

Dealing With Your Vices

By Zen Gray

In my all experience as a fitness professional, I've never come across one person that doesn't have a vice. Usually it's one of the following: sugar, alcohol, caffeine, salt, or just plain portion size. If you nodded your head to one of those, just know you're not alone.

Personally, my vice is sugar. In the past, I felt like I had a dysfunctional love/hate relationship with sugar. But I've learned to control it with a strategy that lets me look forward to enjoying carrot cake without feeling guilty about it.

If you want to live a healthy and happy life, I think you've got to develop some flexible rules for yourself regarding your food. And you have to start with loving yourself. Stop beating yourself up each time you may "slip" in your diet because life will happen. Celebrations will happen. And giving up by saying, "Well, my office/spouse/friend/co-worker/children won't let me eat more healthy food so I guess I'll just have to be I'm unsatisfied with my health and my appearance..." is NOT the answer. You'll get a little pleasure by indulging in those vices with the excuse that it's someone else's fault... but ultimately you will feel more pain by not developing a healthy strategy to deal with them.

First thing you need to do is to write down why indulging in those vices is harmful to you. What will happen 5, 10 or 20 years down the road if you DON'T change your eating habits? You really need to make this association painful. Get disturbed!

If you keep eating sugar (or refined carbohydrates), what will happen to your body, your energy, your health? What will happen to your relationship with yourself or your spouse or your family? If you are depressed and getting fatter and your energy is low, how will that affect your life? Can you achieve your dreams if you can't get control of your vice? Or worse, did you give up on your dreams? Will you even be around for your family? What will happen?

Write it down. By writing down those painful associations, you will make connections in your subconscious mind. Your mind is always working to make associations and most of it happens on a subconscious level. So, let's use that to your advantage. If something is painful enough, you will do something about it. Imagine that pain so you can use it as a motivator.

Next, write down all the benefits to developing a healthy strategy for that vice. How great will you look and feel if you no longer let it control you? How will having more energy and vitality affect your career, your relationships, and your family? Will you inspire your spouse, your kids, yourself? The momentum you build through successful eating will spill over into all areas of your life! Perhaps the self-confidence you gain will help you achieve your dreams! Write it down! Writing down the benefits of healthful eating will also inspire you and help you reprogram your subconscious mind.

Now you've got leverage on yourself to change your eating habits! How you FEEL about those vices will help change your BEHAVIOR and ultimately your results. The next step is to develop a strategy. For me, it's limiting sugar to weekends and holidays. I know that if I eat like I'm "on the job" during the week, I can enjoy cookies or a slice of cake on the weekends and it doesn't send me into a downward spiral of self-loathing and depression. That strategy works for me. I also know that if I have a holiday or celebration where I'm sure to have cake during the week that I can increase my cardio or eliminate a weekend day indulgence. It's got to be flexible for LIFE. I also know that if I happen to have sugar 3 times in one week, it's NOT going to kill me. But I have to make sure I'm back on track the next week.

Think of ways where you can start weaning yourself off your vice for most of the week. If it's alcohol, what will you drink instead when the waiter asks, "What can I get you to drink?" If it's portion size, how can you limit what you see on the plate in front of you? If it's caffeine, how can you maintain your energy throughout the day without an artificial jolt? If it's salty food, what else can you choose that has less sodium?

(I do need to say that I have had some clients that discovered they CAN'T deal with alcohol on their own. It was just too difficult. It's a big realization that really improved their life after they sought professional help from Alcoholic's Anonymous. If you can't cut back on your alcohol consumption, you may want to take a really close look at that vice.)

So, let's break it down:

- 1.) Identify your vice(s).
- 2.) Write down how your life will be affected if you DON'T get a handle on your vice. Make it very painful and imagine how it will feel in 5, 10 or 20 years if you don't change your habits!
- 3.) Write down how much better your life will be if you DO develop a strategy that helps you limit your vice. Imagine how a successful strategy will affect your life in 5, 10 or 20 years!
- 4.) Write down your strategy. Will you limit your vice to weekends? Once a week? Only on holidays and special occasions? How will you get a handle on it? How can you manage your vice for life? What will your strategy be if you slip up sometimes? How will you get back on track?

Just remember, it's not about falling down. It's about getting back up.