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Break Free of the Clean Plate Club using NLP techniques for Healthy Weight Loss

by Holly Stokes, Master NLP Coach, Speaker

The formula for weight loss is fairly simple, *eat **better (rather than less)**, and move more*. So, what gets in our way of whether or not we follow through on what we know we “should” do? It’s our habits. Some habits are obvious, overeating, smoking, needing to clean your dinner plate. But there are other habits that are less obvious, we also have habits in what we think and how we feel. These other habits can easily get in the way of how motivated or disciplined we are with any goal we are trying to achieve. With advances in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), you can apply a few techniques to help you conquer old habits and springboard yourself toward success.

Our brain relies on habits for efficiency. Anything that we repeat often enough, the mind automates it and adds it to the autopilot system. This is useful in learning because once we have learned something, and it’s automated, we don’t have to think about it, such as tying shoes or driving a car. However, the difficulty comes with habits that are not so useful, like overeating, smoking, and even thinking and feeling habits, such as taking things personally, anxiety, even depression can all be habits.

Our brain is made up of brain cells that create pathways between them. We use these pathways for what we think, feel, and do, and the pathways that we use most often become the default or part of the autopilot system. What we practice becomes easier.

Remember the old saying, “It takes 30 days to make a new habit?” Well, it’s not so true anymore. The element of creating a new habit is repetition. With understanding how the mind works, and through the advancement of applied psychology, namely, NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), we can set up a new habit in just a few sessions, or even less. NLP developed from the study of successful people, and typically uses mental strategies for creating new habits, patterns, and updating old “programs” or belief systems.

In training the mind to create new habits, we first must identify the cues or triggers that tell the mind to run the old habit. For instance, if we have been conditioned to clean your

plate, the cue is that you are not done eating until your plate is clean. Even if you are stuffed, you may feel compelled to squeeze in those last bites.

The Clean Plate Club is very common. And the reasons parents taught us to clean our plate have a variety of positive intentions. Not all of it was meant as a guilt trip, but most cases, it was well-meaning parents who wanted to make sure their kids had enough to eat, get the nutrition growing bodies need, and also to appreciate food, minimize waste, and feel gratitude.

So, after years of making sure I cleaned my plate, the cue to stop eating doesn't come until after the plate is clean. However, just because we've created a pathway doesn't mean it can't change. All these brain pathways are simply what we've learned and we can learn something new. In fact, we are always learning. We can more easily than ever create new habits, patterns, and update old "programs." But first we must identify what we want instead.

I know I no longer want to be compelled to clean my plate! I would rather notice when I am full and satisfied, and find it easy to stop eating when I've reached the point of comfortably full. Now, that we've identified what we want instead, it simply needs practice and repetition for the mind to automate it. But rather than take 30 days to run through it daily, while focusing conscious attention on every meal, we can instead run through it in the mind and create new mental cues that take care of the positive intentions of the old behavior.

So, if you've been part of the Clean Plate Club, try out this exercise from the field of NLP, to help your mind gain new cues about when to stop eating and what to do instead.

In your mind's eye, imagine that you are sitting down to dinner, you have a beautiful plate of healthy food in front of you, and you begin to enjoy your dinner. When you've finished about $\frac{3}{4}$ of your plate, you begin to notice that you feel full, even a wonderful feeling of satisfaction. Looking at your plate, notice that the food looks less appealing, and you feel like eating less and less. You might even hear yourself thinking, "I'm done," and you notice that you would rather have that wonderful feeling of comfortably full rather than stuffed.

Way off in the distance, you notice a bright spark, it begins to come closer and closer, faster and faster, until it explodes in front of you into a big refrigerator. You realize, it's so easy to wrap it up, and save the rest for later (preserving the intention of not wasting food), or if you are in a restaurant, you can box it up and take it with you, you can still enjoy it later. You automatically get up from your dinner, wrap it up, and put it away in the refrigerator, while you feel so comfortably satisfied.

So, this brief visualization has outlined some mental cues for breaking the old habit, Clean your Plate. repeat this exercise about 8 times and your mind will begin to create a new thought pattern. Notice the next time you sit down to dinner, you will pay more attention to the feeling of comfortably full as a cue to stop eating rather than cleaning your plate. In your mind, you are telling your brain what you want it to do, and running through the new pattern instead. All it needs is repetition to turn your new thought pattern into a habit. And your new habit will run, even without consciously thinking about it when it is incorporated into your autopilot system. This is only one example of how you can train your brain to quickly and easily create new habits and patterns.

Other patterns that may affect your motivation, health, and self-management may not be very obvious, even sometimes with hidden benefits that perpetuate them. The habits of what we do are more obvious than our thought and feeling habits, but if we take the time, we can identify what else may be getting in our way. Thinking and feeling habits common to the challenge of weight loss is that for many in our culture, sweets were given as a reward. When we did something well, often we were treated with candy, cookies, ice cream, or other sweets. So, now as an adult, when we want to treat ourselves, recognize that we've done a good job, we may go for the same rewards we were given as a child.

So, we not only have our habits in what we do, but our entire history of food and meanings that may be influencing our choices and preferences daily. Included in that history are beliefs about ourselves or how the world works. These beliefs are tricky because they seem like the hard fast rules of life. But when we look closer, they don't hold up to scrutiny. See if any of these beliefs may be part of your history.

- “You have to work hard to lose weight” There are many people who don't work hard to lose weight or maintain it. If it's not true for everyone, it's not a universal truth, and it may be just a belief.
- “Weight loss is just part of getting older.” From a study of the obesity in U.S. it was found that before 1980, only 1 of 50 states had more than 15% of the population who were obese. After 10 year span, 1990, the same map showed that all states had more than 15% of the population who were obese. America got fat in the space of 10 years!

Here are some more examples of beliefs that can get in your way. “No pain, no gain” may keep you from enjoying a fitness program. Other beliefs or programs may come from childhood mind, “If only I were bigger, they wouldn't pick on me.” There is no end to the possibilities of the mental and emotional patterns that may be running in the background, and every person is unique.

With NLP, it's easy to identify the unique set of internal associations that are contributing to your problem or challenge, and may take as few as 10 minutes. If you are not getting the results you want with your weight loss program, or you find yourself lacking motivation for your goals, you will find it useful to identify the deeper "programs," that are working against you.

Ask a qualified NLP Practitioner to walk through the Hands Polarity exercise to quickly find the internal associations, patterns, and beliefs that contribute to a problem or challenge. It can even take as few as 10 minutes to help you identify what might be getting in your way. Then, with the applied tools of NLP, you can take charge of how you think and feel, update your programs and patterns, and make your success happen!

Author Holly Stokes, "The Brain Trainer," NLP Coach lives in the Pacific Northwest and works with clients across the U.S., helping them change habits, patterns, and update past "programs" that are getting in the way of personal and professional goals. Holly Stokes, founder of Expanding Potentials, runs workshops and tele-classes for Healthy Living and Weight, Positive Communications, and Personal and Professional Success. Visit: www.LightenUp.me or www.ExpandingPotentials.net