

CAN I ACTUALLY LOSE WEIGHT?

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

This is a long one and the topic may not appeal to many readers, so just don't bother reading if this is a touchy subject or you don't have the time.

I have tried all kinds of diets over the years, my favorite always being fasting, at least for a short time. Let's start there. I fast for a few days, eating almost nothing and drinking lots of fluids, feel a lot better, and gradually introduce food again. I always lose a few pounds, trim down a bit, and am pretty happy with myself for that. The problem is that after I start eating again I kind of go into zombie mode and before long I am eating at least as much as I was before and sometimes more. Somehow I zone out. I forget.

I know that there are lots of different kinds of diets and I have tried probably too many of them with not great results. Of course, if there is any equipment to buy (a juicer, yoga mats, etc.), I buy it all. I love to spend money on things that are supposed to do what only I can do or help me get there. I would rather read more about something than actually do it.

Years ago one of my spiritual teachers, a Unity minister from Detroit, told me that the average mind can only keep to a willful thought in mind for as long as the human being can stay awake, which is something like three days. I don't know if that is true or not but I do know that after about three days in any diet direction I seem to start cutting myself slack and stop eating to live and go right back to living to eat.

Let's face it. As I get older, food and eating seems to take on a larger role in my life. When I was younger I even used to forget to eat, but these years I look forward to meals like a clock watcher. I don't miss a one.

And I used to be smaller and taller. Can you believe it, I think I have shrunk at least an inch in height as I have grown older and as for gaining weight, well yeah. For the longest time I was exactly 136 pounds, year in and year out. Then sometime in my late thirties I began to very gradually gain weight and I didn't even have any babies! I don't know how that works. It just happened.

It did not happen to my wife. She is on it. It seems that women are much more aware of weight than men and take steps to control it. We men just kind of slide down that slippery slope and are almost proud of it. As a devoted student of esoteric philosophy I can remember reading that in some traditions you can't be really accepted into the inner work unless you were married and (believe it or not) had a pot belly. Well, I am ready for some esoteric initiation folks, but let me get back to losing weight here.

I like to think that I am halfway intelligent, but when it comes to learning about things that really matter, like living healthily and being smaller than larger, I never seem to learn until the last dog dies. I try everything else but the obvious solution. I look for every back way out instead of what intellectually I know is right. How intelligent is that?

With me fad diets and (in fact) any diet never lasts long. I start out strong but before I know it (and I really mean before I realize it) I am right back where I started from... or worse. How does

that happen? How do I fall back to the sleep of eating too much? Well I believe I finally understand the process and that understanding is more than three days old so maybe I have.

I pointed out earlier that I am a slow learner in these things. That means I don't give up habits that are bad for me by intellectual persuasion or any other way until I am at death's door. A bad habit (smoking, drinking, overeating, etc.) has to present the clear choice to me of feeling really rotten almost every time I do it as opposed to feeling better (or at least not worse) if I don't do it. As I get older I am settling more of the time to feeling just OK rather than really good. Feeling OK is what used to be feeling good. I digress, but I am getting around to talking about what actually does seem to work for me and here it is:

I can't just do a diet and put it on automatic pilot and trust myself that it will continue. It doesn't. As mentioned, before I realize it I have allowed myself (degree by degree) to slip back right where I used to be. With diets it is easy to see. I start out strong. I don't eat or I eat just a little. Sometimes I tell myself that I will eat just what fills this or that bowl and no more, whatever I can place in that bowl.

Then, before I know it I am piling that bowl high like a mini-mountain and declaring that fair game. Fair game? Who said so? Who am I kidding? Whatever the case, before I know it I am back on three square meals a day and probably some snacks. I don't have space here to really go into snacking but I will just say it is diabolical. I can't seem to pass through the kitchen without having a bit of this or a bit of that and before I know it I am passing through the kitchen like: all the time. Here is my funniest story on snacking.

I began to notice that I was having some kind of rash. It first appeared on my arms and then across my chest. What could this be? I blamed it on the loofah sponge I was using and had read somewhere that these things can pick up bacteria or something that can give a skin rash. Well, that sponge left the bathroom in a hurry. But my rash didn't stop. In fact it got worse until it looked more like I had the measles or something. And on it went.

Well, I finally found out what was the cause and it was not the poor loofah. It was a severe case of snacking. I had gotten in the habit of eating a few potato chips every little while during the day. You know, not a lot, not like a bowlful, but more like a handful as I passed by them in the kitchen. But I passed by them a lot and because they were so few each time I never thought anything about it. As it turns out it was the salt that was doing it. My poor body was getting so much salt that it was coming out my skin. The moment I stopped eating the chips, the rash vanished. This is how unaware I can be of my eating habits. Anyway after all these years I finally feel that I have found a diet method that works and it is simple but difficult.

I mentioned earlier that for me breaking any bad habit has to include making a conscious choice not to do the bad habit because "not-to-do-it" feels better than to do it. I have to have a payoff and that payoff has to feel obviously better than continuing in the habit. That is the only way I know how to quit something and with eating this is especially true. And here's the thing: I have to have a mind to give up the extra eating. In other words, I have to be aware or mindful each time the compulsion to eat arise and it arises all the time.

If I am in the kitchen and see any kind of food, without even thinking about it, my instinct is to eat just a little bit of this or that. And so it goes. But if I am mindful, I pass the food by. But let's talk about what mindful means in the case of not-eating. If by mindful I mean policing myself, that does not work. Policing is just a task and sooner or later you are off work and ignoring the task. It happens every time with me.

Bossing myself, whether intellectually or physically only goes so far and is then forgotten. Mindfulness is not policing. Mindfulness is remembering exactly why I am doing whatever it is I am doing from the very beginning when I resolved to do it. With food, mindfulness involves actually remembering what my original choice to not eat so much involved, going back to my initial decision to cut back. When I am aware once again that I choose to feel better, thinner, and happier over the sluggishness of overeating and all that it involves, then I am being mindful. That is mindfulness.

If I just go on autopilot and try to police myself into not eating, sooner or later I have coerced the policeman in me into eating with me and then the whole cycle starts all over again. I wake up weeks or months later to the same problem. I have once again slipped backed into the sleep of eating and eating and eating without a blink.

And overeating is not pleasant. It is not just getting fat or carrying around a medicine ball in my gut all day that I object to. It is the loss of energy this entails. I like to overeat when I eat and then I get really, really tired and want to take a nap which is not a good combination. Before I know it my day is punctuated with eating and then napping, not to mention the time spent going to sleep and the waking back up. Mostly I don't feel very good from this syndrome.

Mindfulness has turned out (at least for me) to be the key and I mean being really aware and catching myself the moment the thought to eat occurs. My wonderful Tibetan teacher gives this example:

The time to keep the pig out of the garden is when he first pokes his nose through the picket fence. That is when you smack him on the nose. Once he gets into the garden you can only chase him around and around until he can calm down enough to find his way out. It is too late once he gets in. Mindfulness is like that. You have to catch the impulse to eat early.

Being mindful for me means going over the reasons I am not going to eat at each instance of wanting to eat and this means like almost all the time to begin with. I am not forcing myself not to eat, but remembering why I don't want to over eat and going through the reasons until I actually do remember again, until I have it in mind. That works for me. If I don't do that, pretty soon I zone out and wake up months later fatter and not feeling all that good.

Of course, those readers who know me know that I study and learn mindfulness through the traditional Zen or Tibetan Buddhist methods of mind training. All I can say is that this particular technique works, at least in my case. Sorry this is so long. Please join me in this conversation. For those who want to read about mind training, it is the first title here:

<http://astrologysoftware.com/books/index.asp?orig>

Photo: My Calla Lillies are still happy. Winter still hold on here and spring has not come. More snow over this last weekend. I have spent some time cleaning an extra office room and making it easier to take photos in, so I have kept busy.

