

I was fat: Oggie told me so.

"You're getting fat," said this lean, beautifully sculpted, water polo player to me during my freshman year of college. Thanks for the newsflash, Oggie.

It was incomprehensible that this could happen to me! I swam 45 minutes every day! I trekked up and down millions of stairs on campus and rode my bike every week. Plus, I was eating healthy: granola for breakfast, salads at lunch and dinner, and carrot sticks for snacks.

Many active people who exercise regularly still struggle with their weight. While health club memberships have risen, so has obesity - one third of Americans are overweight and another third are obese. And just when we were positively sure that exercise was the key to weight loss, *Time Magazine* ran a 2009 Cover Story saying "Exercise Won't Make You Thin."

"Good grief," I thought, and proceeded to dissect and devour every piece of the article. The "skinny" is this: while it's proven that exercise burns calories to help lose weight, it can also stimulate hunger and cause you to eat more, which negates weight-loss benefits. Most people believe that being thin is only a matter of willpower- we can will ourselves to exercise more, and eat less. Some people can do both, but self-control is like a muscle and it weakens every day you use it. So when you push yourself through an hour on the Stair Master, your self-regulatory capacity is proportionately enfeebled. You'll probably feel like eating pizza or pancakes rather than a chicken breast or a salad.

Well, I'd already learned this lesson. When I was losing my "freshman fifteen" that summer, I finally discovered that a bowl of granola has as much fat and calories as a Big Mac, salads are low-calorie only when you skip the cup of grated cheese, candied nuts and high fat dressing, and carrots stop being the perfect snack when you dip them in spoonfuls of peanut butter.

Okay, we can't bank on exercise alone to drop unwanted pounds and what goes into our mouths is doubly important. We must eat more real foods and not eat too much. But, the mind is powerful; and you CAN pay close attention to what you are eating, while utilizing exercise to accomplish your weight loss goals.

Here are my recommendations for getting your brain on board:

Tell yourself you're worth it: You are worth the time, energy and money it costs to be healthy. You'll be at your best when you're taking care of your body. Your self-esteem and self-confidence soar when you eat the right foods and the the right quantity. Exercise boosts your mood and motivates you to stay healthy. If you find your hunger increases on work out days, prepare healthy choices before your work out.

Replace "I can't" with "I can": A supportive, encouraging inner voice is imperative when committing to a healthy plan. Develop a mantra: "I can do it and I will do it." When your inner critic voice pops up, replace self-sabotaging thoughts with positive affirming thoughts.

Know thyself: Increase your self-awareness about how you use food. Are you choosing food to nourish and replenish your body, or to numb anxiety, anger, hurt, and loneliness? If food is how you deal with negative feelings, discover new coping strategies that manage feelings

constructively. Exercise, meditation, yoga and psychotherapy are some of the most effective ways to deal with life's emotional struggles. Engaging in activities that are meaningful to you helps to soothe your emotions.

Let go of the shame: Your self-worth is not measured by the size of your waist. While it can be uncomfortable and embarrassing to be overweight, it doesn't change your value as a person. A self-accepting and self-nurturing attitude will help you be your best, and will continue to foster any changes you want to make for yourself.

Get Support: Acknowledge your weight struggles with family and friends and ask for their help. Tell them specifically what's helpful and what's not. Encouraging, supportive statements are the best way to show someone you believe they can achieve their goals. Sarcasm, joking, and critical comments are counterproductive.

Feeling good is a decision you make for yourself every day and your path will be easiest when you train your brain that "losing is winning!"

Losing Weight? Get Your Brain in the Game

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Successful weight loss means increasing your self-awareness about how you choose and use food.



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