

How to Change Your Eating Patterns

Many of us are trapped in our old, hardened eating patterns.

In fact, we might not even be aware of the patterns, but we do know that 1) we'd like to get healthier or leaner; 2) we have a hard time making eating changes; 3) we don't always know how to change.

Those are good realizations! It means we have to humble ourselves, and find a way to put ourselves into an area of uncertainty and discomfort in order to change.

Some common eating patterns that are difficult to change:

- Snacking on junk food
- Sugary drinks like sodas or Starbucks sugary coffee drinks
- Bingeing in the evening
- Eating out a lot and making unhealthy choices, then regretting it
- Needing comfort foods when you're stressed or feeling down
- You start drinking and then you eat like crap

And more, of course. These are just some common examples. Do you have any of these? Are there others you aren't aware of but that keep you locked into a less-than-healthy lifestyle?

If you're ready to make a change, let's look at how to change our eating patterns.

What Gets in the Way

Before we look at how to change the patterns, let's take a look at the common obstacles. Don't get discouraged by this list! Changing is definitely possible, as my own life shows. I've changed my entire diet completely, and while I'm not perfect by any means, I have confidence in my ability to change my patterns if I want to.

Some common obstacles:

- **Being motivated by guilt, fear, regret:** Studies show that these motivations are very common, and they don't work well. Instead, change that sticks is motivated by a positive outlook and self-motivation.
- **Vague or too many goals:** If you have a specific plan, rather than "eating healthier," that's more likely to succeed. If you try to change too many things at once (exercise, diet, meditation, decluttering, procrastination!), you'll use up your limited energy and discipline.

- **Depriving ourselves:** If you are on a diet, and it feels like a sacrifice and deprivation, you won't be able to stick to that for long. Instead, eat high-volume foods like vegetables and beans that fill you up and don't leave you hungry, and eat indulgent but healthy foods like a few squares of dark chocolate, berries, relaxing tea, a glass of red wine. Make it feel like a wonderful lifestyle rather than self-flagellation.
- **Not having practical ways to get there:** It's great to have a goal to lose weight, but how will you do it? Most people only have a vague idea of what to do, and it can be confusing. It's best to have a practical plan. More in the next section.
- **Too much choice & variety:** If you go to a buffet and there's a hundred delicious-looking foods there, you'll probably overeat. The same is true at home or wherever we normally eat — if you always have lots of choices, with tempting varieties, you'll probably overeat. But if you went somewhere where there was just one choice, and it was healthy, you'd probably do much better.
- **Social eating:** Eating out with friends or going to parties can make it difficult — mostly because of the above reason of too much choice and variety. But also because we're not mindful of our choices when we're talking to people, and also we might feel pressure to eat like everyone else instead of making healthy choices.
- **Resistance to healthy foods:** Lots of people don't like vegetables. Or beans, raw nuts, whole grains. I know people who would rather die than eat brown rice, oats, kale or drink soymilk. This is a barrier to changing eating patterns.
- **Not realizing your patterns:** Many people aren't really aware of what their eating patterns are. It can be hard to figure it out unless you're forced to see it in the cold harsh light of day.
- **Healthy eating is confusing:** There's a lot of advice out there, so many things to learn about. To combat that, pick a simple, whole-foods diet and just stick to a simple plan. Veggies, fruits, beans, nuts, whole grains. Drink water, tea, maybe a bit of red wine. Simple!
- **Depending on willpower:** If you have to stare donuts in the face, then French fries, then sumptuous dessert ... you will run out of willpower. Instead, change your environment, and make things easy on yourself.
- **It's not convenient:** When you're hungry, tired, stress, or lonely ... you'll reach for what's easy. Instead, get rid of the junk and have convenient snacks (I like hummus and carrots, and apples and raw nuts).
- **You think it's expensive:** Healthy eating can be seen as super expensive. Actually, it can be even cheaper: try lentils! A lentil soup with potatoes or some brown rice is super cheap. Add some frozen green veggies and you have an incredibly healthy, simple meal for very little.

OK, that might seem like a lot of obstacles. But being aware of them is key, and now that we've looked at them, let's talk about some solutions, and how to shake up our eating

patterns.

Shaking Up the Patterns

I'm usually a fan of slow changes, but lately I've been realizing that it can be helpful to really give our patterns a good shakeup.

How do we do that? By giving ourselves a line to stick to.

Here's what I mean: when we meditate, by trying to focus our attention on our breath ... it becomes very obvious once our attention wanders to a chain of thoughts. Without the line drawn in the sand — trying to stick to watching the breath — it's hard to notice the mental patterns of impatience, frustration, harshness, retreating into our stories, rationalizing, etc. The breath is the line that we try to stick to, and the line helps us see what's going on.

So create a line to stick to for eating patterns.

I recommend that your line be a meal plan, that you try to stick to for one month.

By trying to stick to a meal plan, it becomes very obvious when you binge, or eat a bunch of afternoon snacks, or breakfast on pastries and a latte. Your patterns start to become obvious.

And when you learn that you can actually stick to the meal plan, the patterns start to fall apart. You're aware of them, but no longer beholden to them. You start to free yourself.

Here's what I recommend:

- **Make a simple, healthy meal plan:** Pick a healthy breakfast, a healthy lunch, a healthy dinner, a healthy snack or two. Enter it into an online food tracker to see how the calories add up (I shoot for 250-500 calories below my maintenance level to lose weight). Keep it simple to prepare, based almost entirely on healthy whole foods, not processed foods. Again, veggies, beans, nuts, whole grains, fruits. Btw, I pick one healthy meal and eat it for both lunch and dinner, every night of the week, to keep things simple.
- **Plan for indulgences:** Don't make it a sacrifice — include delicious nutritious foods, include indulgences like dark chocolate, red wine, coffee, berries, tea. And include a couple free meals each week (don't pig out, just eat moderately but whatever you want).
- **Stick to it for a month, give your habit time to change:** Challenge yourself to stick to the meal plan (with two free meals per week) for a month. This will give your mind and body time to adjust to new habits.
- **Clean up your environment:** Keep junk out of your house. Have healthy alternatives to your usual comforts — fruits instead of sweets, air-popped popcorn or carrots and

hummus instead of chips.

- **Prep to make it easy:** If you eat the same lunch every day, and the same dinner every day, prepare them in advance so that it's easy to eat when it's mealtime.
- **Have strategies for restaurants & social eating:** If you have to go out, either make it one of your free meals (and remember to eat moderately) or plan what meal you'll be eating. For example, you can look at the menu online and know that you'll have lentil soup with a salad, or black bean tacos with guac. If you're going to a party, prepare your healthy food and bring it to the party.
- **Give yourself time to adjust to new foods:** If you don't like the taste of vegetables at first, let yourself eat them every day for a week. You'll start to like them.

So that's the plan: make a simple, healthy meal plan and stick to it every day for a month (with two free meals a day). Clean up your food environment, don't make it a super sacrifice. Yes, this is a bit boring. But if you rebel against that, it shows you a pattern — you need excitement in your food! But actually that's not something we need to get from food — it's not entertainment, it's sustenance.

You'll start to see your patterns if you try this plan. You'll become very aware of what you're rebelling against, what your failures are (and why), and you'll be able to focus on those and get better at them.

Finding a Fresh Alternative

What happens when the month is over? Must we stick to a meal plan forever? No, but we can now step outside our old patterns and choose a fresh alternative.

Like what? Some ideas for alternatives to our old patterns:

- Plan healthy meals for the week.
- Eat healthier alternatives to our old comfort foods and snacks.
- Change our food environment to be more conducive to health.
- Change our social eating to be a bit healthier.
- Find other ways to cope with stress (meditation!), comfort ourselves (a walk, a bath, tea), socialize (go for a hike).
- Adjust to new healthy foods and find joy in the deliciousness of nutritiousness.
- Letting go of shame around food, and instead just seeing it as nourishment.

I'm not going to tell you what alternatives you should choose, but only recommend that you allow yourself some time to contemplate how you'd like to live.

Fresh alternatives are available once we shine a light on our old patterns, and break away from them.

Course: How to Stick to a Lean-Out Diet

If you'd like to go deeper into these topics, and challenge yourself to stick to a meal plan this month ... I'm offering a course for my Sea Change members called "**How to Stick to a Lean-Out Diet**". It's just a way to create a healthy meal plan and stick to it for the month, but it'll be a good exploration of all the topics above.

Join us now to get access to the course (and a challenge with weekly reporting): **Sea Change Program**.

In this monthly membership program, you get access to:

- Video lessons
- Monthly challenges
- A forum for supporting each other and accountability
- A webinar (for Gold level members)
- Lots of great content in the course library

I'd love it if you joined me today.