

Now What?

By Lisa Schilling RN

Many people list the goal of weight loss, on their list of reasons to exercise. This is a valid reason to start a wellness program. However, it tends to not be a strong enough motivator unless combined with other more pressing factors. This has to do with our personal comfort levels. Every behavior or habit that we repeat is embedded in some level of a payoff. For some the payoff is simply comfort or pleasure. For others, the payoff may be feedback from peers or loved ones. Most of the negative health habits we keep are based in comfort. We do what we feel like doing and what is most convenient, especially when we lack multiple motivators.

To reach the goal of weight loss, you must first clearly decide why losing weight is more important than continuing the comfort of your regular habits. Make no mistake, there is comfort in the familiar and to change that will take some hearty motivation and discipline. When you decide, “This is it, I am done! I am going to change my weight and my habits.” Then you are ready to start Phase I.

Phase I weight loss involves developing an exercise introduction plan. It can take from 4 to 8 weeks to establish this phase. It is a way of easing you into a new routine. The reasons are two-fold. First you want to avoid burning-out and second you want to avoid injury. Starting slow and gradually building by 10% weekly is the smartest way to lose weight and keep it off. Is it the fastest? No, but it has the greatest probability of becoming a lifelong change. When you create a gradual progression of exercise, you will build upon each success until you have comfortably made exercise a part of your lifestyle. This is very important! If exercise does not become part of your lifestyle, you will be doomed to repeat your past failures. When treated like a temporary solution, exercise serves as

nothing more than a band-aid on a large wound that needs stitches. Building a program that makes exercise part of your lifestyle, making it “just something you do,” is paramount to lifelong maintenance of health and weight loss.

Phase II weight loss involves developing a peak weight loss routine. In this phase you have established a solid exercise routine and have been committed to sticking with it. Now is the time to ramp up your efforts. This means committing more time to cardio-exercise in your target heart rate. You will need to increase the number of days you exercise, the number of minutes and the intensity. Sound tough? It is, if weight loss were easy we would all be thin. You will also need to begin increasing the amount of weight you use during resistance training. It becomes even more important to keep challenging your muscles to work harder for you. A minimum of two full-body workouts per week will be necessary. This targeted peak-routine will need to continue until you meet your goal. Ouch-I know that seems harsh, but there are no rose-colored glasses here. If you want Biggest Loser type results then you will need to put in Biggest Loser type efforts. This goes back to “How bad do you want this?” If the motivation to work hard is not there, you may want to save yourself the aggravation, or better yet—find a motivator and get to it!

Phase III weight-loss is maintenance. Once you achieve your goal you will have to keep exercising to maintain it. The good news is that you can scale back from the Phase II peak stage. The general recommendation for health is 120 minutes per week of physical exercise. That would be 30 minutes 4 times a week. Most people find that to be very achievable. The trick is making it a regular and non-negotiable part of your lifestyle. Remember for weight loss to be life-long, exercise will need to become—“just something you do.”

Wellness is like a three legged stool. It consists of nutrition, cardiovascular exercise and resistance training. Kick one of the legs out from under the stool and you know what will happen. The same will happen to your efforts if you do not incorporate all three areas into your wellness plan. This week I have focused on cardio and resistance training, next week I will discuss the role of nutrition. Now is the time to evaluate what changes you are willing to make to improve your life and health!