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Diet, Exercise & the Balancing Act

Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk and author once wrote, "Happiness is not a matter of intensity, but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony." Just as the balance of seasons nourish the earth, so do the choices we make to keep ourselves healthy & vital.

Most people would agree that in today's society, time is a valuable commodity. Often we find there is not enough of it, and that the time we do have continually expires beyond our control. So in our pursuit of a balanced, healthy life, we have to be more deliberate in our manipulation of time. Making time for vigorous exercise is a critical starting point. The addition of exercise into one's life is a fundamental step toward overall balance. Either before work, during work, after work or on the weekends, a commitment of at least a half hour to exercise, 2-4 times per week, must be made. Until this transition occurs, the scales will remain tipped to the excesses of work and stress,

and a balance will remain elusive. Of course, the dividends of exercise are only revealed by the immersion into exercise. Hence, one will never know until they try. Once the combination of work and exercise is obtained, free time takes on an entirely new meaning, and it's rewards become even sweeter. Alas, you've achieved one of the many fundamental levels of balance in your life.

The Yin & Yang of work and exercise (not to be mistaken with work and play, an entirely different but equally relevant level of balance) feeds easily into the realm of diet, and to what extent you wish to control what you put into your body. And here's a hint, the crucial balance you seek will not be achieved by controlling every morsel of food you eat and every drop of fluid you drink. Real balance occurs once you relinquish partial control to your own common sense. The combination of self control and informed judgment creates the ulti-

mate path to diet success. For example, consider the scenario where Monday thru Friday, you make thoughtful, well balanced choices for your breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. The rewards are the consistent maintenance of your weight and nutrition, as well as peace of mind. Now let's say you extend this approach to the remaining 2 days of the week. You have now achieved complete perfection in diet and nutrition, right? Here's an argument for why this might not be considered total success, and certainly not balance. Let's assume you're a fairly typical person who has friends and enjoys going out and socializing. What's going to happen when you're out at dinner and cannot precisely control the content of your meal? Pack it up and go home? Tell off the chef? No, you're going to sit back, relax and enjoy yourself, here's why: Based upon the choices you make at home 5 days a week when preparing meals for yourself and your family,

trust that the choices you make from a restaurant menu will also be based upon the same sound judgment. And so food is no longer to be feared, rather enjoyed. And once again, you find yourself on the path to achieving yet another fundamental level of balance in your life.

Diet and exercise are, by no means, the total solution to a balanced life. They are however, fundamental components that when mastered, can create an unstoppable wave of self confidence and peace of mind. And who among us couldn't benefit from more of that?

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