated, the brain can mistake thirst

for hunger, making us eat instead of drink. Additionally, we've all been told that if we drink water before meals, it can decrease our hunger. BUT you've got to do it correctly. Water increases our feelings of satiety (fullness) because water passes through the system quickly, stretching the stomach – which signals the brain about fullness. Two cups of cold water all at once, before your meal is enough to fill the stomach. Cold water is best because it requires the body to expend energy to warm the fluid up to body temperature (thermogenesis). One study showed drinking two cups of 70-degree Fahrenheit water led to an average 30% increase in metabolic rates. Drinking water before meals alone will not solve your weight problem – but every little thing we do helps.

Did you know that there is a link between the body's hydration status and the body's ability to breakdown fat (lipolysis)? Being adequately hydrated appears to support the natural process of breaking down fat. In other words, the body needs water to burn fat. (Don't over-hydrate because that can lead to a whole host of problems.) You can tell by the color of your urine if you are over- or under-hydrated. Clear urine indicates over-hydration and darker yellow indicates under-hydration. Aim for pale yellow.

Dehydration increases your body's production of cortisol (dehydration is a stressor on the body). We know from last session what cortisol does to our eating behavior.



Exercise

Doctors have known for decades that exercise is the single best thing you can do for yourself, both physically and mentally. – *Robert Lustig, MD*

Ah yes, the dirty old “E” word – or as I like to call it – the E-bomb (like the F-bomb, but worse)! The body burns calories in three main ways: basic body housekeeping done during rest (basal metabolic rate), breaking down food (digestion) and performing physical activity (exercise). The basal metabolic rate – the daily basic body housekeeping – consumes most of our energy and accounts for 60% to 80% of the total number of calories we burn every day. Actual exercise makes up a very small percentage of the calories we burn every day. Therefore, I don’t look to exercise to burn calories and lose weight. Exercise as a method for weight loss really doesn’t work. BUT there are three very important reasons to do it with regard to our physical allergy and mental obsession: glycemic control, insulin sensitivity and overall mood.

Glycemic control is maintaining the optimal serum glucose levels in the blood. Exercise, both aerobic and weight training, improve glucose regulation. When you move and use your muscles for physical activity, your muscles can then use more of the glucose that is circulating in your blood.

Insulin sensitivity is defined by how sensitive the body is to the effects of insulin. If you have high insulin sensitivity, your body will require smaller amounts of insulin to lower blood glucose levels than someone who has

low insulin sensitivity (also known as insulin resistance).

Exercise improves skeletal muscle insulin sensitivity. Large muscle groups are doing the bulk of the “work” of exercise. Exercise also improves insulin sensitivity by improving your beta cell function (remember, those are the cells that secrete insulin). A growing body of evidence suggests that aerobic exercise and weight training together are more effective at increasing insulin sensitivity than either exercise alone.



Evidence is overwhelming that exercise improves mood – and it doesn’t seem to matter what kind of exercise. All exercise improves mood. Exercise also improves our prefrontal cortex functioning and decreases visceral fat, both of which help to reverse negative mood. Finally, exercise can help to alleviate stress by giving us a physical outlet for the body’s preparation for fight or flight.

But I HATE Exercise!

That’s pretty much true for me. That’s why I don’t typically suggest it to sponsees right away. In fact, I tell them not to worry about it for at least the first 90 days of their abstinence. I had to wait for my brain to be able to register my



leptin so that I was even remotely willing to get off of the couch and move. That took me about 90 days of abstinence. I still don't particularly care for exercise, but I have found a regimen that I can live with. I am not a fitness warrior and I hate to sweat. But I am willing to be consistent with the exercise schedule I put together.

Some folks love exercise and have always done it no matter what their size. I say – more power to you!!! Keep doing it. Your body loves you for it.

***** During the workshop session, I will also be going over epigenetics and how to take advantage of it. *****

