

Taking Small Steps in Nutritional Health

Case Study: Fr. Rick and Sr. Sue

Fr. Rick lives in a rectory without the services of a cook. Twice weekly he ministers at three local hospitals. Since his commute takes him past a favorite fast food drive-through restaurant, he would often stop for coffee. Gradually the coffee was augmented by an egg and meat sandwich or pancakes. When he noticed his shirts were becoming tighter, he realized he had gained weight. He set a goal to eat cereal and a banana for breakfast at home. After the first week he assessed his feelings about the change: It was not time-consuming, the food was satisfying enough, and he had more cash in his wallet than he had in previous weeks.

The down side was that he missed the coffee in the car. He decided to try making coffee at home and carrying it in a travel mug. At the end of the week, he was moderately satisfied and was not tempted to stop at the drive-through, but realized he missed the gourmet coffee flavors. How might he make the flavor more interesting without barista training? He sampled several gourmet blends for home use and found flavors that he enjoyed. He began looking forward to his morning cup o' Joe, and some mornings his associate would join him, enticed by the aromas wafting through the house. He experienced the changes thus far to be minimally intrusive and socially and financially rewarding. But how might he change the other lifestyle components that affect weight—decreasing calories or increasing exercise?

Fr. Rick enjoyed tennis but rarely took the time to join priest friends who played weekly. Could he afford court fees? Would it be selfish to take one afternoon a week for tennis? He decided to join his friends for one week for their afternoon games to assess the benefits. He noticed his skills had deteriorated a bit, but he also noticed how much fun he had interacting with his friends. He decided to make tennis part of his routine, adjusting his hospital ministry days around it. On the days when he was at the hospital, while he waited for afternoon traffic patterns to adjust, he found a walking path and took a power

walk. He weighed himself weekly and found a sense of accomplishment as his weight returned to its former level and his clothes fit comfortably.

Creating New Patterns

Sr. Sue has been a kindergarten teacher for 30 years. She is 5-feet tall and has been overweight for her entire adult life. She is an excellent and beloved teacher. As a weekly reward for her young students she often gives Friday afternoon candy treats. In her personal life, she also gives herself a weekly reward. To wind down from a busy week with 20 5-year-olds, she comes home, props her feet in her recliner and eats her favorite chocolate candy while watching TV.

When Sr. Sue found out last year that she had Type 2 diabetes, she knew she had to change her food habits and she felt overwhelmed. She began her changes by becoming more aware of her food intake by writing down everything she ate for one week. She was careful to observe her choices, but not to judge them, so that she could better understand them. Changing the Friday afternoon candy binges seemed a reasonable place to start. She knew that a person with diabetes should not eat candy mindlessly, even though she took medication that controlled her blood sugars well. She decided to allow herself three pieces while she watched her "feel-good" TV dramas. The first week with this change she found that as the anxiety built in the drama, she continued to help herself from the candy jar. Without reprimanding herself, she considered another approach to decrease candy intake.

The next week she moved the candy to the kitchen and enjoyed it there with a cup of herbal tea before she started her programs. She thought this change might help to sever the association of eating candy with watching TV. This approach was effective, and as she watched TV she sipped on a second cup of tea.

Since limiting her candy intake was such new behavior for Sr. Sue, she knew she needed to practice this workable strategy for several weeks and to reassess the costs and benefits. The loss of her candy binge seemed minimal

compared to the emotional and physical benefits of self-control in her eating. Sr. Sue experienced a sense of self-efficacy and practiced this new, healthier behavior for one year as her only new behavior after her diabetes diagnosis. With modest effort she found some non-food rewards for her students, which they also enjoyed and which did not remind her so vividly of her former food behavior. Creating new patterns through small changes gradually diminished the associations between eating and other habits, which helped her to maintain her new behaviors.

Ellen M. Griffiths, RD, LDN, MPH, is the staff nutritionist at Saint Luke Institute.

Transitions

After 12 years of service as Director of Education and the Editor of *Lukenotes*, Sr. Lynn M. Levo, CSJ, Ph.D., has concluded her full-time ministry at Saint Luke Institute. After some sabbatical time, Lynn will continue to minister as a consulting psychologist, offering workshops and presentations in the USA and abroad. Lynn will continue to affiliate with both Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, MD, and St. Luke's Centre in Manchester, England, sharing her expertise in selected workshops.

The readers of *Lukenotes* have benefited not only from Sr. Lynn's talent as a psychologist, but also from her ability to bring out the best in other experts. As editor, Lynn has provided inestimable guidance and support to all those who have contributed to *Lukenotes* over the last several years. Sr. Lynn Levo, CSJ, Ph.D., can be reached at lynncsji@gmail.com.

We are also pleased to announce that Martha Keys Barker, LCSW-C, has been appointed Editor of *Lukenotes*. Martha is an individual therapist in the Talitha-Life Program for Women Religious at Saint Luke Institute. She can be reached at marthak-b@sli.org.

*Rev. Edward J. Arsenault
President and CEO
Saint Luke Institute*