

Episode 21 – Combating the Top 3 Reasons Why We Quit Healthy Habits

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T, episode number 21.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. Now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, hey, hey, guys! This is Coach T from TD Fitness. Welcome back to episode number 21 on your TD channel. Tonight, we're talking about making it stick. Implementing real change and maintaining it, so getting over that hurdle that comes shortly after you start to try to implement health habits, whether it's exercise, nutrition, you name it. The episode title here, "Addressing the Top Three Reasons Why We Stop Healthy Habits." The question we're trying to answer is, why can't I stick with my efforts to eat better and exercise more? Why is it so hard?

This is important because viewing your efforts as continued failures causes de-motivation over time. If you're de-motivated, you're going to give up and you'll just accept the current situation as the way it's going to be. I want better for you. I know that there is better for you. We don't have to accept our current state when we can improve our [health 00:01:38]. If you've ever tried and failed or tried multiple times, or if you've even had success only to revert back to your old ways, your old habits, your old weight, then this episode is for you. What I want you to take away from this episode is that change is a process. We don't often think about the process of change. So often we focus on the change itself or what we're trying to change, but once we understand that change is a process and we're able to look at it as a process, then we can identify the sticking points. That's what we're talking about in this episode.

If you've followed me for any length of time, you know that I am a process guy. I follow checklists for a living. Literally. I do it at work, I have checklists at home. I like to systematize because I feel like there is order in process. I've worked with so many people over the years, and for me, I always seek to answer the question "what can I help this individual help themselves with?" Because I'm a process guy, I try to find the common problems. What I'm presenting to you here in this episode is based largely on my experience, largely on my observations, and also some direct feedback from questions that I've asked folks that I've worked with and survey responses that I've gotten. We're trying to figure out where does the desire to change go. Why do we stop when we start so well down the road to positive, healthy habits and implementing those habits, but then we just stop? We're overcome by life events, we lost motivation, things like that.

That's what we're trying to get at tonight. In looking at all of those observations, all of those experiences, what I try to do, and I've tried to wrap my mind around this, is to kind of create or define what I call the cycle of change. There are certain steps and certain processes that everyone goes through along this cycle of change when trying to implement healthy habits, or to change any facet of your life, really. It starts with a desire to reach an end state. Let's just say for example that end state is to lose weight. It starts with your desire to lose weight. Now, I will say that there are some desires that are

better defined than others, and we're going to get into that in a little bit here shortly, but the desire to lose weight may not necessarily be the best goal. I'll talk a little bit, again, shortly about how to address that. It all starts with a desire to change, and you create that end state in your mind.

There's excitement surrounding that. There's excitement towards reaching that goal, whatever it is, because you start to envision your new self. You start to think about how you're going to act once you reach your goal, some of the things that you're going to do once you reach that goal, the people that you're going to tell once you reach that goal. That excitement, that fuels the desire to change, at least initially. That desire to change will last for a certain period of time. In my experience, it's typically about two to four weeks. Sometimes less, sometimes more, but usually it's about two to four weeks. If you think about it, think about the most popular time of the year to implement change, which is New Year's resolutions. What are the gym attendance rates do after about the first month of the new year? They drop off pretty dramatically, and that kind of gets to the point that we're making here, is that that desire to change only lasts for a certain period of time.

What happens? Why do we lose interest? Why do we lose the desire to change? I've narrowed it down to three primary reasons. The first reason is that we don't see results. This is kind of a function of what we're led to expect these days. We are a "results now" society. It has not always been this way, but more so now than ever, we are driven by results. You want to find the answer to something? Google it. You want a new product? Order it online next day delivery. You have a question about how to cook something or what something means? Just look it up. Check your phone right now. You want to watch something on TV. You don't have to wait for the next showing; you log on and watch it in real time. You can watch entire seasons at your discretion. We want what we want, and we want it now. We are a "results now" society, but as we know, real results don't often come that quickly. Quick results certainly are possible, and that's why so many get-rich-quick or lose-weight-quick models are successful for a little while, because they sell. We always want that quick win.

Those quick results are many times, from a health and fitness standpoint, those quick results are usually not sustainable and typically they're not good in the long term. That's the first reason why our desire fades, is that we don't see results, at least not immediately. The second reason: we lose motivation. Why is that? Let's look at this as a transaction. You're putting something into your change efforts, and you're expecting something in return. If we don't feel like the effort that we're putting in outweighs the results that we're getting back, then motivation is going to drop. Whether you're talking about effective change or a sale, a transaction, any time you buy something, the only reason that you're going to buy something is if you feel like you're getting greater value than what you're getting into that transaction. It's the same thing with motivation. We don't feel like the effort we're putting in outweighs the results that we're getting.

The third reason is that it just becomes too hard. In many people's eyes, that's the definition of change, and that's unfortunate because it doesn't have to be this way. We are doing things outside of our comfort zone. We're doing things that we're not used to. We're doing things in order to change our direction, change our course. Change the course of our life to live a healthier life, and yes that is difficult, and it's a big sacrifice a lot of times. Many people view it as simply being unsustainable, and that's why they view it as just being too hard. The bottom line here is that it's hard to maintain your vision of success without feeling like you're making progress toward that vision. You feel like it's just sacrifice after sacrifice and a change from your normal habits, and that's when you quit. Or if there is progress, you feel like it's too hard to maintain. What keeps people going is actually seeing progress and feeling

like we can sustain the effort. That progress has to be sufficient enough to believe that the goal is still possible.

So, how do we counter those top three reasons why we stop healthy habits? Those three reasons that kill our desire to change. What's going to keep people going when the desire wanes? Let's tackle the first one: no results. As we go deeper here, think about the type of result that you're looking for. Going back to one of the first examples I used about weight loss and how I said that that may not actually be the best goal or the best end state you're looking for, weight loss is an outcome that we seek. If we define our success by achieving an outcome, then our failures are also defined by not achieving that outcome. When you define success by losing five pounds, if you don't lose five pounds, then by definition you have failed at that, but that's not the best way to look at it. That's why I rarely encourage people to set a weight loss goal. Instead, we encourage healthy living, healthy eating, healthy exercise habits. Weight loss is simply a byproduct of those habits.

The difference between that type of goal, which is an outcome-based goal, versus a performance is that you have so much more control over performance goals. With an outcome-based goal, losing five pounds for example, you really don't have a lot of control over that. You may think you do, but you don't. We've been taught that it's as simple as calories in versus calories out. If you create a negative calorie differential, i.e if you take in less calories than you're expending or if you burn more calories than you take in, then you'll lose weight. It's not that simple. The science supports the fact that it's not that simple. You don't have as much control over losing five pounds as you may think you do, but you do have control over the actions you take towards reaching a goal like that. Those are performance goals. Instead of saying, "I want to lose five pounds by the end of the month," why not say, "My goal is to exercise X number of times every week this month?" You do have control over those goals. Those are performance goals, and those are the types of goals that you want to use to set your path for success.

Performance goals versus outcome goals. Very important distinction and an important concept to grasp. Secondly, lack of motivation. The way to counter a lack of motivation is to, what I call, "examine your why." Examine your why. Is your "why" really to get into that swimsuit, or is there a deeper underlying reason? You have to be honest with yourself here. You have to ask yourself why repeatedly, because a lot of times, we don't even realize what our really deep, underlying desire and motivation is. If we don't understand that, if we identify an incorrect motivation, then we're going to take incorrect steps toward reaching our goal. You have to be honest with yourself, and the best way to do that is to keep asking yourself, "Why do I want to do this? Why do I want to reach this goal?" Keep asking yourself that until it hits deep down into something that you care deeply about. Something that is associated with your values or your principles, or something that you really care about deeply. That's how you attack the no-motivation scenario. You have to get to the real reason why you're doing that.

Then the third reason, the fact that things just get too hard. Well yes, it is hard, but only if we make it hard. You don't have to feel bound by what others have tried and other approaches that people tell you to use. There's nothing that says you have to, for example, cut an entire food group from your diet. Effective change is change that is sustainable. Sustainable change doesn't require a lot of effort. In fact, effective change and sustainable change should almost be effortless. What you want to do is break those huge chunks, those huge goals down into smaller, bite-sized goals, and just start executing. If you feel like you need to cut an entire food group from your diet, why not just cut a small portion of that unhealthy food or the food that you consider to be less healthy? Instead of feeling like you need to exercise five times a week, if you're not doing any exercise at all, why not try starting with a five-minute walk one time a week?

Break it down into something that is sustainable. It has to be challenging enough to provide the motivation to continue, but it can't be so hard that it's going to dissuade you or keep you from maintaining those efforts. Now, having said all that, we can kind of think about the proper cycle for change. Again, it starts with a vision, a vision that has to be defined correctly. A proper vision. Not to lose weight, but to live healthier. Again, weight loss is a byproduct. That vision will then cause action. Once you take action, your success is based on your performance, not the outcomes you seek. It's not the five pounds you want to lose that will determine whether or not you're successful, but it's the fact that you did indeed go to the gym or exercise two times each week this month like you said you were going to. Once those performance actions, those successes turn into repeated actions, guess what? You've created habits. Once those actions become habits, then they're easier to maintain. That's the definition of a habit, a regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up. That's the Webster definition.

Once you've created a habit, it's no longer a question of how hard it is to maintain it, but rather how hard it is to give it up. Once your habits are set, then you've reached your goal. You're practicing healthy habits. Having success with your goals is a journey. It's not a destination. It has to be consistent, it has to be recurring. It has to be regular.

To wrap things up here, the top three reasons why our desire to change suddenly fades: the first, no results. In order to counter that, you want to reframe those outcome-based goals as performance goals. When you lack motivation, you need to examine and understand the true "why" behind what you're doing and why you're doing that. Then finally, if you feel like it's too hard, then break it down. Make it sustainable and make it effortless.

As I sign off here from this episode, I want to leave you with a quote. It's a quote by Seth [Goden 00:16:35] and his book "Footprints on the Moon." He says that, "Intention leads to focus leads to action leads to results." The answer is easier than you think. If you want success, then practice being successful at taking action. That practice becomes a regular habit over time, and that regular habit means you're consistent. As you've heard me say before, consistency over time is better than trying to achieve perfection all the time. That's all I have for you all in this episode. I hope this has been helpful. You'll be able to find the show notes at tdfitness.net/021 for this episode. If you like the content, don't forget to share it. Again, I thank you guys so much for tuning in. I want you to have a blessed one. Coach T out.