
The Beacon

Guiding You Through the Process of Change

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Basic Steps to Healthier Living

In the midst of managing a busy life, it is easy to forget some basic principles of healthy living. There is the daily grind of work and career, juggling the needs of children, struggling to make ends meet financially, and caring for extended family members. It can leave a person almost gasping for breath, able to do little more than tumble into bed at night, only to wake up the next morning to get back on the figurative treadmill and do the whole thing over again. The thought of finding the time to eat properly, exercise, and engage in fun and stimulating activities feels like added pressure in a schedule that is already packed to the brim.

What is missing is the recognition that failure to take care of oneself in a sustained, mindful manner creates a person who becomes increasingly depleted. A depleted person is ill equipped to care for others, manage demanding careers, or make sound financial decisions. That person comes to wonder why they feel tired all the time, why their life seems boring or uninteresting, why talking to a spouse or friend or coworker feels unduly burdensome, or why they just want to go to sleep.

It is necessary to expend energy if one is going to take care of oneself. Many people wonder, "How can I expend even more energy on taking care of myself when my lack of energy is the problem?" Simply put, it is a matter of changing the focus of where the energy is spent, not necessarily expending more energy. The first step is to make positive self-care a priority. Start with your basic physical needs; if these are off track, further progress will be nearly impossible. Make sure you sleep at least 7 hours each night and try to keep your weekend sleep schedule similar to your weekday sleep schedule. Eat three reasonable healthy meals, mindful of having proteins,

carbohydrates, and healthy fats at every meal. If you are unsure of your nutrition intake, take a vitamin supplement (with your physician's consent) > Move your body with some regularity throughout the week. It doesn't matter whether you run, bike, dance, do yoga, houseclean, or walk up and down the stairs in your office building. Your activities should be varied, a regular part of your schedule and enjoyable. And don't forget relaxation, a chance for your body and mind to rest and rejuvenate. The choice of relaxing activity is up to you. Read a magazine, watch a football game, take a drive, play a game with your children, prune a hedge, or meditate. The key is that you maintain awareness that you are taking care of yourself while you are engaging in this relaxing activity. This awareness can help the rejuvenation process.

Some people feel they are too stressed to do even these simple, basic tasks. They say that they know they should eat better, exercise more, and take time to relax, but they are too busy with work, have children's needs that come first, have too many responsibilities, or find it's just too hard to make changes. Try making changes one at a time. For example, for one week, only work on getting to sleep at a reasonable time, and don't worry about eating well or exercising. Once you establish a better sleep routine, pick another area of change and work on that for the next week. If you keep to this simple schedule, within a month's time you will have been able to establish healthier habits in the four areas, with a minimum of personal discomfort and stress. You will be surprised at how taking some basic steps to healthier living can provide you with renewed energy to cope with work, family, finances, and many other curveballs life will send your way.

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