

Change can be an excruciatingly slow process for many people. It can be particularly agonizing for those who are interested in losing weight and getting healthy. For these people, change seems like the impossible dream.

Even though it may seem that way when you are in the middle of this battle of the bulge, change is only a matter of time. For those who can handle the wait, a fitter body and healthier life is the payoff at the end of this long and winding road.

The problem is this: the force of habit is always working against change. As a matter of fact, habit is the enemy of change. Habit has a way of putting you to sleep and robbing you of the belief that change is possible. I'm reminded of a story I once read about frogs. It's a bit gruesome but it makes a powerful point. As I remember it, the story states that if you put a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out to escape the danger. However, if you put a frog in a kettle that is filled with cool and pleasant water, and then you gradually heat the kettle until it starts boiling, the frog will not become aware of the threat until it is too late.

The same can be said for the slow process of putting on excess weight. Many of these people are also unaware of the threat until it's too late. That's why it's so important, if you are overweight, to address this issue now!

The story of the frog, even though a bit ghastly, demonstrates how some people get themselves into trouble as well. Weight gain, like warming the cool and pleasant water in the kettle, is a slow and rather unnoticeable occurrence. Gaining weight slowly over months and years, as many of you can attest, has a way of catching up to you before you know it. I hear this all the time from people. They make comments like, "One day I looked in the mirror and I didn't even recognize the person looking back at me!"

Like the frog, once these people realize they are in trouble, they are too far down the road to simply jump out of the kettle and find instant change. As I said in my opening sentence, change can be an excruciatingly slow process for many people. Many people just want to jump out of the pot and have instant weight loss. Unfortunately, that just isn't going to happen. Weight loss, just like weight gain, takes time and many people just can't handle the wait! As that famous singer Tom Petty once wrote, "The waiting is the hardest part!"

Albert Einstein offered an interesting idea about "time" in a concept he called the "space-time illusion." It has to do with how we interpret and estimate the passage of time. This concept revolves around two different types of time. Einstein referred to them as "linear" time and "subjective" time. In short, "linear" time is that which can be objectively measured. A clock, for example, is a good measure of linear time. "Subjective" time, on the other hand, doesn't lend itself to objective measurement. It is totally dependent on the experience and the state of mind of each individual.

In explaining the difference, Einstein is quoted as saying "Spending a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour, while spending an hour with a beautiful girl seems like a minute." What he was implying was that your perception of the passage of time, depends

on the situation you're in. If you are bored, for example, time seems to drag; if you have a deadline to meet, time is running out; if you are having great fun, time flies and if you are trying to lose weight, time simply doesn't pass quickly enough.

So to those of you wanting to lose weight and get healthy, here's a reality check. It's going to take some time to make that happen. Unlike the frog and the boiling water you simply can't just jump of this kettle you now find yourself in and find immediate change. Choose wisely and make healthy choices and, eventually, you will leap with joy!

I have a great suggestion to offer you today that will help those of you who struggle with Mindless Emotional Eating. I call that the MEE syndrome and I'm sure that many of you can identify with this behavior.

Mindless Emotional Eating is the cornerstone of weight gain. The key to solving this problem is to become more mindful and less mindless about the health choices you make. With that in mind, here is an idea that can help make that happen.

I received a plea from a desperate eDieter frustrated over her inability to stop eating candy bars. They were Snickers candy bars to be specific. She ended her message with the following request: "Dr. Sklare, can you please show me a way to shift gears when that Snickers candy bar is calling my name?" Well, never fear... Dr. Sklare is here!

The core of her difficulty is that she is fixating on the very thing she is trying to avoid. And, as research and experience has taught us, the more you focus on something, the more mind-consuming it becomes. What she really needs is a distraction strategy that will help shift her attention away from eating that candy bar and interrupt her temporary mental obsession. Her situation brought to mind a creative exercise I wrote about some time ago. I offer it again for your consideration.

It is said that if you can distract yourself for as little as a few minutes your craving for food will pass. Activities that divert your attention away from food are what are called distraction strategies. Reading a book, taking a walk and listening to music are typical distraction strategies that many people employ.

Along those lines, I have an idea for a distraction strategy that will divert your attention, disconnect you from that burning desire of the moment and help you to focus on healthier thinking. You'll need a pen and a piece of paper for this. I call it The Health Jumble. Here's how it works.

Let's say, as in the case of the eDieter above, it's a Snickers candy bar that is calling your name. Write the word "Snickers candy bar" on a piece of paper and then see how many other words you can create with those letters. For example there's rice, nice, niece, I, cab, can, earn, be, break and skinny -- to name just a few. Just approach this exercise as you would the jumble in your local newspaper and see how many new words you can create out of all of those letters.

Then, after you have written as many words as possible, see how many "healthy sentences" or "positive statements" you can make by combining those words. For example, four of the words that I created above combine to create the sentence, "I can be skinny!"

The idea here is threefold: 1) this activity allows you to face and confront your temptation; 2) it provides you with a way to engage that temptation in a safe, healthy and positive way; and 3) by creating the words and developing the sentence, you manipulate, defuse and totally reframe that temptation.

Repetition gives birth to habit. This activity is intended to interrupt that habitual and repetitive cycle of Mindless Emotional Eating. The bottom line is this: To successfully manage your weight, you must address more than just your body. You must also address your mind. The Health Jumble will provide you with a distraction strategy that will change the way you respond to temptation by helping you to become more mindful and less mindless about the health choices that you make.
