

## **When Life Calms Down...**

*by Ann Gerhardt, MD*

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Aristotle Onassis said, “We must free ourselves of the hope that the sea will ever rest. We must learn to sail in high winds.” That is a concise expression of how we should approach a healthy lifestyle.

Too many of my patients feel that sick relatives, problems at work, an upcoming daughter’s wedding, houseguests or being broke prevent their exercising or making prudent food choices. They say, “When things calm down, I’ll start walking again,” or they will plan better meals. Malarkey.

Those things are life. And they, and almost every other excuse you can think of other than your neighborhood flattened by an act of nature or an illness landing you in the intensive care unit, don’t necessarily keep you from making healthy choices.

No life is problem-free. Disruption may subside long enough for you to pay for a gym membership or write an ambitious shopping list, but is guaranteed to return sooner or later.

In the meantime, we don’t need a lifestyle overhaul that requires hours of planning and tons of money. We must make minute by minute decisions about walking to the bus or cycling instead of driving, taking stairs instead of elevators, shooting hoops instead of watching TV... choosing the veggie rice bowl instead of the double cheeseburger, tea instead of soda, a modest salmon steak instead of a mound of fettuccine alfredo... shopping from the outside supermarket aisles instead of the inner ones... contemplating the universe instead of eating a bag of chips.

To use stressors as excuses to not make the prudent choices doesn’t relieve the stress. It just sets us up for more stress down the line, ranging from dissatisfaction with our weight or shape to losing a

job after a stroke... or death – but that’s only disrupting to the people you leave behind.

So let stressors be the excuse to redouble your commitment to health, not the excuse to give up.