

Making Every Choice Count

By Lisa Schilling RN

I had the pleasure of listening to Joan O'Keefe speak. She is a dietitian, mother of four and wife of a Cardiologist. This gives her a unique perspective from which to discuss how nutrition affects our lives. Mrs. O'Keefe made many wonderful points that I fully agree with. My only concern, as I looked around the room, was how many people would now go home and raise their dietary standards to that high level? To live by those high standards, you must either have a very *high* enthusiasm for healthy living, an extreme discipline principle or a chronic disease that requires a strict modified diet. That is a **very** small percentage of people.

I take a more *realistic* approach. People receive increased benefit from learning to incorporate the *healthy principle* behind the rule, into their lives. Often when the bar is set so high or rigid, people take an 'all or nothing' approach. Since they feel unable to meet such high standards, they choose to make no changes at all. But my message is clear: Every choice counts! *Whatever* changes you can *incorporate* into your life will help your overall health. Would it be better if you maintained the strict eating guidelines? Yes, but not if the prospect of following them causes you to not even want to try. I heard one man say, "Life is too short to not enjoy your food. I would rather die at 70 and enjoy it, than live to 100 and be miserable." I thought that sentiment really said it all. You must be able to enjoy your life.

I have done extensive research into the effect of *attitude* and *mental approach* on eating and weight loss. We are made up of a complex body of hormones and chemical responses. How we think, literally, affects our bodies functioning. When we are content and happy our immune system is stronger and our overall health is markedly better. So by neglecting how the consumption of eating foods affects our moods and life enjoyment, we are missing the boat! The best way to improve wellness is by starting with small doable changes. As a unique individual, you must evaluate what changes you could make that would improve *your* health and that you could **realistically** stick to. You need to think more about making the *principle* behind the rule work into your life, not "Is this the ideal

choice", more of "Is this a *better* choice than I usually make."

Here are a few doable tips:

- *Aim to eat* a **protein** source at every meal. *Helps to stabilize blood sugar and reduce cravings. Yes, even if it is bacon or sausage. They are not the *best* choice but it is *better* than choosing to not eat any.
- *Choose* "two colors" (fruit or vegetable) for **each** meal. *Specific vitamins are found from each color and are necessary for body functioning. TIP: Focus more on what you're trying to **add** and less on what you are trying to **avoid**.
- *Eat* breakfast. It does not have to be typical breakfast food. *This jump starts the metabolism and boosts mental function.
- *Go no longer* than four hours without eating. *Keeps blood sugar stable, maintains metabolism and reduces over-eating.
- *Reduce* consumption of bag in a box, prepackaged foods. *Fillers and preservatives are not natural to the body and can greatly affect metabolism.
- *Be skeptical* of artificial sweeteners. *Numerous studies show (multiple) possible harmful effects. Also they seem to create *more hunger* when the sweetness is introduced without the calories.
- *Decrease* your dependence on sugar. *Pay attention to the sugar content of what you eat or drink and actively seek to reduce your daily consumption.
- *Reduce* saturated fat sources and *increase* intake of healthy fats. *Fat is a necessary nutrient. However too much of the wrong kinds are harmful.
- *Consider* supplementing with a multi-vitamin and fish oil supplement. *Vitamins from food are best. At times though, most people will be deficient in getting what they need from diet alone. (Consult with your doctor for what is right for you.)
- *Choose* to get 20 minutes of direct sunlight daily (without sunscreen). *This is how your body absorbs Vitamin D which is essential to body functioning. Many people are becoming Vitamin D deficient.

The bottom line is: What we eat, directly affects our health. Each choice we make is vital. Plan your choices *carefully* and

intentionally. Often when you do not make **plans** and **provision** for healthier living, you will make poor choices simply out of convenience. So, this week ***make a plan, prepare ahead of time*** to have what you need to carryout your plan and finally, ***incorporate*** these healthy eating suggestions into your routine. Make each choice count!