

DailyHap

Achieving Happiness 1 Day at a Time.

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Will Well Eating Really Make You Happy?

NUTRITIONIST FRANCI COHEN WEIGHS IN



Franci Cohen is a personal trainer, certified nutritionist, exercise physiologist, and creator of SPIDERBANDS®, a total-body cardio resistance workout that leverages gravity and your bodyweight with other intense exercise modules such as rebounding, kickboxing, and indoor cycling. Franci believes in a tough love approach to fitness and health, but we got to see her softer side when she revealed her health, wellness, and happiness tips to us. Read on.

DailyHap: How does your approach to nutrition differ from the mainstream view?

Franci: My approach to nutrition is different than most conventional dietitians. A typical dietician tries to get an accurate and complete patient food history at an initial consultation. This may include requesting a food log, list of food likes and aversions, psychological or behavioral questionnaire (for example: do you overeat when you are stressed or depressed?), list of all medications, etc. This is all wonderful! A diet plan is then designed using certain math equations. For example, cutting 3500 calories from your diet will result in a 1 pound weight loss.

Unfortunately, the math doesn't always hold true in reality. If you cut 3500 in just 3 days, your body's homeostatic mechanism (survival mechanism) will "red-light" your fat-burning capacity, and a 1 pound weight loss will not be achieved.

This is why I found it prudent to operate differently with regard to diet and weight loss. The initial questionnaire is great peak into the window of a patient's life with regard to food, but no 2 people are alike. This is why we need to delve deeper. I always request a full CBC. By reviewing blood work, I find that hormone imbalances, slightly off-balanced thyroid functions, high blood pressure, etc., are strongly correlated to diet and weight loss. Additionally, I

have patients fill out a "cravings" forms. This is a detailed questionnaire that can easily allow me to identify the main issues associated with an individual patient's struggle with weight loss.

What we crave is indicative of the hormonal status in our body. The hormonal status is indicative of metabolic function, and this, as we all know, is closely linked to weight loss. One patient may have an underlying medical issue that can be easily rectified through a food or supplement, and another may be gaining weight simply due to environmental or emotional culprits. Identifying these barriers for me is the 1st and most crucial element. Next we set realistic short and long term goals and objectives, and incorporate an exercise regime that is also realistic and enjoyable.

To recap, here is my fool-proof way to weight loss success:

A patient must be evaluated as an individual in several areas.

Evaluate CBC

Diet and exercise plan must be devised and tailored specifically for patient, and MUST be doable and enjoyable for the patient.

Constant change in both diet and exercise plan. This keeps patient excited, confident, and happy, avoids the pitfalls that monotony can bring, and keeps your body's metabolism on its toes!

DailyHap: Do you see a psychological component to diet and weight loss?

Franci: There is most certainly a strong psychological component with regard to diet and weight loss. In fact, there are entire categories in the healthcare field devoted to this matter. Psychologists who specialize in "behavioral health". Brain biochemistry is what drives our behavior. This includes habits, addictions, and actions we choose to take based on advertisements and other environmental influences. Each plays a key role.

It's about that time of year when many of us are looking to banish those bulging post-holiday pounds. Many pay a handsome price for weight-loss supplements, and others make the famous "New Year's Resolution" to lose those last stubborn 5 pounds. Some attempt just a single day, vowing to eat healthy, and yet by mid-day they find themselves polishing off a piece of chocolate cake. This is all psychological.

We are capable of rationalizing any behavior, and we can try to "behave" when eating, so that we nourish our body while obtaining a lean and slim physique. However, just because we are capable of a certain behavior, does not mean we will choose to behave in that manner. Stress, anxiety, addictions, depression, are just a few factors that can cripple us from consciously controlling our eating behaviors.

The bottom line is that if you are both psychologically and physically ready and willing to take positive strides toward diet and weight loss, the pounds will drop with every single step you take!

DailyHap: What role does nutrition play in a person's happiness?

Franci: Nutrition plays a vital role in a person's happiness in 3 different ways.

First, if a body is being fed processed foods, high in refined carbs and sugars, with additives and hydrogenated oils, the body basically becomes a toxic waste dump. It emits offensive odors, becomes sluggish, and does not operate to the best of its ability. Such a body becomes at risk for certain diseases and illnesses as well. On the flip side, if a body is being fed natural foods, whole grains, legumes, fruits, veggies, and lean proteins, such a body will thrive with regard to health, and will operate like a fine-tuned machine!

Additionally, there are foods that have components proven to promote happiness. For example, omega-3 fatty acids found in salmon have been linked to happiness. Certain components in nuts aid in sleep, which in turn reduces stress and promotes happiness. Other foods are touted as "happy foods" due to the endorphin release (feel-good hormone) they promote in the body.

Maintaining steady blood sugar levels by eating many small meals periodically throughout the day (as opposed to 3 big ones) can keep you satiated, and prevent mood swings that result from big drops in blood sugar throughout a given day. This steady blood sugar in turn creates a steady stream of happiness throughout a given day. The feeling of being stuffed after a big Thanksgiving dinner generally can be soporific and put you to sleep. Once again, here is another reason to eat small frequent meals throughout the day. The constant refueling of the body will keep you happy and energized all day long!

DailyHap: What do you teach your children about health and wellness?

Franci: My husband and children are the biggest gifts in my life. As such I try to instill in them a healthy attitude with respect to food and their bodies. Extremes of any nature are not healthy. To maintain optimum health while looking our best, we must eat "healthy" foods, and only occasionally delve into sweets and other treats. The trick is to learn to crave the healthy stuff!

When it comes to kids, creativity is key! Try cutting fruits into different shapes, freezing them and homogenizing in juicer to create all-natural sorbet, or stacking grilled veggie sticks like a tower and serving with different dipping sauces. Kids come home from school excited to eat their fruits and veggies!

When my 12 year-old was a toddler I put pink pomegranate seeds in her little princess bowls, and told her they were magic jewel candies from Cinderella's castle. She was ecstatic!!! The possibilities are endless! When kids feel good, their behavior towards food is good as well. They eat well to nourish their bodies and minds, and the result is a happy healthy child!

DailyHap: Are you happy? What makes you happy?

Franci: Happiness is quite subjective. Ernest Hemingway has been quoted as saying "Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know." Intelligent people are often driven individuals always striving to achieve a new level of greatness, never taking time to "smell the roses," so to speak.

Gandhi defines happiness as "when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

I think my interpretation concurs best with Dale Carnegie. He has said "Happiness doesn't depend on any external conditions. It is governed by our mental attitude". I have seen people suffering and at the lowest level of the human condition, and they are happy and grateful for even the smallest things. Conversely, there are others with wealth, fame, friends, and family, and they are miserable and unhappy.

| I am happy and grateful every day for my family, health, and my abilities. Anything else after that is just gravy!