

Hooked On Recovery

February 22, 2008

Eat Less, Move More Chapter II

I set a personal goal many, many months ago; to be in the best shape of my life by age 50. Back in October I clicked off birthday 48. I have this vision in my head that my ultra-firm, lean, sinewy body, my wife and my five children all run the Manchester Day Thanksgiving Day Race, gleefully crossing the finish line hand in hand, barely breaking a sweat; the 5 mile romp simply a stroll through the park. Somehow sitting in the big ol' brown leather chair in front of the 42" flat screen HDTV downing barbeque chipotle chicken wings and multiple slices of bacon pizza wasn't cutting it. I had tried on a few occasions to adopt my own fitness regimen only to have it cave in under the temptation of a Wendy's #3 – a double with cheese, a bucket of French fries drowned with a gallon of "diet" coke. It was becoming painfully obvious that I would need some help.

So back in January, I enlisted the help of a nutritionist and a personal trainer. I equate it to some times in my personal recovery, where I reached out and got the help of other people in recovery to help me walk through some valley or other. In the rooms, I heard others talking about finding people with something I want and then doing what they do. I found people with light in their eyes, people that seemed to intuitively know how to handle situations that would baffle me, and I did what they did. I didn't usually like what I had to do, but it sure beat the alternative. So with this mindset, I met with the nutritionist.

She weighed me, 251 pounds on January 6th. Ouch. I'm telling a lot of people, in an effort to make myself accountable, and people have said, "251? You carry it so well." Tell my aching knees that. I guess being tall has some advantages. Next she measured my body fat (I don't remember what that was; ~27% maybe) and set a goal weight of 215. Next we talked about the different food groups, portion size, and eating 6 times a day with much smaller amounts. The good news is that when they measured my metabolism it was still high. The best nugget of wisdom they gave me was moving from "mindless to mindful" eating. On this continuum, I was pretty near the mindless end. If I was hungry, I ate. If I craved a particular food, I sought it out. The nutritionist wants to move me along to more mindful eating – making conscious choices. I do that every day when it comes to consuming alcohol or any other illegal drug. I make a choice. I could do the same with food. Have I been perfect over the last 6 weeks? No, but it's a lot better.

Now let me tell you about my personal trainer. This woman may be a few years younger than me, she is sweet, gentle, kind, attractive and vicious. How can such a sweet thing be so cruel, so unsympathetic, so immune to the whining of a grown man begging for mercy? The 1st session she broke me. Every muscle in both my arms ached for three days. The 2nd session she showed me a little compassion. The 3rd session, she broke my legs; I couldn't walk without pain for an entire week. But this was the kind of pain that made me smile, even laugh at times. It wasn't like the piercing pain of an injury.

Another example of how vicious this sweet little thing is: I was at the gym on my own and I was sitting at the overhead press machine. I had moved the weight from the 230 pounds the brute before me was using and slid the peg into the 70 pound notch. I struggled through the first 2 sets of 10 and was embarking on the 3rd, when she came over to me (she was working with another

client) and whispered in my ear, “I WARM UP with more weight than that.” Good thing I’m comfortable in my own skin and my masculinity. It’s hard enough lifting puny weights with muscle bound Neanderthals all around you. Truth be known, I kinda admire those ripped guys (they have something I want) and take solace in that they must have started somewhere. I’ll just have to work at it. So I casually replied, “You’re a beast. But I’ll catch you soon enough”. She let out a defiant laugh and moved on. She knows how to motivate, I’ll give her that.

So today, and working this health thing one day at a time, my eating habits are much more mindful. Salad is OK. I can eat a piece of chicken without it being smothered in cheese and bacon. I haven’t missed the sweets, sugar free Italian ice suffices. Portion sizes are down, I get full quickly. I’ve broken through the lethargy and look forward to my workouts at the gym. I’ve improved tremendously on the treadmill, the weight I’m lifting is going up, my endurance is way better, my clothes fit better and most importantly I feel really good. The final proof for me is on the scale. I have signed up for 48 weeks worth of weight checks. At weight check #3, after 8 weeks of working a program I now weigh 234, a nice steady weight loss.

But pray for me, the siren call of Wendy’s still beckons strongly....

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.