

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

How to make responsible and sustainable changes in one's diet and health

After navigating a perilous journey through the holiday bog of sugar-laden treats, many people find themselves yearning for a refreshing change of pace as the new year begins. The month of January historically represents a fresh start and an inspiration point for resolutions for self-improvement and personal betterment. But making those changes stick can be tricky unless you approach the changes in the proper frame of mind.

Unfortunately, a high percentage of people who make New Year's resolutions are unsuccessful. Most people seek or expect rapid behavioral change and set unrealistic goals for themselves. This can lead to failure and disappointment, often resulting in an abandoned resolution just weeks into the year.

Melanie Willoughby, director of health management at St. Joseph's/Candler, is familiar with such scenarios. She stresses that making important lifestyle changes and behavioral modifications are never a quick fix. "It takes true dedication and honest commitment to alter one's behavior, whether it's losing weight, improving one's overall fitness, enhancing one's health through nutritional changes, or becoming tobacco free," she says.

The vast majority of New Year's resolutions are health or nutrition-related. However, people tend to bite off more than they can chew, or have misconceptions about how to accomplish specific goals. According to St. Joseph's/Candler licensed dietitian and nutritional expert, Chloe Paddison, making a serious and lasting lifestyle change begins with a personal commitment and strong desire to make a sustainable change. That introspective process begins by asking oneself the following questions:

- How did I get to this point? Why am I eager to change now?
- When did I lose sight of prioritizing my health and wellness?
- Why do I find myself searching for the next quick fix?

In addition to the annual holiday challenges, there are countless reasons people can lose sight of their nutritional wellness. Says Paddison, "Family obligations, career demands, past traumas, financial and emotional stress and numerous other triggers surround us each day. Any one of these stress-inducing factors can have a negative impact on one's nutrition, and often that can lead to an even more severe effect on one's health."

Paddison stresses that each individual is unique and therefore requires a unique approach to their personal health and wellness experience, goals and motivations. Often this can involve diving deeply into the behavioral root causes. "Every person is an expert on their own personal situation," she says.

With a little guidance from the right provider, anyone can learn how to make a lasting change, one that will not require another reset in the next New Year.



St. Joseph's/Candler Dietitian and Education Specialist Chloe Paddison, RDN, LD

"Often times when someone seeks change, we think our bodies have betrayed us, but in reality we have betrayed our bodies by not learning to understand what we need and how real food plays a crucial role in our health," Paddison says.

She believes that, in the minds of many people, weight loss and health have become decoupled concepts, and food and health seem to have lost their inherent connection. It can be very tempting to try the latest and greatest diet fad that promises fast and effortless results. However, such a leap can quickly lead to failure.

"The diet industry is a \$5 billion a year industry," she observes. "We live in an overwhelming world of constant exposure to evolving nutrition information and products. We are quick to try the latest theory or concoction, and quickly jump to the next diet fad when the last one does not live up to our expectations."

Paddison points to perils of fad diets. "Imagine how your body feels going through so many drastic changes, from restricting calories to adding extra fat and cutting out whole food groups and taking stimulants. Your body is responsible for keeping you alive and in balance throughout the dieting chaos, and it learns to defend with survival mechanisms. Once this level of defense is achieved, it can take a long time to readjust and recalibrate. This directly affects your metabolism and can cause a stalemate between your mind and your body."

Paddison uses the analogy of a bear hibernating during winter. "Bears don't eat all winter and their bodies adjust to the decreased

Get Your Rear in Gear, Savannah!

Annual 5K Walk/Run race set for Saturday, March 2

Attention, runners: Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 2.

That's when the annual Get Your Rear in Gear® 5K Walk/Run in support of colon cancer awareness and prevention will be held at the Lewis Cancer and Research Pavilion, located directly across from Candler Hospital. Start time is 8 a.m. A free Kids Fun Run will also be held.

This event honors the memory of longtime WTOC-TV news anchor Mike Manhattan, who succumbed to this terrible disease four years ago. The run provides a special opportunity to honor cancer survivors and others in our community lost to colon cancer.

Sponsors include St. Joseph's/Candler, Gastroenterology Consultants of Savannah, P.C., the Center for Digestive and Liver Health and



the Endoscopy Center, Fleet Feet Sports, WTOC-TV, the Savannah Morning News and News Radio 1290 WTKS.

For additional information, or to sign up, visit sjchs.org/gyrig, St. Joseph's/Candler's Facebook page, or Get Your Rear In Gear Savannah's Facebook Page.

intake by slowing the metabolism to burn less fuel and keep them alive. When we restrict our caloric intake too drastically, or confuse or body with irregular 'doses' of calories (energy), we are setting ourselves up for the same hibernation/starvation mode."

As a result of diet industry influence, people have conditioned themselves to avoid, restrict and fear food. Says Paddison, "The key to sustainable success is evaluating our relationship and behaviors with food. We are so quick to designate 'good' and 'bad' foods, but disregard our intentions and behaviors with those foods. Eating has become an activity, and most people do not have responsible intentions for the food they eat."

So, the question becomes, not WHAT, but HOW are we eating? "Your personal relationship with food involves why you eat, what you eat, how much you eat, where you eat, and when you eat," Paddison explains. "Most people evaluate their behaviors after the fact; as a result, they feel guilt and wish they could have

done something better. This is a negative cycle. We need to develop 'pre-thought' to acknowledge our environment, intentions and how they will affect our eating."

"When willpower is weak because one has a bad day, the reinforcement has to be how one sets up their environment: what was bought at the store and brought home," Paddison says. "We are not always in control of our environment. When our willpower and environment both fail us, we must rely on our thought process – hopefully our 'pre-thoughts' – yet these behaviors require time to develop and become habitual. Following fad diets weakens thought processes and how you communicate with your body. When you fall off the diet, there are no behavior changes in place and it is easy to resort back to the negative habits and patterns."

Take a step to boost metabolism and reconnect with your body by working on meal frequency. "It is important to set general times throughout the day to prioritize your nutrition, ideally no longer than four hours apart,"

Paddison suggests. "Avoid the three S's – skipping, starving and stuffing. Skipping meals leads to starving, and starving results in stuffing, which then leads back to skipping, and the cycle continues. This slows metabolism and puts the body into fat-storage mode. Planning is required to make sure you have the right things on hand when it is time to eat. Planning can be easy – pack a lunch box with a chicken salad wrap or a tuna creations pouch, throw in a pack of nuts, a boiled egg and small serving of fruit."

Paddison concludes, "Health is one's quality of life, and everyone can start by making their nutrition a high priority. Taking steps for lifelong change will gradually turn into lifelong results without the exhaustion and overwhelming feeling of always searching for what might work better."

For additional information on the wellness programs offered at St. Joseph's/Candler, please visit sjchs.org/wellnesscenter, or call 912.819.8000.