

CUTTING LOOSE

A Biblical Approach to Health and Fitness

GILLIAN TAYLOR



CUTTING LOOSE *A Biblical Approach to Health and Fitness*

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The author is available for: Workshops, presentations, and talks.

Hear, Isra'el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one; 5 and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources. 6 These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; 7 and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead, 9 and write them on the door-frames of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hebrew Names used in this book:

<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>English</u>
Yahweh	God
Adonai	Lord
Yeshua	Jesus
Mashiach (pronounced Ma-SHEE-akh)	Messiah
HaMashiach	the Messiah
Ruakh (also spelled Ruach) (ROO-akh)	Spirit
Ruakh HaKodesh	the Holy Spirit
Tanakh (Ta-NAKH)	Old Testament

In this book, I will refer to Jesus as Yeshua because, quite simply, that is His original Name. I will be using Adonai for Lord and Ruakh HaKodesh for the Holy Spirit.

In the Hebrew language throughout the Scripture, God has many Names which describe His character and who He is. For the purposes of these studies, I will use Yahweh, the Name above all others.

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A Personal Message

Dear Friends in Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah),

You may wonder why I am opening this book about health and fitness with the passage from Deuteronomy. It is for me a plumb line and a constant reminder of the mighty and awesome God whom we serve. As we see the world turn its back on the One True God with mounting hatred, I believe that the time is short and that it is going to get increasingly harder to stand up for our faith.

We live in a world that is obsessed with the self, so if we too live this lifestyle, how can we have our eyes on our Creator God? How can we be living sacrifices? Where is our focus? If we are always tired, struggling to do our daily tasks, or if we dislike our bodies, how can we be living the life that we were created for? My prayer is that through these studies you will be able to see afresh and re-evaluate the uniqueness of His Creation in you and, by so doing, you can then begin to look at your own well-being from a new perspective.

This study book has been a long time coming, in fact, probably about seventeen years. Finally, it took a dear friend to tell me, in no uncertain terms, that if we have learned lessons along the way, then it is our responsibility to pass them on. Indeed, each one of you reading this will have gifts and knowledge that you need to pass on to others, in order to help them in their own spiritual walk.

There may also be those amongst you that do not have such a walk, that are perhaps confused or questioning the very existence of God, Yahweh. I am hoping that for you also, the following pages of study will help you towards finding the answers that you seek.

Introduction

Welcome to *Cutting Loose*. This compilation of study material was never intended to be simply yet another diet and exercise book, but a study to offer a Hebraic Biblical perspective to health and well-being. I suggest that, unless we have a full understanding as to what is going on at a spiritual level, we will generally continue going around in circles.

We are awesomely made, unique, one of a kind, and made in His Image. We were created different sizes and shapes: some tall, some large, some small.

Questions:

- ❖ How should we view our physical wellbeing?
- ❖ Why do so many of us dislike ourselves?
- ❖ Does our physical wellbeing in any way affect our spiritual walk?
- ❖ Whose responsibility is it?
- ❖ Is it alright to resign ourselves to being overweight because “He made me this way”?
- ❖ If exercise “is not my thing” should I concern myself with it?
- ❖ Today we hear much about building self-esteem and confidence, but how do these fit with our spiritual walk?

I hope to respond, at least in part, to some of these issues. The studies will challenge and question what are often quite sensitive issues for many people. But most of all I pray they will inspire, encourage, and support you to make changes that will help you cut loose from the chains that can so easily bind us, so that you may live life to its fullest measure!

My intention is that the studies will help dispel many of the myths associated with health and fitness and identify some of the reasons we so often fail when we attempt to lose weight or improve our fitness. I also intend to give a new perspective to those of you who already enjoy keeping fit and healthy.

It is easy to get confused with the plethora of information on diet and exercise that is available. Without some basic knowledge, it is also easy to be conned into some rather extreme, frequently expensive, and often unhealthy practices that promise quick results. After the initial excitement of “this time it will work,” motivation often wanes and many people fail to maintain what they had set out to achieve, which often results in a downward spiral of self loathing. These types of programmes are generally not focusing on changes to a healthy lifestyle, but rather on a feel good, quick fix.

What are the keys then to success and how do we stay motivated? How do we embrace a healthy lifestyle and how do we lose weight safely and effectively whilst walking strongly on our spiritual journey? We will be looking at all these practical aspects in Part Two. Of most importance is that we begin to understand the Biblical principles behind our approach to these issues and to establish the relationship with our spiritual walk.

I trust and pray that by bringing some of these matters to light, you will perhaps stand back from all you see and hear regarding all the pertinent issues, and reflect on the reality of what it is all about and how it affects you, the individual. It is about empowering you with the knowledge and expertise to enable you to make informed choices and changes and to build firm foundations on which you may stand.

Finally, let us look to Yahweh to instruct and teach. I am simply putting pen to paper and I ask that you test and approve everything that is written. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I have asked, but I am hoping that the studies are sufficient to challenge and make you question and discuss the topics we will be looking at in a new and constructive way.

My people are destroyed for want of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6

But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:26

Preparations

PRAY!!

We will be looking at how to unravel the barriers that can so easily prevent you from living the life God intended, being free of the physical, mental, and practical things that may presently hold you captive. It is vital that we understand how our spiritual walk is connected with both our mental and physical well being, and it takes much effort and emotional strength to change behaviors of a lifetime. So please, it is vital that you spend time in individual prayer prior to starting these studies as well as before each meeting. Allow your Heavenly Father to prepare your heart and mind. Take hold in your heart that:

Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua. Why? Because the Torah of the Spirit, which produces this life in union with Messiah Yeshua has set me free from the “torah” of sin and death

Romans 8:1

Lights**Knowledge through the Word**

The studies will provide you with much information.

Write it down, talk it through, meditate on it, digest it.

Camera**Revelation, when He reveals understanding**

Consider, meditate, dwell upon, pray about, and allow the Ruakh HaKodesh, the

Holy Spirit, to help you understand what He wants you to take on board.

Action**Our response**

Part One

Chasing Rainbows

Study 1 The Biblical Hebraic Perspective

Introduction

You will need:

- Your Bible
- Notepad and pen

For some of you reading this, you may never have heard of a Hebraic perspective before, so let us very quickly summarize why we are using this as our foundation. I am no Biblical scholar nor an academic person, so the following explanation is quite simplistic.

Please read:

Genesis 12:1-2; Exodus 6:6-8; 19:4-5

John 15:18-20; 17:15-16

Roman 12:1-2; I Peter 2:4-5

Luke 2:22-24, 39, 41-42, 45-47; 4:16;

John 7:2, 10; Luke 14:12

Acts 3:1; 17:1-2

Acts 18:18; 21:23-24, 26; 24:14; 25:8; I Cor. 5:8

Consider this. Right from the beginning, we see that Yahweh (God) separated His people: Avram (Abraham), Noach (Noah), Yitz'chak (Isaac) and Ya'acov (Jacob). He separated Israel from the nations and brought them out of Egypt. Within the Brit Hadashah (New Testament), the term Gentile (which in those days would have been referring mostly to Romans and Greeks) is used to represent the world and its ways. We are not speaking in the sense of the country of Greece or city of Rome, but the way of thinking that the historical Greek and Roman cultures brought with them, as opposed to the Jewish way of thinking that Yeshua (Jesus) was born into. Yeshua asks us also to be separated, a people apart, to be in the world but not of it.

Yeshua was brought up in a Jewish household. We read that He attended Synagogue and listened to the Rabbis' teaching. He and His family celebrated the Feasts of Israel. The early church was predominately Jewish people who lived a Hebraic lifestyle, as we see in the verses given. You might say that Peter, after God showed him the sheet, stopped living Hebraicly. But the Biblical Hebraic Law never told the Jews not to go into Gentile homes. In fact, it says to love and be kind to the foreigner that lives among you (Deut. 10:19).

Study 2 Spirit, Soul, and Body

Introduction

You will need:

- Your Bible
- Notepad and pen
- Dictionary

In this second study, we are going to examine the relationship between spirit, soul, and body. Through understanding the complexity of this relationship from a Hebraic perspective, I hope that we may begin to see how our way of thinking and our physical wellbeing interact and how this influences our spiritual walk.

We need first to have a clearer picture of each of the parts that make up the whole.

Please read:

1 Timothy 4:8

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Hebrews 4:12

In the above passages, we see reference to three elements: spirit, soul, and body. The perfect balance to this is evident in our Lord Yeshua and in God the Father, God the Son, and the Ruakh HaKodesh. In the Tanakh, the Old Testament, we also see this reflected in the Tabernacle: the outer courts, the inner temple, and the Holy of Holies.

Discussion

You may wish to discuss this briefly and record pertinent points.

Let us now examine each of these a little closer.

Please read:

Galatians 5:13; 16-26

Proverbs 20:27

Q. If the body fulfills the choice of the will, where does the spirit man fit in?

Please read:

1 Corinthians 2: 9-14

Romans 12:1-2

Q. When we consider now our physical and mental wellbeing, how should knowing the above influence our thinking?

Q. From where should we get our direction, influence, and strength?

Q. In the passage from Romans, how does it suggest we become transformed?

Discussion

If we are in any way cut off from this communion with the Ruakh HaKodesh by our own choice or by things that get in the way, are we simply operating from the soul? We can receive knowledge, but without the help of the Ruakh HaKodesh we cannot spiritually discern or understand, just like the seed that fell into shallow ground. Neither are we likely to make the right decisions, just like the seed that fell among thorns, and we will be open to anything the world teaches us.

How often do we see advertisements for mind and body days, or an evening with a psychic? These are clear examples of operating without Yahweh. Every person is made in His image, but if our spirit is dead to God, then it is liaising with a spirit world not of Yahweh's making, but through the soul, and we end up doing everything in our own strength, or soulishly.

Please read:

John 6:63

John 14:16

Galatians 5:24

And re-read John 10:10

- ❖ We have examined the wonders of His creation of us in His image.
- ❖ We have established that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit and that He lives in us.
- ❖ We have also just established how intricately connected the spirit, soul, and body are.

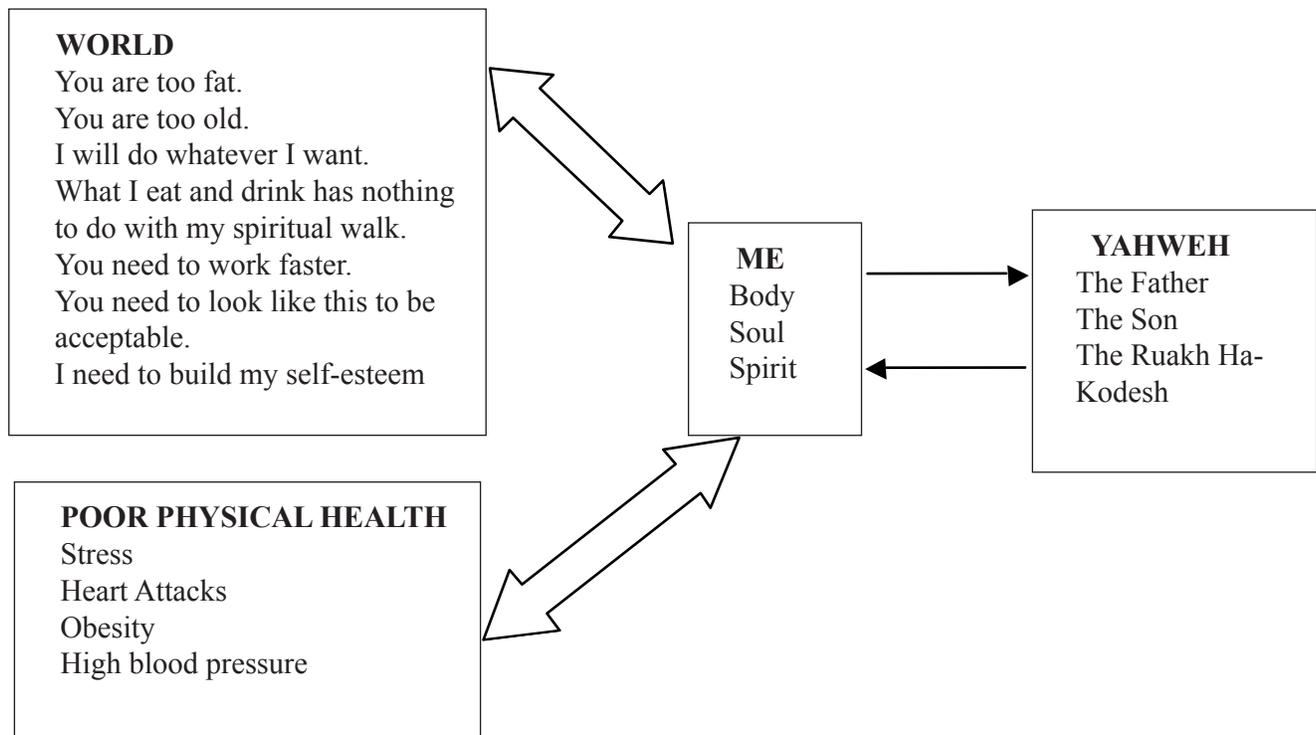
- Q. If our physical being fulfills the will and we have free will to make our own decisions, what influence should the spirit have?
- Q. Could our physical wellbeing impact our spiritual walk?
- Q. Should we care about our physical wellbeing?
- Q. If so, how?
- Q. Are there any areas that you can now identify physically where you might be being held back spiritually?
- Q. With regard to your physical self, your perception of who you are, what you look like, and your health, from where should you seek direction?
- Q. Are you doing all you can to maintain the health and well-being of the Temple?

KEY Q: From where do you seek direction?

KEY Q: Who/what influences you the most?

KEY Q: Are you Diagram A or B?

DIAGRAM A: In your own strength, from the soul.



Study 6 How Do We Move Forward?

In this study, we will consider how to apply what we have already learned. We will look more closely at how the body, soul, and spirit are connected and how this may directly affect our own perspectives. The aim will be to start re-evaluating our own outlook on how we both think and approach our physical and mental well-being and to study what the Scriptures have to say. It is intended that we will then be able to take this forward to the practicalities of our health and fitness program. This study is about drawing together all we have learned so far.

You will need:

- Your Bible
- Notepad and pen
- Sheet of paper from Exercise 1
- Large piece of paper and pen
- Dictionary

We have now established the difficult issues we may have regarding our physical self, how this affects the way we think about ourselves, and how it can impact our spiritual walk. We have also looked at the wider picture. It might be helpful to quickly reflect on what you have learned so far. Briefly jot down on your large piece of paper a few words that summarize the points we have looked at.

Here are a few questions to help you remember:

Q. What are the main issues that concern us about weight and self-esteem?

Q. Where should our focus be?

Q. On what do we base our ideas?

Q. Where do these come from?

Q. What is the spirit of this age?

Please read:

Genesis 1:21-31

Psalms 139:14

Part Two

Firm Foundations

Chapter One - Healthy Lifestyles - What are They and Why Do We Need One?

Consider Matthew 6:19-34

Spend time in prayer. Have a look around you at His amazing Creation, every tiny insect, every intricate flower, every bird in the sky, every majestic mountain and tree, the stars in the heavens and the waves that hit the shore.....you are a part of His Creation and you are so precious to Adonai, so precious that He gave His life for you. In our weakness is His strength, when we have nothing left, He can work in us. Focus your attention on pleasing Him and Him alone and be prepared to take a small step at a time. He *will* release you from the chains that bind..... He *will* cut you loose.

What is a Healthy Lifestyle?

For the purposes of this section, it is all about looking after yourself in the best way possible so that you can, in turn, honour Him. It is about looking after and feeding yourself correctly and about engaging in activities that you find **meaningful**, **purposeful**, and **enjoyable**. It is about reconsidering your body image and building your confidence in who you are as an individual, as you stand before your Master, Yeshua HaMashiach, perfectly created in Him. Keep hold of what we worked through in part one and focus on what you personally would like to work on.

Why is a Healthy Lifestyle Important?

In part one, we looked at whether or not we should be concerned about our physical well-being. Hopefully, you now have a clearer picture as to the “why” behind a healthier lifestyle, for all purposes, spiritual, physical, and mental. The flow chart on the next page illustrates it.

Chapter Two – How Do I Start Making Changes?

All About Change

There is much written in the Scriptures about being pro-active when it comes to our spiritual walk. We are encouraged to run the race, work out our salvation, put in the effort, be determined, and to persevere. We have already established that our spiritual walk should be our priority, but if we also make the right choices in all things, and look after our physical and mental well-being, then we are surely pressing on to the very goal that the author of Philippians is referring to. In order to do this, we need to make choices and decide to commit to change.

The following texts are only snippets and it might be helpful to visit the relevant Scripture and to read it in full in context, discuss them in your groups, and then consider how to apply them.

Please read:

Philippians 3:12-21

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Galatians 5:1-13

2 Peter 1:5-11

Discussion

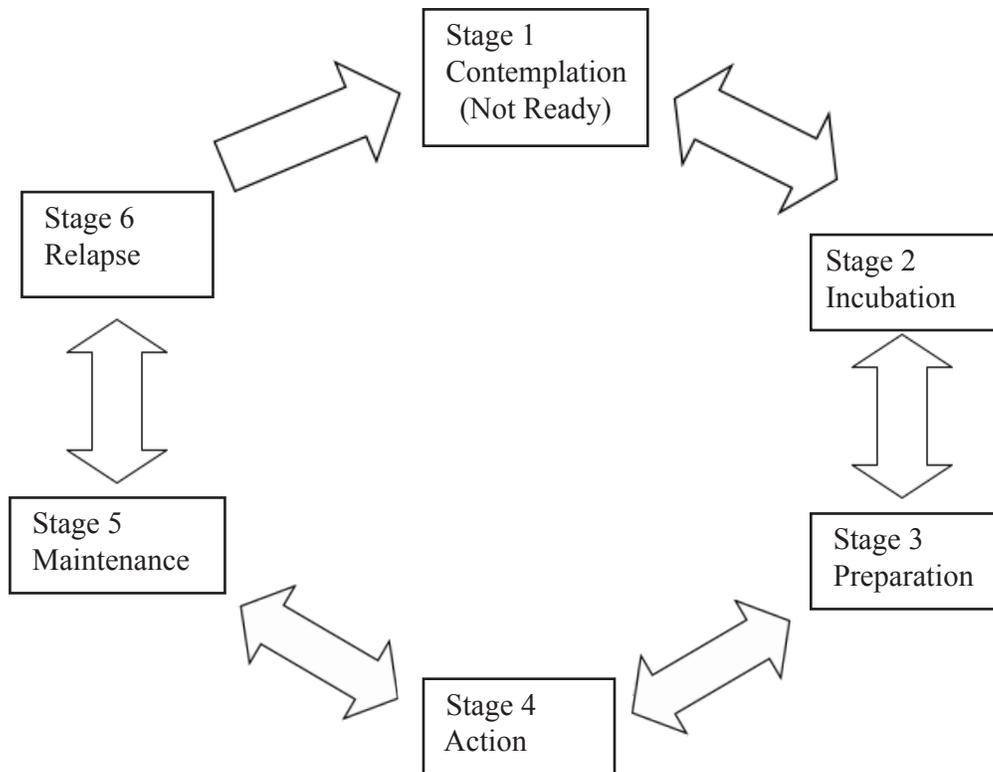
Here the author is encouraging us to add to our faith, and then goes on to list all the attributes we should look to attaining, including self-control and knowledge. As in the above passages, these verses speak of adding these things through our own efforts.

How Do We Change Things?

It might be that you are quite happy and content with your physical and mental health as they are. If, however, you are not, and you feel ready to do something about it, then it is a good idea to actually establish why you are even thinking that you need to change, how ready you are to change, and what steps to take.

We must be careful not to be influenced by what the world considers behavioural theories, otherwise we are slipping back into psychology and a Greek mind set. There are, however, a number of practical observations

The process of change tends to be cyclical in nature, which is great news, as it means if we go through a time where we are not really focusing, we can just get back on track when we are ready.



Have a look at the Decisional Balance Sheet on the next page, which you have probably seen many times before. If you think it is helpful, use the sheet and try and be as honest with yourself as possible. Using this will help you to identify where you are in the cycle of change. What are the pros and cons for you if you decide to change to a healthier lifestyle?

Chapter Three – Goal Setting

Remember Where Your Strength Comes From!

Read:

Proverbs 16:3

Changing behaviours and habits of a lifetime, especially when it is in relation to eating and activity, is difficult to implement and hard to maintain if you do not prepare and plan properly. Change may well upset the routine and sometimes it is easier to just live with what you know. The fear of failure often presents a huge barrier. One of the most valuable lessons an athlete will tell you, is how to learn from not achieving what you had planned—ordinary mortals would call it failure, whilst most athletes call these occasions building blocks. They will analyse them, reset goals, and set off again with a renewed vision. It is important, therefore, to set realistic, meaningful, and achievable goals as well as have contingency plans in place for when things don't go quite according to plan!

We need to narrow the viewpoint a little. It is too large a target and is open to failure if we simply state that we want to change to a healthier lifestyle. We also need to grade what we hope to achieve. When climbers attempt to reach the top of a high mountain, they do not just set out for a hike and expect to get to the summit in one go. The routes are planned in infinite detail and a series of camps set up to split the route into achievable sections. This does not diminish their achievements in any way. Indeed, good planning is part of that achievement.

So we need to:

- ✓ Identify the end goal.
- ✓ Split the route to that goal into achievable portions.
- ✓ Set mini goals along the way.
- ✓ Identify possible barriers.
- ✓ Have a strategy in place for when things go off track.
- ✓ Identify a trustworthy support network.

Before starting to plan your goals, it is helpful to identify what your priorities and values are and to get some ideas going. Your goals need to be meaningful to you as an individual. If they are not, and you are just doing it because you feel you need to, then you are unlikely to be successful.

Common Situations	Practical Solutions
Family or Time pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Get the support of a friend or family member to make sure you allow time for your programme. ✓ Prioritise all jobs and ensure that you create “guilt free” time for your programme. ✓ Remember that you are responsible for your children’s health and well being and to give in to the pressures of them wanting unhealthy foods isn’t necessarily the best route.
Less active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Get out for a short walk. ✓ Walk or cycle to work. ✓ Plan your day to include physical activity. ✓ If you drive a lot, take fruit and low calorie snacks with you instead of fizzy drinks and sweets. ✓ Take the stairs instead of the escalator
Social pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enjoy high fat foods occasionally and then get straight back on track. ✓ Eating out: opt for lower fat dishes.
Living alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Check labels before buying ready meals. ✓ Don’t buy all your comfort foods. ✓ Choose low fat options. ✓ Have a supply of baked beans, tuna, pasta, low fat sauces. ✓ Eat regularly. Try not to skip meals, especially breakfast. ✓ Cook proper meals for yourself. ✓ Try a new hobby. ✓ Join a local group. ✓ Get your friends to walk with you.



Have a look at the suggestion below. It is taken from a personal health plan diary. I always encourage my clients to write down as much as possible. So, if you think it might help, get yourselves a little diary and put all your ideas down. This way, you can keep referring back to it, and you can keep checking on how you are doing. In later chapters, I will mention both Truth diaries and Training diaries, which you may also find helpful. The majority of people forget where they started and how well they are doing, so it’s good to record it on paper. Some people keep all the diaries as one. Either way, feedback from most people is that once they have learned to use them, they report that they become invaluable and help to keep them on track.

My Healthy Lifestyle Diary

My first S.M.A.R.T.T. goal is:

What am I going to do to help me achieve my goal?

Where?

When?

Who will support me?

How will I know how I am doing?

What will I record?

When will I record?

Barriers:

Places and things that make this programme difficult:

People who make this programme difficult:

Thoughts and feelings that make this programme difficult:

Practical Solutions:

Places and things that make me feel comfortable:

People who will help me:

Thoughts and feelings that make it easier to do this programme:

Consider what you have read and worked through in this chapter. Now pray it through and give these ideas back to Adonai. May He richly bless you as you trust Him and step out in His strength.

Chapter Five – Healthy Eating

Introduction

Genesis 9:3

Genesis 3:19

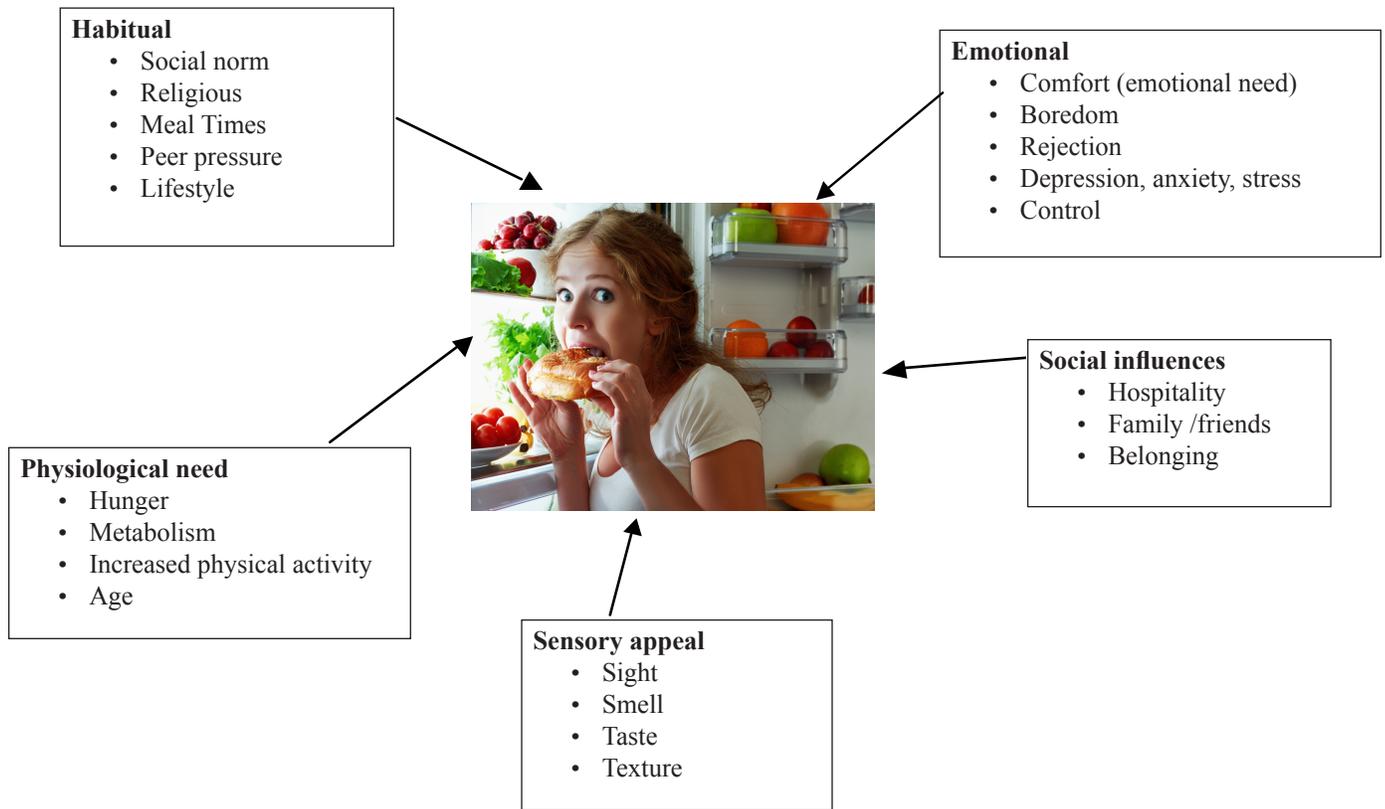
So Keep It Simple and Eat What You Grow!?

The following chapters are meant as something of an introduction to healthy eating and weight loss. For each person reading this, your knowledge about the subject will vary greatly. I am not a specialist, dietician, nor a nutritionist, so the information provided is basic and user friendly. I have documented all the methods and knowledge I use as a health professional and personal trainer in both my weight management classes and when working with individuals. It is what I have found works over the years, that also embraces all the current guidelines from research and is that which constitutes a healthy eating plan.

It is easy to become overwhelmed and confused by the amount of information that is out there. Every week there seems to be some new piece of research that changes current thinking, so I will outline some very simple guidelines that I am hoping will make your healthy eating simplistic and easy to adhere to for both you and the people you care for. Long-term weight loss should be *achievable without heartache*, and I hope the following chapters provide a simplistic, flexible, and workable model from which to work.



Before you start the next few chapters, it would be helpful to complete the following worksheet. Keep this on hand so that you can refer to it as we move through the chapters.



Physiologically, there are two important hormones that regulate hunger, ghrelin and leptin. Ghrelin is responsible for a desire to eat and leptin tells us that we have had sufficient. If we consider these in conjunction with a healthy eating programme, ideally, we need to eat foods that will activate the hormone leptin. These include any healthy foods such as fruits, nuts, vegetables and lean meats. Lack of sleep has also been found to be associated with low levels of Leptin. Difficulty with sleeping is a common disturbance with people who are significantly overweight and obese, which further exacerbates overeating and hunger control. If we continuously overeat, our sensitivity to leptin is reduced and we can no longer tell if we are full.

Menopause

You are probably wondering why on earth I am mentioning the menopause here? The answer lies in the fact that many of the symptoms women experience pre, during, and post menopause can be influenced by what they eat. If you experience such issues as:

- Mood swings
- Hot flashes
- Aging skin
- Joint pains
- Weight gain (over and above normal fluctuations)
- Headaches
- Night sweats

Chapter Seven – Weight Management – Long Term

Introduction

We have just looked at the foundations you need for eating more healthily. This chapter is about how to embrace eating healthily in terms of weight management. We will be looking primarily at long term healthy weight loss. This is very different from putting yourself on a diet for reasons I will explain shortly. This is about eating healthily and happily for the rest of your life, enjoying your food and eating for vitality. It is also about being comfortable with what you are eating, being free from the emotional roller coasters of yesterday, and cutting loose from the dictates of the world as to what size and shape you should be.

We will also look at weight gain. Whilst people who need to increase their weight are generally in the minority, it is by far the harder of the two to achieve. This chapter is all about taking a safe and effective approach to weight management that is not only going to last, but that is also healthier for yourself and honouring to your Heavenly Father.

What is a Healthy Weight?

THE most important point here is that we are considering not total body weight, but body composition. I cannot stress this enough because just getting on the scales everyday is not going to tell you what you need to know (throw them away!). It is about your **fat to lean ratio**. In terms of measuring body composition, your body can be divided into fat or adipose tissue and lean tissue, which is all the rest, your bones and organs, muscles and tissues. As an example, take two individuals who are an identical weight:

Person 1

Male 22

Competitive athlete

Weight: 12 stone (168 lbs.)

Height: 6 ft.

Body Fat: 18%

Person 2

Male 22

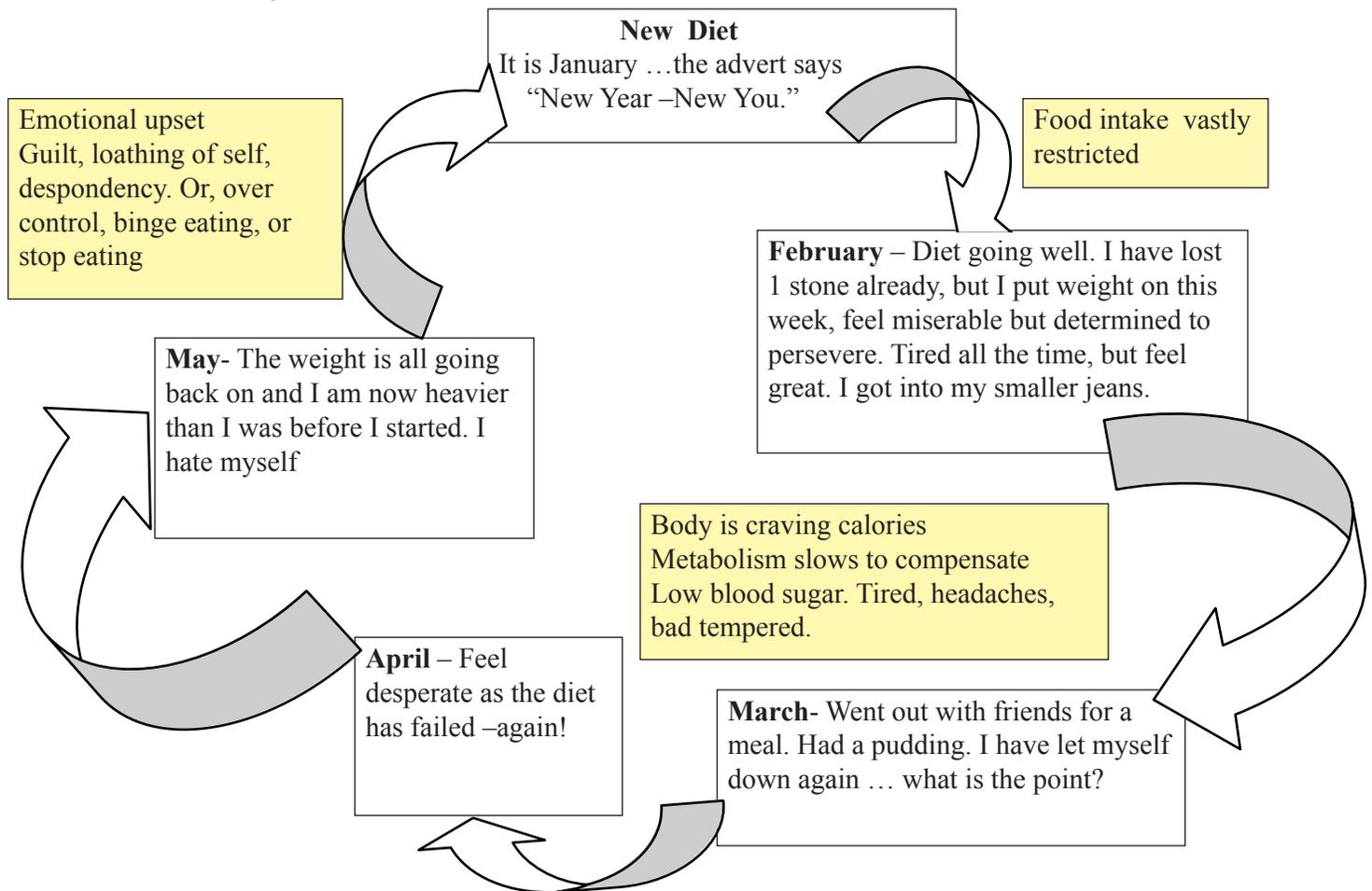
IT consultant

12 stone (168 lbs.)

6 ft.

35%

The Diet Trap:



Long Term Weight Loss: How?

Physiologically, your body can only lose around 2 lbs. of fat in around seven days. Any more than that is going to be lean tissue and water. It is fat you want to lose and this can only be done slowly. I suggest that my clients aim for no more than 1 ½ lbs. per week. Slow, in this case, is excellent. If you have a substantial amount of weight to lose, then it may seem like a lifetime to lose the weight this slowly, BUT, I said that this was a different approach and this is the way that will keep the weight off. We are talking about for the rest of your life, so be strong and persevere. I want to instill hope in you that you can achieve this, and you can. It is, of course, also about changing your eating habits, lifestyle, and possibly your identity, and these also need time.

Chapter Eight – Physical Activity

Introduction

We currently exist in what is now referred to as an obesogenic environment, in other words, one that has an impact on our weight, and supports us in being overweight. Think of your own environment: you can park directly outside the supermarket; you can get escalators to the second floor of every building; you drive your children to the door everywhere for safety; most of you have jobs that you sit down to all day; you are surrounded by high energy, low nutrient food; and the majority of you take very little or no exercise. If we go out for a meal we expect the pasta dish to come in what our grandparents would have considered a serving dish, and, if we don't get a bowl of chips on the side, we think we are hard done by. We effectively live in a world of excess, where food is abundant, and we do not have to really think too hard about obtaining it. Whilst I am exaggerating the point here, I am trying to highlight the need for a possible rethink of our lifestyles. We are so accustomed to this lifestyle that, unfortunately, we often fail to recognise what it is doing to our health.

Consider everything we have looked at so far and ask yourself these questions: Why do we need a healthy lifestyle, what does it involve, how do we go about changing to healthier options, what barriers do we have to address? In this chapter, we are going to consider **physical activity**, which is key to achieving a healthy lifestyle. As I hope to make clear, this doesn't necessarily mean pounding for hours on the treadmill at the local gym or pumping iron until you can't move. It is more about being more active because you want to be, doing activities that are meaningful and beneficial to your health, and simply getting out and enjoying His Creation. Following is a very simplistic guide to increasing your physical activity because to add detail would entail several volumes. There is a plethora of books and information on specific training regimes and exercise programmes for you to study once you are ready. Here, we will simply look at some of the ways in which you can get started and will underline some of the basic principles of physical activity and exercise.

IMPORTANT

It is vitally important that if you are in *any* doubt as to whether or not you should increase your physical activity, you should first consult your family doctor. This will also give you the confidence to set your goals appropriately, be they walking up the stairs or climbing the highest mountain. Even if you are young and apparently healthy, it is a good idea to check with your doctor if you can. I would NEVER take anyone on as a client without first getting them to complete a medical questionnaire.

Physical Activity: Why?

Long Term Benefits:

- ✓ The heart muscles become stronger and the heart becomes more efficient.
 - ✓ Heart recovery improves after exertion.
 - ✓ Resting heart rate is lowered.
 - ✓ Blood pressure is reduced.
 - ✓ Your breathing mechanism becomes more efficient.
 - ✓ Overall fitness is increased.
 - ✓ Number of capillaries and blood flow is increased.
 - ✓ Number of red blood cells (increased oxygen carrying capacity) is increased.
 - ✓ Size and number of myofibrils may increase, helping your muscles to become stronger and improving movement.
 - ✓ Muscle fibre recruitment is increased, which means muscles become stronger and more efficient.
 - ✓ Bone mass is enhanced.
 - ✓ Ability to process oxygen in the cells and to release energy is increased.
 - ✓ Ability to store glycogen is increased.
 - ✓ Ability to utilise fat is increased.
- } These mean that you are controlling your blood sugar better and utilising stored energy better.

Plus You Will Have: (depending on your physical activity level and type)

- Increased lean body mass
- Reduced body fat
- Decreased cholesterol levels
- Increased good cholesterol
- Decreased fat levels in blood
- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Improved insulin response and blood sugar control

This exercise is progressed gradually as you become stronger. If you feel any tension in your lower spine, then you need to drop back to the previous level.

Here are the next two levels:

iii. The Half Plank

- Return to lying on the floor face down.
- Bend your elbows and place them out in front of you, just in front of the shoulders.
- Now you are going to repeat the above exercise, breathe out and pull your tummy in to meet the spine.
- Only this time, you are also going to lift your bottom off the floor, not too high.

You need a gentle slope down from your head. You are resting on the padded bit just above your knee, not on the knee joint itself. Your tummy is doing all the work. **Don't forget to breathe.**



Half plank

iv. The Full Plank

Still further progression is to lift up onto your toes instead of your knees.



Full plank

All the same principles apply. Keep your head in line with the spine and tummy pulled in. Breathe normally.

Try and avoid the following:

Avoid: Lifting your bottom too high. You need it to be level with your head.

Avoid: Looking down. Eyeball just in front of you to keep your head in line with the spine.

Avoid: Using your shoulders to take all the weight instead of focusing the effort on your abdominals.



All of the above plank exercises can be held for as long as you can maintain the correct technique. To start with, it may well be literally seconds. If you can hold each exercise for a minute, then it is time to move on to the next level. At the same time, **watch your backs**. It is a bit of a chicken and an egg scenario, as you want to strengthen your abdominals in order to better support your spine, but you don't want to hurt your spine in doing so. If you feel any pressure at all on the lower spine, you must finish the exercise and return to the floor.

There exists a vast range of core stability and strengthening exercises that you can find online and in books. Try and find a local exercise class to join. Especially if you are doing sports, core conditioning classes can be extremely beneficial. I teach a class that is based on the large physiotherapy fitness balls. It is hard work but effective.

Here are a few more basic exercises to get you thinking about your core muscles:

v. The Superman

- Start off on all fours, with a leg at each back corner and your hands aligned under your shoulders.
- Correct your spine so that it is neutral alignment (as it is when you are standing, with its natural curvature).
- Pull your tummy in to meet the spine (as in the above exercises) without moving the spine itself.
- Keeping your head in line with your spine, extend one arm out and the opposite leg behind you: superman.

And Finally...

“For this reason, I fall on my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its character. I pray that from the treasures of His glory He will empower you with inner strength by His Spirit, so that the Messiah may live in your hearts through your trusting. Also I pray that you will be rooted and founded in love, so that you, with all God’s people, will be given strength to grasp the breadth, length, height and depth of the Messiah’s love, yes, to know it, even though it is beyond all knowing, so that you will be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who by His power working in us is able to do far beyond anything we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Messianic Community and in the Messiah Yeshua from generation to generation forever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:14-21

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