

## CHAPTER FOUR

# CHANGING YOUR ATTITUDE

**H**ave you ever had the experience of making a resolution to make a major change in your life and then found your willpower crumbling in the face of a lack of support from the people and environment around you? One of the reasons that formal education is sometimes ineffective is that, although we can change behavior under classroom conditions, as soon as we go back to the old environment, the same old behavior appears.

One of the most basic tenets of learning theory is that behavior will recur if it is reinforced; and that which is not reinforced will be extinguished or drop away. Many people make resolutions to start an exercise program or resolve to start eating better and then find themselves back in the same old habits of not exercising or eating the same old foods.

What? Me Change?

Changing behavior can be considered a three-step process. First, you have to learn the theory. Secondly, the changed behavior must be elicited. Thirdly, it must be positively reinforced, or rewarded. All this means is that we need to know what to do, do it, and then want to keep doing it. With this powerful sequence, we can control our behavior and make ourselves do anything.

Since this book is about wellness, fitness, and overcoming disease, let's limit our discussion of behavior change to diet and exercise.

In my particular case, I was highly motivated to make a dietary change. After all, as I perceived the situation, the penalty for failure was death. My eating habits changed literally overnight. What then amazed me was that I started enjoying food more.

The most basic foods such as brown rice, apples, potatoes, broc-

coli, carrots, and oatmeal seemed, as if for the first time, to taste so good. I didn't need sauces, spices, sweeteners, etc., to make those foods appetizing. They were already delicious, and I started to appreciate their basic good tastes as if for the first time.

I had learned the theory: that a low-fat diet seemed to enable people to live longer. I was highly motivated to adopt it. Then the reinforcement was the rediscovery of the good taste of pure, healthful food and feeling better.

**You're the One Who's Sick, Not Me!**

The only difficulty lay in my environment. My then husband apparently did not see any value for him in eating this way, saying, "You're the one who's sick, not me!" I was even accused of becoming "a religious zealot" in terms of the enthusiasm with which I embraced the dietary change.

Had I not had the negative motivator of fear behind me, I'm not sure that I could have stuck with the change. After all, I could not clear the kitchen of all the offending foods and had to face the challenge of continuing temptation. I must say, though, that after learning about the problems that meat and dairy products cause, I was not all that tempted.

It was a little different with friends in a social environment. Those who knew of my change were afraid to eat in front of me and thought that I would never find anything to eat at restaurants. Things have changed a lot since I became a vegetarian. Not only are almost all restaurants happy to prepare a vegetarian meal, but there are lots of vegetarian options for you to try.

Ethnic restaurants are probably a fairly safe bet, because the menus offer dishes from generations of people who obviously survived on that diet. Mexican restaurants are great because you can order side dishes of rice, beans, and corn tortillas. (Note: you may have a choice between corn and wheat tortillas. Wheat tortillas are usually made with refined, white flour, so go with the corn tortillas.) This makes an absolutely scrumptious meal and you'll be amazed at how inexpensively you can eat, too! Chinese and Japanese restaurants already serve fairly healthy dishes. Just go for the soba (buckwheat) noodles and vegetables. More and more restaurants are now serving brown

rice. I always ask for it even if I know they don't serve it. I want them to know that the demand is there. You can also ask them to prepare the food with no added oils, or to skip the monosodium glutamate (MSG) if you're on a low-sodium diet. Again, these meals are usually delicious as well as inexpensive. Indian restaurants are also good bets for healthful eating. Many of them have a great selection of vegetarian dishes such as curries, dal, and chapattis. I have included some recipes at the back of this book for you to make at home.

### Groups are Powerful Stuff

With regard to making exercise changes, we already know in theory that exercise is good for us and most of us never get enough. How do we put into practice resolutions to exercise more and get to the reinforcement?

One secret I've found is to join a group. This has been powerful motivator for me. First, a group usually has a leader or coach who provides instruction and encouragement. Secondly, peer pressure can do wonders in terms of making us want to keep to a task and do it well. The social aspects of groups satisfy other needs as well, such as companionship, role models, like-minded friends, and in some cases compatible lovers.

For about fifteen years I was a solitary runner. I ran the same course, the same distance, used the same running style, and did not improve much. Once I joined a formal group of runners headed by the legendary New Zealand ultra-marathoner, Max Telford, my progress was exciting. I was increasing my distance easily because of the fast friendships that enabled me to run miles painlessly while talking and having lots of fun. We tackled steep hills, bounding and striding up them, laughing all the way. At the end of our workouts, we basked in the good feelings we all had for our training efforts and each other. At races we sought each other out and reinforced each other's efforts.

As I got more into road races, I started to work out on a regular track. Here I was, at the age of forty-seven, learning a whole new vocabulary consisting of "400's," "800's," "intervals," "quarters," and finding out that running around in circles could actually be fun. This group still trains every Wednesday evening at the University of Hawaii under the tutelage of the women's track coach, Johnny Faerber.

I miss a workout only under the direst of emergencies. To illustrate, I recall once getting off a plane after a five-hour flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu and going directly to the track to run! I've done 100-mile around-the-island bicycle rides, gotten off the bike, and done a track workout. This is in spite of occasionally being so saddle-sore that I could barely walk.

Swim training in a pool can be so boring that I can hardly ever bring myself to do it alone. Yet, with a group it is actually fun. Coaches are a necessity here, because swim technique is critical to racing fast, and swim form deteriorates rapidly under fatigue. Even when not tired, it seems that I need constant reminders to keep my elbows high!

The bike rides I mentioned above would never have been undertaken alone. In the first place, I always do long rides using the buddy system. It's the safest thing to do in case of accident or mechanical failure. Secondly, a boring ride is transformed into something joyous when riding with compatible people. The experiences we share are so reinforcing that I'm hooked even when not training. And it must work for others as well since we always have a nice, large, and willing group.

As a fringe benefit we see some of the most glorious sights in the world. In Hawaii, on the island of Oahu, we start out by climbing over Diamond Head, go past Hanauma Bay, scream downhill to Sandy Beach and see some of the most beautiful rocky seacoasts on the island. On clear mornings, you can see all the way to the outer islands of Molokai, Maui, and Lanai. These experiences are so exciting I wish I could share these with the whole world!

As you can probably tell, I'm something of a health evangelist! I try to get people out on the roads or in the ocean, just as I implore people to try eating a diet of 100 percent plant foods for just twenty-one days. Many have said they'd try it, have loved it, and are still out there. A few have tried it, intended to get back to it, and somehow never quite made it, but still loved it. And some will not even try it. Those people in the first two groups are your athletic supporters, and people in the third group are your non-supporters. Surround yourself with athletic supporters, and you won't have any problem maintaining a healthy and fun exercise and diet program.