



Sue Ann says: The New Year Begins with a Healthy Woman

Despite the amazing women we are, there is always something about ourselves we want to improve. What could be a more perfect time than the new year?

My friend Jennifer Michels, PhD, a clinical psychologist and counselor at the Marshfield Clinic, had some good advice for me—which I will happily share with you. She told me that the reason we usually fail in our well-intentioned new year's resolutions is because we tend to separate our goals rather than incorporate them into a balanced daily routine.

Jennifer uses an approach called “radical self care.” No, it's not the latest exercise craze or diet fad. It's a total lifestyle approach—mind, body, spirit—that emphasizes personal resonance, focus and reflection. “It's a larger guiding philosophy that allows us to reflect and ask, ‘Am I being in this world the way I want to be?’ versus ‘What do I have to do next?’” Jennifer explains.

Here's how you use this approach: Let's say your new year's resolution is to lose weight and exercise. (Whose isn't?) First, make sure your goal has personal resonance for you—that you feel strongly enough about the goal to make the changes necessary to achieve it. Exercise and better nutrition will help you feel less stressed and give you more energy. Your self-image will also get a big boost. Because you care passionately about feeling better, you will put aside time in your busy day to make eating right and exercise a priority.

Once you set your personal goal, Jennifer recommends practicing mindfulness to achieve focus. Unlike meditation, which seeks to de-clutter the mind from distraction, mindfulness is a heightened awareness of the activity you are involved in. “The key is to focus on just one thing at a time to achieve a harmonizing effect,” Jennifer explains. “When you are walking, focus on the environment around you. When you are eating, take the time to really savor all the flavors and textures.” You'll find that you begin to practice mindfulness not only with regard to your goal, but in other activities throughout your day. Multi-tasking is an energy drain, but focusing on just one thing can actually make you more productive.

Mindfulness doesn't just help us get more done; it makes your life far more peaceful and fulfilling. “Think about being a parent. You can get pulled in so many directions, you forget what's really important,” Jennifer says. “But if you practice mindfulness, you'll

focus on one thing—your interaction with your child at that moment. What could be more rewarding?”

Finally, Jennifer stresses consistent reflection. She reminded me that it takes about three months for the average person to truly kick a habit or establish a new one. She recommends splitting goals into smaller tasks and setting aside time for weekly—if not daily—reflection on what we want to modify and how we are progressing toward that goal.

Radical self-care promotes balance, which is crucial for women today. “It’s the idea of *being* versus *doing*,” Jennifer explains. “Women run on a train of continuous ‘to-dos’. It’s important to pull over and look at the roses once in awhile.”

Many women feel that self-care is selfish. Jennifer argues just the opposite. “When we take care of ourselves, we are nicer people,” she notes. “This increases harmony in all our relationships.” You’ll find that when you make yourself happier, those around you are happier too.

If you want your new year’s resolutions to stick this year, I urge you to try Jennifer’s radical self-care approach.

As we begin 2007, my wish for us all is that we make healthy lifestyle changes, one step at a time, to reach our healthiest potential so that the new year begins with a healthy woman.

Wishing you a joyous and healthy new year,

Sue Ann Thompson
Founder & President
Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation

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