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How to Make Weight Loss LAST: Essential Ingredients.

"I've failed at losing weight so many times... how can I make a lifestyle change that will last?" This is a question I hear over and over from potential clients. Many people know how to lose weight; they know how to get started on a healthy lifestyle transformation. What they can't figure out, is how to make these changes stick.

If you aren't incorporating the necessary components, efforts to lose weight or rein in emotional eating can become part of a vicious self-defeating cycle. No one wants to start a program, fall off track, feel defeated, resort to the old self-defeating habits (like overeating for comfort or stress-relief) and then feel like you are back at square one all over again. Unfortunately, this happens a lot.

There are key ingredients you MUST incorporate if you want to create an effective recipe for weight loss success. Once you understand the importance of these concepts, you can create specific strategies and approaches that will work for you and that will fit your life, your needs, and your preferences. These four essential ingredients are very powerful, and when used consistently, they will impact your life and your ability to achieve your goals in a much deeper and more effective way than any diet every will.

A powerful approach to permanently changing your relationship with food and health must include these crucial ingredients...

1. Structure: When you are working to change the way you eat or begin an exercise plan, including structure is an important way to keep things in action and to create a routine. Especially in the beginning, you will benefit from some kind of schedule or plan that tells you what needs to happen when. Examples of structures might be committing to a class, setting a recurring appointment to meet with a friend, pre-planning your menus and mealtimes, or setting up a consistent appointment with a coach or a specialist. What you want to do is pick the most challenging part of your new plan and find a way to structure it. This is an especially helpful ingredient if you are someone who is busy and juggling many responsibilities.

Setting your structure creates a routine. Routines simplify your decision making. For example, a client recently signed up for a belly dancing class that meets twice a week for six weeks. By making one decision, she structured twelve workouts for herself. She now knows what (belly dancing classes) she will do when. If she didn't have the structure of the class, each day she might have to make a new decision (or not) about what her workout would be and when she would do it. Without a structure, each day is a unique challenge and a new set of decisions. The more decisions you face, the greater the potential for not following through.

Pre-plan and pre-schedule your most challenging activities. Don't neglect to decide when you are going to do that workout or grocery shopping or meal planning! Implementing structure is essential, because you can have all the best tools at your fingertips, but if you aren't finding the time to take action, those tools will do you no good.

2. Motivation: Most people who've been around the block a few times with food and weight struggles worry about their ability to stay motivated. Building motivation into your plan from the very beginning is one of the most valuable things that you can do. As you are developing your plan of action, it's important to ask yourself what you will need to stay motivated. Have you planned in rewards or small milestones to acknowledge along the way? What will make the journey more enjoyable and one that you will want to continue?

One of my clients created a great solution for monitoring her motivation. Each Sunday she evaluates her plan for the coming week, and as a part of that process, she rates her motivation and asks herself what she needs to tweak, adjust, or add so that she will keep moving toward her goals over the next seven days. She doesn't take motivation for granted.

Another motivation factor to consider, which many people neglect, is whether you are creating a lifestyle plan that will work for you. Don't expect yourself to eat food that you hate, or exercise in a way that just doesn't match your style, your schedule, or your preferences. One of the most powerful things you can do to enhance your motivation is to create an individualized plan that won't fail you. This means having



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a plan that feeds you—that is responsive to your needs and desires. What does this mean? It means that to curb overeating you must look at what overeating is helping you cope with and start to include some alternative ways to help yourself with those situations.

If you want to stop using food to meet your emotional needs, or as a way to respond to stress, or as a reward or celebration, you won't stay motivated to do so unless you decide what you are going to do instead to address those needs. It's a simple fact. No one stays motivated if they aren't getting what they need.

3. Accountability: Once you have a plan for action, how do you make sure that you will follow through? Incorporating accountability into your action plan is crucial. It's especially important for busy people who already have a lot on their plate and are trying to establish new habits. If you want to ensure that your new plan doesn't fall off your radar, you need accountability. For each action step, you need to consider: when you are going to follow through (planning your meals or doing the workout or buying the health groceries) and how you will ensure that you do so.

A coach, a support group, or even an online message board can be a great way to create accountability. Publically setting your intention and reporting back afterwards works for many people. Involving someone else in your accountability can be extremely effective. This is one of the main reasons people hire personal trainers and life coaches. Change is difficult and everyone has unhelpful inner critics that can sabotage us and lead us off track. Something I frequently do for my clients is to point out how they are getting in their own way—and help them figure out how to get back in action. One of the most powerful ingredients for change is having someone in your corner who holds your agenda for you and gently, but firmly, helps you stick to it.

4. Support. Support may be the most important ingredient for creating lasting weight change. Everyone hits rough patches, gets stuck, and faces challenges and lapses in motivation. Your support system is what you can lean on—what supports you—when you can't provide yourself all the gusto that you need. The right support system can even assist you with structuring your plan, and providing motivation and accountability. In fact, a good support system can help you create (and keep creating) your winning plan for success. Support is not simply people who care about you. The support I'm describing here is active and should include people who understand your goals and who are ready and willing to step in to help you succeed.

Support takes many forms. Your support system might include a group, a close friend, a mentor or coach. What you need from your support system will vary. Whether you will

benefit from a partner in action, gentle encouragement, reminders, or someone you trust who will tell you the hard truth when you need to hear it, it's important to find a responsive system that fits the bill. When you have a solid system of support, you've broadened your resources. You've created a team approach. A support system fills in the cracks and provides the necessary elements that you aren't able to provide yourself.

The most overlooked component of weight loss success is the endurance factor. Meaningful weight loss is weight loss that lasts. By incorporating these four essential ingredients, you'll be well on your way to building a solid foundation for a permanent healthy lifestyle change. •



about dr. mcreery...

Melissa McCreery, Ph.D., ACC is a Psychologist, certified Life Coach, and the founder of www.TooMuchOnHerPlate.com where she helps smart, savvy, busy women stop struggling with food, weight, and overwhelm. Visit her site to download a free audio e-course:

"5 Simple Steps to Move Beyond Overwhelm With Food and Life."

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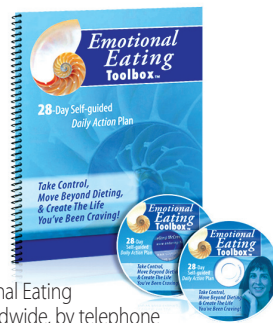
- Take charge of overeating
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Melissa McCreery, Ph.D., ACC, is a Licensed Psychologist and Internationally Certified Life Coach with specific expertise in helping people end struggles with overeating and weight loss and make changes that last.

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