

Every year we convince ourselves that after the Holidays, "I'm going to lose weight." Or, "It's too stressful during the holidays to quit smoking. That'll be my New Year's resolution." If that is so, then why are we still overweight and smoking?

Although the intentions of resolutions may be good, there is something that is missing underneath that guarantees continued failure: BALANCE! Weight gain and cigarette smoking, as well as other compulsive behaviors, are outward manifestations of a disruption to the inner balance. Therefore the difficulty in keeping New Year's resolutions is in the thought that a nicotine patch or a weight loss program is the solution. In reality, it is only part of the solution.

Smoking is a deep addiction that affects the nerves on a chemical level. Nicotine has been found to stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain. The molecular structure of nicotine is similar to the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. Acetylcholine is involved in the regulation of breathing, heart rate, memory, alertness and muscle tension. The body tries to use nicotine to do the job of acetylcholine but fails. So, in combination, there is disruption of acetylcholine leaving you anxious, forgetful, and tense with a stimulation of pleasure thereby encouraging this bad behavior.

Since the addiction to smoking is both physical and emotional/neurochemical, the process of quitting needs to address both facets. Physically, it is important to drink plenty of water and support the body nutritionally to detoxify the lungs and liver. Subsequently for the emotional aspect, taking time for relaxation with a combination of meditation, Acupuncture and massage greatly increases your success rate. Additionally, Acupuncture can help alleviate the physical symptoms of withdrawal.

Weight loss needs to be approached from many sides as well. For permanent healthy weight loss, lifestyle needs to be addressed. Exercise or movement is important since it encourages elimination of waste, promotes circulation and burns calories. As is the case with many people today, insulin resistance is a factor. Just as the nicotine inhibits acetylcholine from functioning properly, certain petrochemicals (plastics that can come from heating and cooling food in plastic) inhibit the proper function of insulin, which is to regulate blood sugar. This in turn controls sugar/carb cravings and hunger. Omega-3 essential fatty acids can rid the body of these petrochemicals allowing insulin to do its job. The insulin mechanism must also be supported with proper nutritional supplementation including zinc and chromium.

Just like eating poorly for one day is not going to affect weight gain, eating well temporarily will not result in permanent weight loss. Rather than focusing on calorie count, know that when balance and proper nutrition is attained, the body will innately let go of excess fat.

Resolving to be healthier in the New Year is a great first step. Always remember to keep in mind why you made the decision in the first place. Write down the top 5 reasons and keep them in your pocket or wallet and pull them out when you need encouragement to keep going in the right direction. Approaching the problem from many directions will help to ensure your success.

Krista J. Essler, Licensed Acupuncturist, practices in Boone, NC.