Addictions are overwhelming and time consuming. If one wants to eliminate an addiction, there are positive alternatives to get on track towards a healthier lifestyle. It is important to replace positive activities for that time previously used for the addictive behavior. Focusing on good self-care is extremely crucial. Eating healthy, getting enough sleep and being with supportive friends are all replacement action steps. Additionally, take up a sport, learn yoga, volunteer time to help others, express yourself through creative projects and start reading again for enjoyment.

A great way to begin your healthier lifestyle would be starting a workout regimen. Team up with a friend a few times a week to go to the gym can increase your chances of success. If someone is expecting you to go, then you are more likely to follow through. Having the support of a friend while overcoming an addiction can be reassuring and give you the opportunity to share with someone how you are feeling. As little as 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day increases the release of endorphins which may reduce your stress level significantly and make you feel good about managing your addiction.1 Sign up for new fitness classes at the Student Recreation & Wellness Center such as cardio kickboxing or Zumba to keep things exciting while keeping your mind off your undesired habit. Or maybe you want to begin playing tennis, basketball, volleyball, rock climbing and/or running. All these activities are offered through the on campus Recreational & Wellness Center.

Another great way to take your mind off your addiction is to try doing something you’ve never tried before. For instance, learn how to play an instrument or take a class offered through your city’s Parks and Recreation department. Playing an instrument can keep your mind focused for hours at a time and can be therapeutic. Taking a cooking, photography, or art class through your city may open your mind up to new ideas and give you the opportunity to meet new people as well. Focusing your time and energy into something new can be fun and exciting!

Starting a new project or planning a trip can be beneficial while trying to cope with addiction. Organizing or redecorating a room in your home may keep you positive and redirect your thoughts to something meaningful. Once the project is finished it can be a rewarding experience as well. If you like to travel, plan a vacation that will mark the beginning of your newly found lifestyle. Instead of sulking and yearning for your addiction, taking a trip provides a safe and enjoyable goal to be achieved. Planning a trip’s itinerary can keep you focused on a rewarding outcome. Most important is to have fun doing these new ventures.

And for additional support, there are 12-step programs offered throughout the community. There is a 12 step meeting in the Student Health Services every Thursday at 4 pm. Trying new things and participating in engaging activities can keep you thinking positively about the future while keeping you motivated. Just remember that there are many healthy alternatives to addiction and support systems in place for your success.1 2

References
The internet has come a long way since it was first introduced in the 1960’s and has evolved into a portal that communicates, educates, entertains and much more. Growing in popularity within the last ten years are social networking sites. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Tumblr are just a few of the many that are in current use and existence. While the internet and these sites are a great way to stay in touch, one must be careful not to abuse its use.

The term internet addiction is still a relatively new phrase. Researchers are continuing to examine and clarify internet addictive behaviors. It remains debatable whether “internet addiction” is a disease similar to alcohol and/or drug addiction, but many agree an individual can develop “a psychological dependence on the Internet, regardless of the type of activity once logged on.” Currently, internet addiction is described spending endless hours chatting, gaming, socializing and/or browsing the web. Most individuals demonstrate moderate and productive internet practices, while others can develop pathological internet use. College students are considered to be a group that is more susceptible to internet addiction. According to CSULB’s 2010 Student Health Status Survey, internet/gaming ranked number five out of the top 10 listed items affecting a student’s academic performance. Researchers speculate students’ vulnerability to internet addiction is due to college students searching for self-identity and meaningful relationships; and with easy internet accessibility, most are encouraged, if not required, to use its resources.

Not to worry if you cannot go without a day checking Facebook this is not considered a symptom of internet addiction. However, if a student exhibits five or more of the following characteristics, it may be worth considering cutting back on internet usage:

- Preoccupation with internet use
- Need for longer amounts of time online
- Repeated attempts to reduce Internet use
- Withdrawal when reducing Internet use
- Time Management issues
- Environmental distress (family, school, work, friends)
- Deception around time spent online
- Mood modification through Internet use

Students who are struggling with internet addiction most likely are using it as a coping method to avoid dealing with issues in their lives, which is an issue with all addictions. For students who are spending too much time on the internet, there are steps to take to reduce use.

First, determine if you have underlying issues which may be fostering internet addiction, such as anxiety, depression, drug/alcohol abuse, or stress. If so, seek solutions; if necessary, seek professional mental health assistance. Second, build coping skills. Rather than using the internet to relieve stress, exercise, practice yoga, listen to music, and/or meditate, ask yourself if you experience a lack of socialization with “real people,” make an effort to improve communication skills by joining an on-campus club or interest group. Joining groups strengthens your support networks and provides a social group with which to interact, as opposed to “online socializing” for endless hours. Other pro-active steps are to keep an online log, listing when and why you use the internet. Make note of the time of day, your mood and if you are experiencing any stressors. Set goals for yourself regarding how much time you spend online and stick to them. Make internet use a positive in your life, never a negative!

References:

Although dieting is viewed as a positive action, some diets may harm rather than help. Fad diets are popular because they promise extreme weight loss in a very short amount of time. Some diet trends do not promote specific food changes, but rather focus on fasting, skipping meals, excessive cigarette smoking or abusing laxatives. Others incorporate specific meal plans that promise to drop weight fast. Speedy weight loss is dangerously unhealthy. The human body needs the appropriate nutrients in order to be healthy, and most of these fad diets are lacking nutritional value, ignoring the long-term health problems caused by extreme weight loss. Healthy weight loss is one to two pounds per week, not five or more pounds as guaranteed by detrimental fad diets.

Diets that involve cutting out food are especially harmful to the body. Fasting, for instance, is the act of depriving the body of food and drink for an extended period of time. Lack of food can cause a decrease in energy, muscle and tremor cramps and peptic ulcers. Weight being dropped during fasting is extremely quick, and much of the weight that is lost is due to healthy muscle tissue being shed, which the body needs. Surprisingly, excessive smoking is a way for some to lose weight. Although smoking can curb hunger pangs, its negative effects on the body far outweigh the benefits of weight loss. Smoking clogs the lung’s airways and can lead to serious diseases such as emphysema, lung cancer or heart disease. Another rapid weight loss technique is laxative abuse. When using laxatives, an individual loses necessary food residue and water that can cause internal damage. Ultimately, all of these “dieting extremes” hasten the loss of healthy nutrients.

Instead of just cutting out food altogether, some fad diets give participants specific meal plans to follow in order to lose weight fast, but often these diets fail to include appropriate and necessary nutritional substances for the body to operate. One popular fad diet is the low carbohydrate and high protein diet, which are seen most commonly in Dr. Atkins Diet, The South Beach Diet, and The Zone Diet. When these diets were first announced, they were praised as diets that took off the weight fast. Now scientists and doctors are seeing the negative side effects these diets have on the body. The high protein and low carbohydrate diet proves to be hard on the kidneys because of the high level of proteins. Also, there becomes an increased risk of heart disease because the diet is high in saturated fats that lead to high cholesterol. Some diets that have become popular are the liquid diets, such as Slim Fast, that replace at least two meals a day with a shake or other types of drinks, but these diets end up depriving the body of necessary vitamins and nutrients. Liquid diets also lead to a reduction in calorie intake which leads to lean tissue loss and fatigue. Typically, liquid diets are only healthy when used for medical purposes and under the watchful eye of a physician who knows what the body needs.

These quick fix diets do more harm to the body than help. The focus on quick diets instead of paying attention to the problems of overeating or unhealthy foods has lead to an increase of individuals with weight that fluctuates at an unhealthy rate. People are just looking for a diet that will shed pounds fast, when instead they should be searching for an overall healthier lifestyle with a balanced diet and exercise.

References:

CSULB Student Health Counseling

Nutrition Counseling (Fall 2011): Meet with a peer nutrition counselor who will tailor a one-hour free session to your needs.

Quit Now Program: A guide to smoking cessation resources and information.

SHARE Program: Individual counseling for students newly diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

SAFE Program: Individual counseling for students who recently or in the past experienced a sexual assault, such as an acquaintance or date rape.

For all of these free counseling services: Come to the Health Resource Center, Rm. 268