Maintaining a healthy body weight

When we think of the word 'diet', most of us shudder. Either we've had the experience of trying one diet after another to get to the weight and shape we want, or we've witnessed friends and family doing the same - with some pretty negative emotional and physical consequences.

A healthier approach to maintaining a desirable weight might be to change the way we see that one word. When we alter the word 'diet' from a verb ("I have to keep dieting until I make my goal, then I can relax") to a noun ("My diet is made up of a variety of good foods that I love"), we immediately change its meaning and our perception of it.

Have you ever been to an exercise class and found the instructor a dynamo of vitality and flexibility, who also seemed five or ten pounds overweight? It's a perfect example of what a 'healthy weight' can mean. 'Skinny' isn't necessarily healthy. Healthy choices lead to enjoying food that fuels our bodies and activities that build our muscles. Denying ourselves the strengthening force of a well-rounded diet and lifestyle is not a healthy choice. Instead, boost your energy levels, reduce stress and maintain a healthy body weight with the tips below:

Take comfort in activity, not food. Many people turn to food when they're feeling stressed or down. In these moments, you're not eating because you're hungry, you're eating to feel better. Instead of reaching for the bag of chips or tub of ice cream for 'support,' take a short walk, read a chapter of a book, or do any activity that will lift your spirits. You'll feel comforted and energized instead of overly full and guilty.

Ask yourself 'How do I feel?' instead of 'How do I look?.' If you feel strong and healthy at 145 pounds and getting to 140 is causing all sorts of anxiety, then will five pounds really make a difference? On the other hand, if you know that five pounds is a result of lack of exercise and high-fat foods, then adopting a healthier diet and lifestyle will likely result in losing that weight - without excessive effort.

Banish the 'all or nothing' approach. Healthy eating is a lifestyle, not a two-week plan so if you do go overboard once in a while, it doesn't mean you have to 'start over.' Remember the 90/10 rule: make healthy choices 90 per cent of the time and leave the other 10 per cent for indulgences.

Avoid eating late night snacks. After a hard day's work, it's tempting to unwind in front of the television with a stack of snacks. But this evening habit can add excess pounds and interfere with your sleep. And being sleep deprived will only make it harder to deal with the next day's stresses.

Work exercise into your routine. Physical activity is one of the best ways to keep excess weight off and energy levels up. Think exercise means aerobics classes and weight training? Think again. Fit a mini workout into your day by cycling to work, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or taking a stroll on your lunch break.

The stress that 'dieting' and poor nutrition adds to our lives is well documented, as are the health risks of obesity. The bounty of food we have to choose from makes us lucky among the world's people. Choosing what and how we eat is a personal decision, and when we choose with knowledge and awareness, we boost our level of health and well-being on all levels.