

# Health Promotion Practitioner

Practical solutions for health enhancement programming

## Everything in Moderation

**D**uring my internship at Kimberly-Clark my mentor used this saying to justify his once-weekly indulgence in the dessert treat baklava: “Everything’s OK in moderation... except for smoking.” It’s a phrase that could be a tagline for any health promotion program — but in our super-sized, more-is-better culture, we’ve lost the meaning of moderation.

Nothing, it seems, is within reasonable limits anymore. From food to sports to politics to television, the more extreme the more we like it. The more excessive, the more we’re pulled to it. The more odd, peculiar, even perverse, the more we’re fascinated by it.

### Arriving at Excess

I blame it on the Whopper. Or maybe it was Elvis. At any rate, sometime in the last 30 years it became normal to be excessive. Exercise even had its run at gluttony when guru Jim Fixx, author of the best seller *The Complete Book of Running*, went on TV talk shows saying he jogged 60 miles a week and how exercising at this level increased the average lifespan. The sad irony is that July 20 marks the anniversary of Fixx’s death at age 52 — he died of a heart attack while jogging, just 4 years after he published his second book on running. The last 30 years of the 20th century were filled with near-hysteria about our high-fat diet and its contribution to heart disease. Now it looks like the first decade of this century will go down as the carb-crazed phase, as carbohydrates are labeled the villain in the rush to pin blame for our obesity crisis.

### Eating More and Exercising Less

According to the CDC, between 1971 and 2000 women’s daily calorie intake increased 22% (to 1877 a day from 1542), and men take in 7% more at 2618 vs. 2450 a day. At even half that amount it’s amazing our obesity problem isn’t worse!

The bottom line is we’re eating too much, specifically too many simple carbs, mostly from convenience or snack foods. We’re also less active. While the CDC says the number of adults reporting moderate activity — brisk walking, golf, gardening — at least once a month rose between 1988 and 2002, it’s unlikely our overall activity is increasing.

### Pat Lord’s Rules for Moderation

I’ve long since lost touch with my mentor from 1984, but here’s how he defined moderation for various health activities:

- Exercise. Do it every day. Your body was meant to move every day, so do it.
- Meals. 3 squares a day, starting with a high-protein breakfast. Don’t eat after 8 PM (or within 3 hours of bedtime) if you want to maintain a healthy weight.
- Sweets. Limit sweets to rare treats, no more than once a week.
- Snacks. Wait until you’re hungry, then eat a vegetable.
- Fast food. Avoid it.
- Caffeine. Skip it. Drink water.
- Smoking. Don’t do it.
- Alcohol. Limit it to 2 drinks a week.

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- Stress. Take time to meditate, pray, or just be still for at least 15 minutes each day.
- TV. Restrict it to 30 minutes a day.
- Sleep. 8 hours a night.

### No Magic Bullet

In the years since 1984, messages about miracle methods for losing weight have grown exponentially — from special diets to supplements to video tape workouts to home exercise equipment — on television, online, and in print. Your job is to set the record straight. No matter what your clients buy or what they try, if they're overweight, the only way to achieve and maintain a healthy weight is to eat less and exercise more.

### What to Do

You can't reinforce the moderation message too much. Your goal is to get people thinking about what's truly moderate behavior when it comes to health habits. Create your own Everything in Moderation list on posters, table tents, and wallet cards you can distribute at every opportunity. Keep it simple, like Pat's list above. Include a link to your website for more details including the science behind your rules.

Commit to the long haul — changing perceptions about what's moderate will take time. Ironically, your moderate views will sound radical at first but in time your message will sink in... and those who take it to heart will live healthier for it. 🍌



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