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FALLING OFF THE WEIGHT LOSS WAGON

One of the most discouraging aspects of weight loss is the inevitable slips. Everyone has them. For some people, an occasional slip engenders an all-out binge ... followed by guilt, self-recrimination, a sense of powerlessness and a feeling of "what's the use?"

Sound familiar? We call it "falling off the weight loss wagon," and if you can change how you think about it, you don't need to be victimized by it anymore. Let's start by looking at a simple kid's board game called "Chutes and Ladders." In case you forgot how to play, here's how it works: You use a spinner to advance from space to space toward the winner's spot. Along the way there are ladders—which leapfrog you over a lot of spaces, as well as chutes—which send you back in the opposite direction.

Some kids play this game with a laissez faire "whatever" attitude, taking life as it comes with all its ups and downs, pitfalls and triumphs. They learn the wonderful moral of Chutes and Ladders— half of the secret to life is just showing up. Keep playing the game, and eventually you'll get where you're going.

Some kids, however, get very upset when they land on a chute. They're ready to quit the game, pick up their proverbial marbles and go home. For some reason, they believe that life isn't supposed to have any chutes. When they land on them, they are very disappointed and feel like giving up.

Weight loss is like a huge game of chutes and ladders!

In dealing with hundreds of clients over the years, we've discovered that the biggest difference between the winners and the losers in the weight loss war isn't whether or not people have slips and go off their program. It's not really a question of *if* they have them; it's a question of *when*. What really makes the difference is how you deal with the slips when they happen. Here's an example. You've been absolutely wonderful on your eating plan for three weeks. You've been sticking to your exercise routine and feeling pretty terrific. You go to a wedding and have a glass of wine. Before you know it, someone is insisting you try those delicious little canapés, and before the wedding singer can say "Tanta Elka Cuts the Cake," you've managed to down about 4000 unwanted calories from stuff you wouldn't have been caught dead looking at during the past couple of weeks or months ... pates, desserts, breads, stuffing, you name it. Most people think that's where the action stops. Actually, it's where the *real* action begins.

First, a reality check. Have you done a lot of damage? Not really. Maybe you put on a pound or two. Big deal. You can knock it off in no time, and go right back to "work" on yourself. So what's the problem?

The problem isn't what we did, but what we make it "mean." We tell ourselves that our "transgression" means that we have no will power, that we will never succeed, and that our efforts are in vain. In other words, we hit a chute and now we want to stop the game.

Let me suggest something more empowering. Suppose, instead, we learn to see life's occasional "chutes" as just that — stumbling blocks that everyone hits on their personal path to personal power, nothing to be afraid of and certainly nothing to give a lot of "meaning" to. So you hit a chute. On your next spin, you might hit a ladder.

Most important of all, you can't win the game unless you keep on playing. And every minute gives you a new chance for another spin. Take it. And don't look back.