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How you can stick to your weight loss plan even if your partner isn't on board

Published: Sept 27, 2019 9:57 a.m. ET



Different eating habits can lead to serious relationship problems


 By
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After years of dieting, losing a little and gaining more, I got serious about weight loss at age 50 and lost 40 pounds. When I started this journey, my loving husband, who also needs to lose weight, told me he'd rather eat ice cream every day and die five years sooner than diet.

Trying to lose weight when your partner either doesn't need to for health reasons or is just not interested can lead to some tricky relationship situations. It can also make it hard to stay on track with your own weight-loss goals.

The buddy system

A partner, friend or family member can be helpful in weight loss, particularly when that person is also trying to lose weight, says Rene Dailey, associate professor of communication studies at the University of Texas at Austin, who led a study about partners and weight loss.

Working together is what Dailey calls "synchronization," and says when you and your partner can join in a goal for weight loss, you're more likely to be successful.

If you're trying to lose weight and would like your partner to join you, it's easy to find yourself trying to do it through motivation or convincing. However, that's a mistake, says psychotherapist Eliza Kingsford, CEO and founder of Empowered Wellness, which operates weight-loss programs in Santa Barbara, Calif.

"You will never be able to force that motivation on your partner if they do not want to change. Your partner must want to commit to changing their lifestyle and you should never try to do it for them," Kingsford says.

Dr. Scott Kahan, director of the National Center for Weight and Wellness, a weight loss clinic in Washington, D.C., says it's important to support your partner's autonomy and decisions. If your loved one doesn't want to lose weight, you can't cajole the person into it.

Kahan suggests that you can point out how weight loss could help your partner be more able to do enjoyable things, such as have more energy to play with grandkids or not get winded playing tennis. But ultimately, it's up to the individual, he says.

Negative impacts on relationships

When one partner loses weight and the other doesn't, it can lead to serious relationship problems. A recent study by North Carolina State University found that when one partner lost 30 or more pounds, that had a negative impact on the relationship, causing arguments about food, as well as nagging and resentment.

A study in the *Journal of the American Medicine Association* found that weight loss surgery led to an increased rate of divorce (41% higher than in other marriages).

Kingsford explains that relationship issues connected to one partner's weight loss are caused "largely due to the fact that one partner is evolving and changing and the other partner is staying the same. This is difficult in any relationship. But with weight, there is a visual representation of this change."

Also see: [This \\$17 product could be a key to losing weight permanently](#)

She suggests that communication is essential to navigating the situation. Talk about what you're thinking and feeling so your partner can be part of your growth process. If you can grow together, you're less likely to grow apart.

Managing food preferences at home

One common problem for people in relationships — especially if they live together — is that the person who is not trying to lose weight brings food into the house that is detrimental to the other person's weight-loss plan.

For example, Joe Wooden, 55, of Baltimore, has lost 25 pounds with his weight loss and exercise plan, but his wife Laurie doesn't need to lose weight. "There's food at the house I wouldn't otherwise have in the house, like cookies or cupcakes that I can't eat," Wooden says.

The best way to navigate this situation is to "start by acknowledging that they have the right to eat whatever they want," Kahan says. Then, ask for support.

"Even if he or she is not able to commit to keeping junk foods out of the house, putting them in a place that is not front and center in the kitchen can be helpful, such as on a lower (or higher) shelf and hidden behind other items," he adds.

Dealing with criticism

You might find your partner trying to "help" you make better choices, which can make you feel criticized. Wooden says his wife sometimes will ask him things like "Should you be eating that? Should you be eating so late?" It makes me feel bad," he says.

Dailey recommends trying to "react positively to [your] partner's suggestions for healthier choices. For example, if you have asked your partner to help you make time for your workout, don't be critical when they suggest you take your daily walk."

Negotiating lifestyle changes

Your weight loss journey will likely create changes that impact your lifestyle as a couple. Wooden says, "We don't go out to eat as often, so we don't socialize with friends as much as we used to."

Don't miss: [10 diet hacks to help you lose weight](#)

Dailey recommends talking about the impact of your effort on your life together. If your partner wants to maintain a certain lifestyle, such as frequently eating out, look for a compromise — maybe a restaurant with healthier options.

"It's not always easy to negotiate mutually acceptable solutions when the partners have different goals. But individuals trying to lose weight could see where their partners are willing to change," she says.

How your partner can support you

Wooden's wife, Laurie, admits she feels guilty that her husband is trying so hard to lose weight when she doesn't need to and can continue to enjoy treats. Her solution: "I try to turn the guilt back into support for him, like joining him for a walk in ninety-five-plus degrees when I really don't want to, but he needs to," she says.

Also see: [This one thing in your marriage increases the risk of divorce by 33%](#)

Dailey notes that getting some kind of acceptance or validation from your partner is important for staying on track. "Messages such as 'I know exercising every day is hard, but I know you can do it' are likely more effective than 'Quit complaining and do it!'" she says.

The bottom line to weight loss success is to "avoid equating weight with appearance, or weight loss with morality," Kahan says. "Avoid value judgments — both of your spouse and others, as well as self-judgments."

Focusing on your own goals and not judging yourself or your partner will help you stay on track.

Brette Sember is the author of many books about divorce, child custody, business, health, food, and travel. She writes online content and does indexing and editing.

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Paul Gerald ★ Leader · 21h · Edited

This whole story is foolish. If one person decides to eat differently, why would they not be able to choose what they eat and don't eat? It is simple as telling the mate what they were going to do and let it go at that. We have been married almost 54 years and both of us have been eating what we liked for all those years without any problems. I am a picky eater, my wife grew up eating many item that I have never eaten, but it has never been a problem, maybe that is why I can not identify with an issue like this. Every tub sets on its own bottom.

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Brian Thompson ★ Leader · 22h

It's tough if you live in a state that doesn't have any restaurants with healthy food. The eating out less issue sited in the article is a real problem. However, if you live on one of the coastal states, there's plenty of options, just the one partner not on a diet needs to be willing to be a little flexible.

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Jodi Ehrlich ★ Leader · 22h → Brian Thompson

Which states do not have any healthy restaurants?

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Meg Ewen ★ Leader · 21h → Jodi Ehrlich

Many small towns in rural areas don't have much other than bars, fast food and cafes. Everything is fried, smothered in some kinda of sauce or dressing. Yes, you can "ask" if they will alter the order and sometimes they will accommodate you, sometimes, not.

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Jodi Ehrlich ★ Leader · 20h → Meg Ewen

Coastal elitist much? When I go visit where I grew up I find healthy restaurants and in my big city there is fast food next to fast food. This is an observation not a statistical analysis

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