

Weight Loss Starts in Your Head

October 31. My Healthy Weight Journal crew was feeling the pressure of Halloween. “Candy. It’s everywhere.”

We were now in Week #7. Time to tell the group to hang tough, and take it a day at a time. Perhaps they would be inspired by a special group of people, who now make up the National Weight Control Registry. Would they be members in the future?

The National Weight Control Registry (www.nwcr.ws) was founded in 1993 by two researchers, Dr. James Hill of the University of Colorado and Dr. Rena Wing of Brown University. The purpose of the project was to find out why some people are successful at maintaining weight loss when rather bleak statistics tell us 95% of dieters fail to do so.

To qualify for the project, registrants – now some 4,500 – must have dropped at least 30 pounds and kept them off for a year or more. Many of the registrants have kept their weight off for over five years and lost over 60 pounds.

Interviews with study volunteers have revealed some common themes in terms of diet and exercise habits. Virtually all of these folks exercise five to seven days a week, for at least an hour a day. Walking is the most common form of exercise.

Although study participants used a variety of different diets to lose weight initially, daily monitoring of calorie intake and keeping the diet low in fat was the pattern most of them followed to maintain their weight loss.

For me, the fascination with the NWCR project has not necessarily been the information about diet and exercise habits. Instead, it is the information about how these people think, which ultimately directs their behavior. Based on their interviews, it becomes clear that the real key to staying within a narrow weight target comes with an inner transformation, a sort of “aha!” moment, with the realization they had become something new. Each of the registrants described a new sense of self, leaving behind an old environment and then being almost “reborn” into a different way of life. As their confidence and a feeling of self-empowerment increased, it opened the door to new types of achievements and goals, often unrelated to weight loss. For some, it was a new job, or a new passion, such as bird watching or hiking.

What path will weight loss lead the Healthy Weight participants down?
Stay tuned.