

A Cliche to Live By: How I Got Healthy and Stay That Way

By [Camille Leon](#)



Have you ever heard that old cliché -- "You are what you eat?" Well, I used to be *fast, cheap and easy*. After all, I live in LA where Pink's Hot Dogs is a revered institution. And what's a girl supposed to do in a town where Dodger dogs are a rite of passage? Plus, with the schedule I kept... let's just say that fast, cheap and easy allowed me to be effective, productive and at meetings on time.

Then my grandmother had a stroke. My mother was diagnosed with cancer and had a double mastectomy. I started paying attention to health-related news all the time.

Three of the top five causes of death are cancer, stroke and heart disease. Suddenly, I was looking at two of them, up close and personal.

Cancer, stroke and heart disease have been linked to genetics, poor eating and exercise habits, and partnered with high stress levels. I didn't have to look too far to know where I was headed. I already had the genetics up at the top rung on this ladder.

The good news is that only 30% is attributed to genetics. That means that I still had control over 70% of the factors that lead to these diseases. I had to look at my eating, exercise and stress habits.

I'm not alone. You might also be one of the 34% of Americans who are obese and 32.7% who are overweight (according to the National Center for Health Statistics). Whether you're overweight or not, I probably don't need to tell you how stressed we all are. These are the danger factors that we can all control.

The problem was that the healthy diets I saw were too rigid for me and the rest were too unhealthy... I felt like Goldilocks, with five bears at the banquet table! Papa Bear loved meat and potatoes and Mama Bear was filling up with fast food - unhealthy and unappetizing. The other bears were health addicts: one vegetarian, one vegan and one raw food only. Their diets were too much work and they were taking so many supplements to make up for missing nutrients that they weren't healthy either!

After some research, I started a diet with balance and a little of everything, an "all things in moderation" kind of diet. All I really needed to do was take one meal and one day at a time, to consider total nutritional value. Now, when I eat meat and potatoes, I include vegetables. If I have ice cream for dessert, I eat fruit for breakfast. I can decide between a Snickers and a banana, between fast food and organics, between water and a Coke.

My research told me that changing my eating habits wouldn't be enough. I would have to move my body, too. Apparently, running from office to meeting and back doesn't qualify as a workout.

Happily, according to the Mayo Clinic, any extra movement makes a difference. "Taking the stairs more often and parking farther away at the store are simple ways to burn more calories."

This means I don't have to go to the gym to get exercise. I have started walking more. I even take my cell phone and use the time to catch up with out-of-town friends.

In addition, my stress levels were through the roof. For me, a high level of stress was actually a success measurement. In L.A., stress is almost a competitive sport. It meant I was in demand, that everyone loved me and wanted me.

Unfortunately, a variety of sources from the Mayo Clinic to the World Health Organization have linked high levels of stress to everything from hair loss to decreased immune system function and heart disease. Stress also impacts our ability to focus and get work done efficiently or effectively. It also leads to some well-known and questionable pseudo-solutions like drinking, smoking and comfort eating.

I started talking to health and wellness experts like hypnotherapist, life coach and stress relief expert Barbara Schiffman, C.Ht., who says we should take steps to balance our stress levels so we don't get thrown off-center too easily: "This includes sleeping well, eating healthy foods, exercising, meditating and focusing on the positive things in our lives." Now, when I'm over-stressed, I take care of myself first by visiting a wellness professional, rather than waiting until I need a doctor! I get a massage so I can avoid needing a prescription.

It's easy for anyone to do what I'm doing ~ one meal, one snack and one day at a time. If I get off track for a day, I get back on the next. I guess if 'you are what you eat,' then I've gone a little bananas.

Today, I feel better, I look better and I work better. I have more energy and enjoy my L.A. lifestyle, even with less stress. I invite you to join me on this journey to becoming a healthier person on a healthier planet.

Camille Leon, Executive Director of The Holistic Chamber of Commerce and Co-author of THE EXHILARATION EFFECT: Building the Courage to take Your Leap of Faith, believes in a healthier and happier world through our choices. Learn more at <http://TheHolisticChamberOfCommerce.com> or at <http://ExhilarationEffect.com>.

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