

Change is a process

From the book *Personal Stability Model*

We need to be aware that lifestyle change is not just about recreation and diet. These are the first activities we think about, because activity and nutrition increase our vitality and well-being. To make a lifestyle change, we need to make a decision. Only by deciding to break the current pattern and to start introducing a new pattern into our lives will we be empowered to become proactive in finding solutions and to trust ourselves that we can do it.

Some people decide to change their behavior because they are afraid of the disease or that their health could deteriorate. Whether it is fear or personal motivation, it is important to be aware of what can affect our health, both positively and negatively, to get the information we need, to set goals and to create a new pattern of behavior or lifestyle that fits in with our own vision and self-image. It is important to be gentle with ourselves, because change does not have to happen overnight. Some people achieve change in a few months, some in a few years.

When I look at my journey to stop over-consuming sweets, I see that I have gone through certain stages. The first phase was denial of the possible bad effects of this habit. After all, a young body can do a lot of things and the negative effects of bad habits show up much later. So, there was 'no need' to change the habit, because I was healthy, slim, vital. Then came the phase of intentional or unintentional acquisition of information about healthy eating, which can take a longer period of time - depending on the individual's decision-making style. Nutrition advisors advise against excessive consumption of simple sweets, as they contain sugars, simple carbohydrates, unhealthy fats, and lack vital nutrients for our bodies. Sure, they give us instant energy, but before long we are hungry again, and in bad mood, and therefore in search of a 'new dose'.

When the doctor also mentioned that it would be a good idea to reduce my intake of sweets, the third phase came when I started to think more deeply about what I was actually getting from this diet, why I needed sweets and which healthier option could replace it. We know that the brain needs sugar, there is no doubt about that. But it is the foods we get that sugar from that are important. I have finally started to realize that there are 'healthy sweet treats' such as bananas, dates, grapes, melons. This fourth phase took some time and involved alternating good and bad sweets. I still reached for chocolate, but I did not eat the whole 400 g Milka in one go. I still bought boxes of biscuits, but I did not eat a whole box of biscuits in one go. I ate bananas, melons, dates, grapes, figs and banana-spinach smoothies more and more often. As my body got used to these foods, the need for unhealthy sweets decreased. Then came the fifth phase, when I started to change my whole diet. It was like my body was now telling me what it wanted for my health, I just had to pay attention.

The whole journey from when I became aware of unhealthy eating to healthy eating habits took two years. I was patient, I was persistent, I did not beat myself up. I trusted that I would achieve my goal. The road to achievement gave me an extra sense of purpose and I was happy that my value of health was increasingly becoming my virtue. On the road to transformation, I found the right books on nutrition and health, a web page advertising a healthy eating course opened up, I volunteered to help grow vegetables in the garden - when you have the right desire, the whole of creation is working to make it happen, you just have to be alert and open to see the opportunities. If there are negative people in your orbit telling you that you will not succeed or belittling your efforts, do not pay attention. Increase your inner strength by attracting people who encourage and support you. Keep your goal in your mind and heart - see and feel it as if it has already been achieved. Along the way, you may be looking for excuses to continue your unhealthy lifestyle. One excuse might be: ... *because I don't see the problem with ...* But, as I said before, the young body can do a lot of things and the symptoms show up on the outside later. It is good to be aware of your own values, and if one of your values is health, ask yourself whether you are really actively looking after your health or whether these are just empty words. Another justification might be: ... *because I am going to start next month ...* Procrastination is caused by lack of decision and lack of confidence. If you find it difficult to make decisions, be aware that without decisions there is no change. Make a decision first, then follow through. When you make a decision, you take responsibility for your life and do not look elsewhere

for the culprits. A third justification might be: ... *because I don't think I can do it* ... Some say courage is a personality trait, some say it is a virtue.

Author Brene Brown says that courage is a skill. And skill can be developed. Realize that the power is in you and in the present moment. The fourth apology might be: ... *because I would lose friends* ... It is true that we gather like-minded people in our lives. But as we change, so does our consciousness. When we are no longer on the same level of consciousness with our friends, divergences occur. New people appear to support and encourage us. True friends will stay by our side, but jealous friends will get in our way. The next apology might be: ... *because I would miss that feeling of satisfaction* ... The feeling of satisfaction that comes from a stimulus is short-lived. When the power of the stimulus weakens, so does the satisfaction. It is right to seek and reconnect with the inner contentment, the joy, the gladness that is within us and that does not need external stimuli. It is not wrong, however, to have external stimuli that bring us joy alongside our inner contentment, but they should be healthful.

The next justification might be: ... *because I am afraid of a withdrawal crisis* ... If you decide to eat less sweets or to stop smoking, drinking, overeating, a withdrawal crisis may occur. I remember that when I reduced my coffee intake, I had a headache for four days, I was sleepy all the time. Because I had read about it, I knew that this was to be expected and I was aware that I was going through a withdrawal crisis that would soon end. Smokers also go through short-term withdrawal crises with withdrawal symptoms. Some even say that they do not feel the crises at all. If you are planning to make changes that require you to alter your intake of certain foods or substances, find out as much information as you can about what to expect and consult your doctor. Advice and information will help you to overcome your fear. The next excuse might be: ... *because I don't know how to go about it* ... There are many support groups that can help you and where you can get information.

But the first step is always your decision and taking responsibility. Once you have a purpose that leads you to achievement, trust yourself and know that you deserve it - you are worthy of achieving it. And one more belief or justification may be holding you back: ... *because the goal is too far away*... It will help you to think of the achievement, i.e. what you want to achieve (reduce your intake of certain foods, stop smoking, stop drinking, become more confident, lose or gain weight, make lifestyle changes, etc.), as having already been achieved. Visualize that you have already achieved the desired change. You should also feel positive about it. If you feel anxious or reluctant, know that this is because you may not trust yourself at the moment, that you do not believe that you will succeed. Do not push these thoughts away aggressively, breathe, ask yourself if these thoughts are even yours. Or maybe they are just remnants of what you were told as a child.

Resentment can also be an obstacle to making life changes. We think that others are to blame for the problems we have: my father smoked when I was a child and I got used to the smoke; my grandmother fed me sweets all the time; my parents didn't give me money for sports lessons, etc. But resentment can become a source of chronic stress that weakens the immune system and makes a person more susceptible to certain illnesses. Resentment is the result of a lack of acceptance of responsibility and of blaming other people. If we do not become proactive in 'dissolving resentment', headaches, migraines, bone and muscle pain occur. So, which path will you choose? Probably the path of letting go of resentment, stepping out of the victim role and proactively taking responsibility, which will lead you to a lifestyle change and a better sense of wellbeing. Make sure you have the resources - material costs, psychological strength, mental energy, physical strength. Do not terrorize yourself, know where you are going, know that you are worthy of this change and trust that there will be people, books, programs, advice to help you on your way.

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