



A Practice to Open the Heart

Do you secretly believe you'll be happier (healthier, more satisfied, etc.) when ____ happens (fill in the blank). It is so easy to focus on what we think is missing in our lives. This has the effect of closing our heart; our life becomes more constricted.

Practices that open our heart get us back into the present. When we are able to be there with whatever is happening in our life, something opens inside us. Our life becomes more expansive. An easy opening practice is to think about what you already have. Even when things aren't going the way you'd hoped, what is there that can be appreciated?

Create a regular practice of writing or saying out loud what you appreciate in or around you. Is there beauty in plants, colors, textures, the day? Is there some part of you that feels well today? Are there relationships that you value? Do you enjoy watching the new buds of spring? What is there that opens your heart just by noticing?

Saying what you are grateful for has a way of changing your perspective. It reminds you of what is good in your life. Rather than focus on what you think is missing, this practice opens your heart to what you already have.

Heart Health

When you think of being good to the vital organ that pumps life force throughout your body, think fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are nature's power foods. They are low in calories, and packed with vitamins, minerals and other compounds that enhance our health. People who eat the most fruits and vegetables have the lowest risk of chronic diseases.

You know this. Do you actually do it? Here is one way to make this a habit. Pay attention to how many servings you are currently getting. In general, think of 1/2 cup as a serving. If you already get 9 servings a day (4 fruit and 5 vegetable), congratulations! If not, try increasing by one serving a day until that becomes a habit. Once that is your new routine, increase just a little more.



An added advantage of eating more fruits and vegetables is that they are filling and there is less room for junk food. You are concentrating on developing a positive habit, rather than focusing on what you 'shouldn't' have. A seasonal treat is roasted root vegetables. Select a variety of root veggies (try something new!) Peel and cut into bite size pieces, then toss with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Slow roast for 1 1/2—2 hours. It's delicious. Cheers to your heart!



Depression and Exercise

January and February are months that many people notice a tendency towards depression. Exercise is known to improve our mood—so this is an ideal time to do it. Find an activity you enjoy and do it regularly. Start slow and build gradually.

A rounded out exercise program includes four components:

- Aerobic exercise (like walking, swimming, biking)
- Strength or resistance (ie weights, push-ups, bands)
- Stretching
- Balance

Some forms of exercise, like Pilates and some yoga classes, can incorporate several components. Experiment until you find a combination that works well for you.

Creating Health

My new program, Three Months to Healthy Habits, is under way! This one-on-one work is giving me an exciting opportunity to learn more about what impacts our ability to care for ourselves and how we create lives of health and wellbeing. Here is something I've noticed:

All or none thinking

"I'm an all or none kind of guy/gal." Does this sound like you? All or none kind of thinking seems to be especially common with food and exercise. It is one of the biggest barriers that I see as I work with people. It sets up the unrealistic expectation that we have get it right or do it fully - or we won't do it at all. What are the chances for that?! Look for progress, not perfection. As long as there is movement you are making progress. That is enough.

Pay attention to your thoughts and what you tell yourself. Notice when you engage in all or none thinking. Ask yourself if that is really true. Make a game of it – how many times can you catch yourself and how many different ways does this kind of thinking show up? Be a detective and see what you can uncover. By becoming more aware, you'll have more choices and new options.

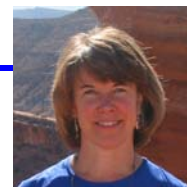
Learn more about this program on my website. Re-create a healthy relationship with your body. You don't need to deprive, or push yourself. You do need to pay attention and listen.



Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Health and Wellness Coaching and Nutrition Consulting. Discover the three core practices that contribute to your energy level and your state of well-being: Awareness, Eating to Sustain Energy, and Movement.

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!



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(707) 431-7524 or kathy@kathynichols.com