

An unhealthy focus on a healthy life



There is only one question you need to ask yourself when you consider making any change to be healthier.

Is my desire to change based on fear, or love?

Many of our attempts to eat well, exercise, and to generally live a healthy life are actually based in fear when we look closer. I've found that the more time and effort someone puts into a health endeavor (such as finding the optimal diet), often the more motivated they are by fear. If you follow some popular health and fitness blogs, the messages are clear: Eat (insert optimal diet here i.e. vegan, low-fat, etc) to prevent chronic illness and disease. Exercise (insert activity and intensity) to prevent dying early or debilitation.

The problem with coming from a fear based perspective is that you are setting yourself up for added stress even as you attempt to live a healthier life, with all the benefits it has to offer. Being fanatical about a strict diet or exercise regimen is identifying with a certain set of behaviors so much that without them, you don't know who you are. There are all kinds of programs out there to help you stick to positive changes, and many focus on learning to identify yourself as "someone who doesn't eat cake" or "someone who loves to be active". But the problem is that if you do end up eating that piece of cake, or staying at home to watch TV instead of

hitting the gym, you end up feeling like you did something wrong that you have to make up for the next day. How many times have we all thought that working out extra hard the day following an indulgence would counteract it? Not only does our metabolism *not* work that way, but that mindset reinforces our fear that there is always a perfect decision we should have made, that we failed to make.

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It's a life-changing and literally brain-altering experience to come from a place of love when you make your lifestyle choices. If you choose to eat healthy, do so because you love the flavor of the food and how it nourishes your body. When you decide to lift weights at the gym, do so because it exhilarates you to witness your own strength and progress. Find joy in each healthy behavior, not because it is helping you change how you look physically or is preventing a disease, but simply because each of these behaviors is an expression of self-love. It's no different than reading a sweet child a bedtime story and tucking him in with his teddy bear. That's how loving you want to be with yourself when you are on a journey of healthy living.

When you do experience a "setback" or "relapse", which is essentially engaging in a behavior that ultimately does not serve your higher purpose, do it with love. This sounds somewhat paradoxical, because how can it be self-loving to indulge in a behavior you have pre-identified as harmful to your health? The answer is that no single behavior in and of itself is healthy or harmful. Every choice you make occurs in

a context. Eating spinach is healthy, but only if you are eating plenty of other things as well. A spinach-only diet would lead to malnutrition pretty quickly! Eating birthday cake might lead to some unfavorable hormone and blood sugar fluctuations temporarily, but if this is an occasional treat then you can trust your body will recover and suffer no ill effect from a once-in-a-while indulgence. As long as your overall context for your choices is love, you can feel comfortable that any choice you make will be aligned with the healthy life you truly want.

I encourage you to evaluate your health behaviors and investigate whether you tend to approach them from love or fear. For those that are rooted in fear, how can you be more loving towards yourself as you make a change? Apply this question to other areas of your life, and you might just find that health is the natural outcome of love itself.