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The Perfectionism Trap 10 Keys for Breaking Free

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By Greg Hottinger, BLC Expert

Are you a perfectionist? When you're given a task, do you either do it the "right way" or not at all? Do you strive for perfection in life, whether its school attendance, keeping an immaculate home, or having the desire to become the CEO?

If so, you set the bar high and experience mastery in many areas of your life. As a perfectionistic person, however, you aren't very successful in losing weight and keeping it off despite your best effort. How is this possible, you wonder? Are you ready to escape the all-or-nothing perfectionism trap that keeps you feeling stuck at a heavier weight?

The desire for "perfection" can be learned from your parents or from living in a culture obsessed with beauty and wealth. You are reminded on a daily basis what you could have or look like if you just worked a little harder and had more control.

When you start a new weight loss program, it's normal for you to follow the rules of the program exactly. In doing this, you trust that you'll be successful in melting off your unwanted pounds. You're convinced that this approach is the right one until you hit the familiar "speed bumps" that zap your motivation and brings your new program to a grinding halt. The first step to long-term weight loss success is to see how your tendencies are sabotaging your program.

The perfectionistic dieter is one that can answer YES to at least 5 of these 10 questions:

1. Do you typically begin your new program on a Monday?
2. Do you typically want to "speed up" the process and are willing to eat less than what the program recommends or exercise more to reach your goal?
3. Do you expect to suffer with your new program and feel deprived?
4. Do you enjoy the thrill of eliminating certain foods or entire food groups?
5. Do you battle strong urges to eat unhealthy foods or skip exercise?
6. Do you use the words "good" or "bad" to describe certain foods and your eating behavior?
7. Do you fall off the wagon when you have a bad night, sometimes even after just making an unhealthy food choice?
8. Do you struggle with feelings of guilt, thinking that you could be doing better?
9. Do you believe the motto "no pain, no gain" is true?
10. Are you convinced that past failed attempts were lack of effort and/or staying focused?

The perfectionistic dieter typically sees great results and feels completely in control for a few weeks or months. If this is you, then you know how the bottom can fall out and how your motivation can disappear overnight.

Often a major life event, like getting a new job or moving, causes you to abandon your program because you can't "give it the attention it deserves." You put this unfinished project back on the shelf until later, at which point, you've gained much of your weight back.

How does the perfectionistic dieter break free of a pattern that simply doesn't work? The answer is to shift to the 80/20 approach, which means learning to make healthy choices 80% of the time. The 80/20 approach leaves room in your weight loss program for both planned and surprise indulgences. By adapting the following 10 keys, you will be able to adapt the 80/20 approach and escape the perfectionism trap once and for all:

10 Keys to Escaping Perfectionism