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## Support Your Partner's Healthy Habits

**Is your partner trying to adopt healthy habits? If so, he or she needs more than motivation. A little support from you could go a long way.**

*By Jenilee Matz, MPH, Staff Writer, myOptumHealth*



No one ever claimed that changing a behavior is easy. Losing weight, revamping a diet, or making a commitment to exercise takes a lot of hard work and dedication. It also helps to have a good support system. And the support of a partner is the most important of all.

### **Health and the power of two**

Weighing too much, being inactive, or eating unhealthy foods increases a person's risk of medical problems. So as people strive to get healthy, you might assume that the ones who love them the most would be their biggest cheerleaders. Not necessarily, say researchers.

A study of overweight adults looked closely at weight stigmatization. "Weight stigmatization" includes weight-related bullying, teasing, harassment, and hostility. The people in the study said they got the worst teasing, bullying, and negative comments about their weight from their friends and family members.

If your partner is trying to make healthy changes, not supporting him or her could hurt you in the long run. Research shows that our health status mirrors that of our partner's. If your partner has a condition like high blood pressure or diabetes, chances are you also have the illness, and vice versa. If you don't support your partner's weight loss or other health goals, you could be sabotaging your own health, too.

### **Be a team player**

Many studies show that social support from friends or family is key for getting a new behavior to stick. If your partner is trying to make healthy changes, offer support in these ways:

- **Jump on the health wagon, too.** Having a buddy can make eating well or exercising seem a bit easier. What's more, you'll both get healthier. If you slip up, don't pressure your partner to "cheat" with you. Acknowledge your setback, but encourage your partner to stick with the

program.

- **Be a fitness buddy.** Even if you don't need or want to increase your activity level, offer to join your partner sometimes. Go on walks around the block, take weekend bike rides, or do exercise DVDs together. Better yet, find activities you both enjoy. A fitness buddy may be all the incentive your partner needs to get moving. Make sure you and your partner check with your doctors before starting an exercise program.
- **Suggest helpful solutions.** If your partner won't work out alone, suggest he or she take a yoga class or join a local running club. If your partner's work cafeteria doesn't offer healthy options, offer to help pack a nutritious lunch.
- **Embrace healthy eating.** Don't turn up your nose at the extra greens on your plate. Instead of proclaiming you don't like a meal, search for healthy recipes and offer to cook a nutritious dinner for your partner one night. Or take a healthy cooking class together. You may even find a new favorite dish.
- **Sing your partner's praises.** Express that you're proud and impressed by how hard your partner is working. This extra motivation may really be needed during weeks when the scale doesn't budge or slip-ups occur.

Even if you choose not to join in your partner's healthy efforts, you may benefit anyway. Research shows that when one spouse participates in a weight-loss program, the other is likely to shed some pounds, too. Be a supportive partner for the health of your loved one - and yourself.

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