

## Episode 40 -

### Encouraging Loved Ones to Live Healthier...

#### Especially When They're Older

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T., episode number 40.

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, guys. Coach T. from TD Fitness. This is episode number 40. How do I encourage loved ones to live healthier, especially when they're older? Just this week, I was having a conversation with one of the fitlifers, one of the individuals enrolled in my Fit Life Program, and she has had a lot of success with the program and was basically looking for some advice on how to get some of those same successes, how to apply those things that she's learned, to help someone else in her life, a loved one in her life, helped them to take some positive steps in their health.

Now, I'll tell you, this immediately resonated with me, because I thought about my mother. My mother passed a little over a year ago, but before she passed, I mean, she was pretty active up until the point where she got very sick. She was doing things around the house, but she suffered in her later years with back pain, so she would be up washing dishes, for example. She would be up cleaning the house. She lived until she was 83 and did all of this, like I said, up until the point where she got sick and just couldn't do it anymore.

Now, I often encouraged her to exercise or to get some movement, because I knew that that alone would help her address some of those things that, some of those pains, some of those ailments that she was having. She lived a quarter mile from the YMCA, and so obviously, within walking distance, very close, right around the corner, not a lot of traffic, so easy to walk to, and she had a membership, because we purchased a membership for her there. She'd had previous success at the gym, at the YMCA, an enjoyment from going, because there were people there that she knew. They had some classes for older individuals, and it's a small community. Everyone kind of knows everyone else there, but she just wouldn't go, and she wouldn't go consistently.

I'll say that this is not uncommon. I think about people who are given prescriptions for medication and literally told that if they don't take the medication, they won't live much longer, literally, and guess what? They still don't take it. It seems like it's something that is simple as can be, like why not just take your medication, but it seems to be too much for them, so what's going on here? Well, as it turns out, this is a deeper topic than we think about on the surface. It's not just a matter of somebody saying, "Well, I just don't want to take my medication," or, "I just don't feel like working out." There's more going on there, so I want to unpack this a little bit and talk about it.

I'll start with a statistic, and that is that just one out of four people between the ages of 65 and 74, one out of four people, exercise regularly. That's just a statistic, right? That, yes, that's sad, but it doesn't really hit home for us until it's someone we know that's not exercising. That's part of that other 75%, those three out of four people that aren't exercising.

It doesn't hit home until it's a mother, or a father, or a grandparent, or a friend, or someone that you're close to, another loved one.

This episode is about helping and encouraging older adults to live healthier, but I will tell you that the game plan, the methodology, the approach, applies to just about anyone, whether you're old or young. What I hope to do here is help you, as the individual who recognizes that you have someone close to you that needs to incorporate healthy habits, I want to help you help them. That's kind of the angle I'm coming from here. I think this is applicable to just about anyone, so just about anyone can find value in what I'm going to tell you here in this episode, but let's start with why exercise in particular is good for us as we aged. We'll just set the stage here. It turns out that exercise as we age is good for us for a lot of the same reasons that it's good for us when we're young, but I'm going to focus on some of the other reasons that relate specifically to older individuals.

Exercise has proven benefits for older individuals. It strengthens bones. It reduces the risk of disease, and I'm talking a number of diseases, things like cardiovascular disease, hypertension or high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, obesity, colon cancer, osteoporosis, breast cancer, you name it, so exercise reduces the risk of those diseases. It also decreases the risks of falls and fall-related injuries. Why? Because it improves our balance. It improves your coordination. It improves your strength, but it improves more than just physical health. Exercise has been shown to boost memory and prevent dementia. That's another great reason to exercise, particularly in your older year or later years, and it's a good way to maintain some of your independence in your way of life.

Again, I think back to my mom as she aged. One of the things or one of the big reasons why she continued to do so much around the house was because that was, yes, just what she was used to. That's how she was raised. That's how she grew up. That was also a way of her holding on to that independence and kind of proving to herself and others that she was still capable. Exercise is another way that you can do that, though. Exercise, I read a fact that exercise can often do as much, if not more, good than taking up to five to 10 medications a day. In my mind, that alone is reason enough to exercise, because I don't typically like to take medicine and pills.

The question, again, how do we encourage loved ones to live healthier, especially when they're older? I'm going to go ahead and give you the answer here early in the episode. The answer is a thoughtful approach and some type of accountability. That's the way you do it. In health coaching, we are taught that motivation, it's not a personality problem. It is a state of your readiness to change. We talk about this in the Fit Life Program, actually. That state of readiness to change fluctuates at different periods in our lives, but that state can be influenced. What people think about their readiness to change can be altered in a positive way if given the appropriate help and some guidance, so if you've ever wondered what a health coach does, okay, this is a huge part of it right here.

Here, I hope, again, to empower you with some of the basic health coaching techniques so you can help those that you love. I will tell you that it starts with understanding where they are. There is a model called the stages of change model, and essentially it has five different categories of where people reside on this sliding scale of their ability to change, or to incorporate, or implement positive behavior. In the far left, they're not even thinking about change. Right? They're the people that exercise and healthier living is the farthest thing from their mind. They're just not thinking about it. Next, you have those who are actually thinking about some type of change. They're open to it. Then you have those who are actually preparing to make a change, so these are the individuals who are looking for time, planning time in their schedule, looking at when they can exercise. Maybe they're going to the gym to open a gym membership or to start a membership. Maybe they're looking for different areas

around the neighborhood or in the community where they can actually go and get some exercise.

Then you have those who are taking action and steps towards that change, so these are the ones that are actually doing the exercise. Then the final category, the final stage is those that are taking action on a consistent basis, because that's when it's a habit. It doesn't mean it's easy, but it does mean that it's regular. Those that you're close to, those who you are looking to help implement some type of positive healthy change, they are in one of these frames of mind. Either they're not thinking about it at all, they're thinking about it a little bit, they're preparing for it, they've started to take action, or they're pretty consistent with it.

The goal in each one of these stages is simply one thing, and that is to move them to the next stage. If they're not thinking about change, your job is to help them start thinking about it. It's not to have them start an exercise plan. It's just to have them start thinking about it. If they're already thinking about it, now you can work on helping them prepare, and then, if they are preparing, you can help them take some action. Don't try to skip steps here. It's important that we move one step at a time, and this does take time. Okay?

Now, I'll give you another page out of the health coaching playbook, and that's a technique called motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing essentially consists of five principles. First, you want to express empathy. Make it known that even if you don't feel like you understand where they're coming from, help them to understand that you recognize that they're coming from a place of difficulty, if you will. Next, you want to help them develop an awareness of some of the negative consequences associated with not making that behavioral change or that positive change in health. Next, you want to roll with the resistance, man. I mean, this is, it sounds very scientific as I lay out these five principles here, but I'm here to tell you that it is an up and down rollercoaster, because everyone is different. Everyone experiences periods of high motivation, and then it comes back down, and then goes back up again. That's what health coaching, that's what helping others is all about. We're all human.

Next, you want to support self-efficacy. If you're not familiar with this term, "self-efficacy," it is essentially their perception of their ability to change or to perform a specific task. It's similar to self-confidence, but self-confidence is more of a broad feeling. You are a confident person, for example, but self-efficacy is more specific. When you have self-efficacy, for example, you may say, "I do believe that I can incorporate exercise into my schedule three days a week," so you're feeling positive that [inaudible 00:12:04]-

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-into my schedule three days a week. So you're feeling positive that that is something you can do, that specific thing. And then finally, the 5th principle of motivational interviewing, avoid arguments. If you create a barrier between yourself and the person you're trying to help, guess what. You're not gonna be able to help them at all.

Now, it's important to note that three for those five principles I just mentioned actually deal with your attitude, the person who is looking to help someone. Two of them deal with the individual you're trying to help. Three of them deal with your attitude that's expressing empathy, rolling with resistance and avoiding arguments. And then on their end, you wanna help them develop an awareness of some of the negative consequences if they don't improve their health, or if they don't take actions to improve their health, and support them in their self efficacy.

Their successes, while it is dependent on their attitude and their actions, it is absolutely enabled, and absolutely hampered in some cases by your approach. That is one of the key things to remember, that is one of the key takeaways that I want you to remember from this episode. Going back to understanding where they are, that means both physically and mentally. Let's think about just some of the barriers or belief systems that an older individual might be up against, some things that in their mind are preventing them from incorporating more exercise or healthier habits.

They may assume that they are just too out of shape, or too sick. Or they may feel too tired or just plain too old to exercise. Your job as a loved one in that instance is to help them and to coach them through this. It's a myth that old age is inevitable. This is such a dangerous mindset, but a lot of people feel that way. Their like, oh I'm getting older, that's just the way it is, old age is inevitable. I'm just gonna not move around as much, not exercise as much, and maybe not eat as healthy. Like I said, that is very dangerous, and it pains me, it really does, when people don't feel empowered to make change. That is the things that drives me in this personal training and health coaching quest. I want everyone to feel like there is hope, there is an outlet, there is something that they can do that is in their control to make positive steps.

The funny thing is though that many of the things that we assume when we get older, many of the things that we assume that just come with old age are not due to age at all. A lot of times there just a result of weakness and loss of balance that stems from guess what, inactivity. If you're more active, you're less apt to be, you're gonna be weaker. You're gonna lose some balance. Another barrier people have is fear. They may be afraid of falling, fear of falling and getting hurt. And that's legitimate, that's a legitimate fear.

Exercise though actually reduces your chances of falling by improving your strength, improving your balance and improving your core nation. Sometimes they may fell like they're incapable because they have a condition like arthritis or diabetes or heart disease. But again, exercise can be important here, especially if you have one of these conditions. Of course, I'll caveat that, it is absolutely still wise and recommended to check with your doctor if you have any condition like that before you start exercising.

Another fear that may come up, if there already in pain, they may feel that exercise may make that pain worse. They may be in more pain, and again that's a valid concern. Note what I'm doing here, when it comes to these fears, the goal isn't to say don't worry about that, that's not even, that doesn't even make sense. You wanna empathize with them. If you put those fears aside and dismiss them, then you're not gonna make a connection with the person you're trying to help. Again, the fear of having more pain, that is again a valid concern. Studies have show though that in older populations, this is a fact, those who exercise more actually have less pain and better joint function. So when you help your loved one's kind of work through some of these fears and some of these barriers, you don't wanna counter with emotion, you wanna counter with education. Help them understand that some of the things that they believe are not necessarily true. In fact, exercise for example in this case, can help with those things, not make matters worse.

I will tell you, I'm not elderly yet, but I can attest to the fact that when I increased my activity to train for a triathlon for example, my knee pain subsided. I've talked about that in previous episodes. So that's another example. A lot of people think exercise has to be expensive, well it doesn't. In fact, exercise can be free. Walking is free. There are things that you can do around the house that don't involve a lot of equipment or anything like that, you can simply lift things that provide resistance.

Also, help them to understand that they are not too weak. Simply start with more than what they're doing right now. Again, this is another principle that I talk about a lot here at TV Fitness, and that is that wherever you are right now is exactly where you're supposed to be. And where you need to go, is enabled through a simple step, and that's just improving on where you are right now. It's that simple, okay. Don't try to complicate things.

It's never too late to start and still reap the benefits of exercise and healthy behavior. Your job, your goal is to kind of help them work through some of these barriers that I've mentioned. Getting loved ones to live healthier, how do you encourage others, specifically those you love to live healthier, I'm gonna run through, I'm gonna unpack this a little bit.

The first thing we talked about was empathizing and actively listening. One of the things that most of us are very bad at doing is listening. I'm certainly guilty of this, but a funny thing happens when you go to help someone who you're encouraging to exercise, and you're encouraging them to implement some healthy behaviors, some healthy habits. If you listen to what they're saying, number one, you'll probably pick up on some things that you just hadn't thought of before because you simply weren't listening to them. Number two, you start to open more dialogue and create a deeper connection with the person. The deeper that connection is, the greater chance there is of you being able to help them. You wanna empathize with them, actively listen.

Knowing their personality type helps. Typically, this isn't a problem for us because it's someone that's very close to us. So we know the things that encourage them, that motivate them and also the things that do the opposite. You wanna encourage them, coming from a position of love and caring. You wanna address the barriers, don't ignore them, and don't fight them, address them and again empathize. Try to focus on the big picture, but again not in an argumentative way. You and the family and the friends want them to be healthier, to enjoy life together, long life together. Those are the types of things that you wanna focus on, the bigger picture.

Help them associate some of the simple healthy behaviors and healthy habits that you're trying to encourage them to do, help them associate those with that big picture. Next you wanna help them develop an awareness of the negative consequences if they don't take action, if they don't take some, if they don't make some positive changes. Your attitude is basically your stance toward a particular idea or concept. That's just a general definition how I define your attitude. That's the way you look at something. It's usually informed by your experiences growing up and throughout your life, and your knowledge, or your awareness and education, understanding. You wanna identify, help them identify their desire to live healthier, feel less pain, move healthier, move better, be active with the grandkids maybe, spend some quality time walking with their spouse, be able to travel. Those desires you wanna help them articulate and bring to the forefront the things that they really want to accomplish.

Then, you wanna relate again the actions that they're going to take with that desired outcome whether it's again, live healthier, feel less pain, you name it. And help point out those areas where the less healthy habits conflict with that desire. That's really the point of this step here.

Another part of it is educating them. Individuals may doubt their ability to be active and they may lack basic understanding about whether or not they can start an exercise program, or take part in specific activities. You wanna let them know that exercise is important, and it's okay here to bring in the help of someone who is a professional in the field whether it's a personal trainer, health coach, their doctor. Sometimes hearing it from an objective source

versus you, as someone whose close to them, sometimes its better to hear it, or it adds to your argument if they hear it from someone else.

Again, you wanna support self ethicacy, which again is their perception of their ability to change, or their ability to perform a specific task. Help them in this regard, build them up, give them positive encouragement. Focus on small wins because those small wins tend to snowball. If you set the goals initially pretty low, make them obtainable, then you can build some successes there, and those things help you to continue to improve upon themselves.

Encourage them to get help, or help them yourself, right. Help them visualize what success is gonna look like to them. Help them set those goals, help them create a plan. But I'm gonna say again, help them set the goals. You don't wanna set goals for them. You could say something like what do you think are some ways in which you could start to and insert whatever healthy behavior you have here. Start to incorporate more walking in the day for example. And if they can't think of anything, maybe you could offer a few suggestions.

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And if they can't think of anything, maybe you could offer a few suggestions and ask if any of those might be doable. So you might say, hey, do you think it's possible to add a short walk around the block after your breakfast every day? Or, do you think it's something you could do to meet up with the walking group that starts at 5:00 that walks around the neighborhood Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Or You could say, hey, while you're watching your game shows, do you think you could stand up and down, up and down five times, getting up out of your chair during the commercial breaks? And which of those things do you think would be easiest for you to implement? What's something that you could actually do? Give them the choice of those three things. Because having the ability to choose is so important when it comes to having the individual incorporate change in their lives.

If it's pressed upon us, we don't want to do that. We resist that. But if it's something that we come up with ourselves or that we have a buy in, then it's more apt to stick. So, goal setting, think longterm, think short term goals. But again, I don't want you to get too wrapped around the axle on this one, the point here is just to help them kind of realize what it is that they're trying to do. Help them realize, okay, don't do it for them, again. And again, set easier goals to begin with. build on those small wins and those successes. I also try to think about things that they like to do. So it's easier when we're trying to make change, it's easier to add things a lot of times than it is to take things away. So instead of saying, hey, you don't need to be watching that much TV, why don't you say, hey, why don't you think about incorporating a little bit of exercise throughout the day?

Guess what? You can't really watch TV while you're exercising. At least not if you're walking outside. So figure out something that they might enjoy to do, and enjoy doing, and then help them incorporate those things into their schedule. Exercise shouldn't be boring. It should be something that you like to do, because there are so many forms of exercise. It could be walking, it could be gardening, it could be playing with the grandkids, there are so many things you could do. It doesn't have to necessarily be exercise in the traditional sense. The point is to get the heart rate up, and to get us breathing deeper for a little bit longer period of time, at least 10 minutes or more, right? Support systems are also important. There are a lot of local groups, particularly for older adults. And get your family and friends in on it too.

The support systems are very important. Remember that behaviors are a made up of habits. Those things that you do consistently. And as I explain to people, working through this

involves, it's kind of a circular loop, one of planning, taking action, and then adjusting that plan, and then planning again. So it keeps going around and around. It's an iterative process. Now, accountability is going to be something that's extremely important too. So what are some accountability mechanisms, I'll call them? Well first is you. You could be the accountability. You could call everyday and say, hey mom, hey dad, I'm just thinking about you, checking in on you. Did you walk today? Okay, I'm going to call you again tomorrow to see if you got your walk in. You'd be surprised how far this could go. Because when you know someone else is going to follow up with you, then it goes a long way in setting some positive habit patterns.

Also, friends could do the same thing. Friends are good accountability partners. Pedometers or wearable devices, things that you wear that counts your steps and things like that. Assuming that your older loved one is okay with technology, because I know sometimes that can be a barrier in itself. The Fit Life program I use, I use an online tracking tool that basically shoots a message to your phone asking if you completed your planned habit the day prior. And you just click yes or no, and then I take care of, I look at all the data on the back end and I can kind of see how things are going, and I can check up on people. So that's another thing that I can provide more information on if you're interested in that. There is so much more.

I've run through a lot of things to help you help others. I've only scratched the surface here. I mean this is like the 30,000 foot level just hitting the highlights of some of the things that you can do to help those that you love. There's a lot more to it than that. Unfortunately I can't cover it all in a half hour podcast, but hopefully I've given you a few tools. And more importantly, a mindset to approach your friend or your loved one with. So I go back to the question, how do you encourage others, those you love to live healthier? And I'll go back to the main takeaway. I want to remind you of this. Focus first on what you can control as the person helping someone else. What you can control is your attitude as you try to help them. So roll with resistance.

Avoid arguments. Avoid resistance by being empathetic and being understanding. Confrontation is not what you want. You want to support their belief in themselves to make the change. You want to build their confidence, and point out some of the positive steps they've taken. Some of the successes they've had. Remember that it has to be their decision. It has to be their choice. They need the ability to choose, to choose if they do this, to choose what they do, to choose how long they do it. That is all part of the process, because the goal isn't just to get them to exercise or to make a positive healthy change, it's to get them to do it consistently. And the only way to do it consistently is for it to come from within, for them to want to do it.

Remember, when you're going from one stage to the next, when we talk about the stage of somebody who's not even thinking about exercising, all the way to the person who's exercising consistently. Remember the goal there is simply to move them to the next stage. So if they're not thinking about exercise at all, you want to help them start thinking about exercise. If they're already thinking about exercise, you want to help them start planning for exercise. If they're already planning for exercise, you want to help them start acting on those plans. And if they're acting already, you want to help them stay consistent. Okay? Just move them to the next phase. And again, it can take time. But you have to be patient. You have to be patient, but you have to persist. Because this is too important for you not to.

That is all I have for you in this episode. The show notes for this one can be found at [tdfitness.net/040](http://tdfitness.net/040). There you can listen, you can watch, you can read the transcript. You'll find links to the references that I've made here. I also will point out another reference that I did not mention. But if you go to, and again I'll link to this on the show notes page. If you go

to [goforlife.nia.nih.gov](http://goforlife.nia.nih.gov) it's basically an exercise and physical activity campaign from the National Institute on Aging, which is part of the National Institute of Health. And it's designed to help you fit exercise and physical activity into your daily life. And the program is called Go for Life. There are so many free resources there. There's a lot of information there. So that's something that you can do as someone who's trying to help your loved one get healthier, and incorporate some of those healthy habits.

So check that out. Again, all of those links are on the show notes page. I want to thank you guys so much for tuning in for such an important topic, because it's not enough for me just to try to reach you. The way that we reach a lot of people is for me to help empower you to reach others. Okay? That's how things spread. That's how this fitness movement is going to spread. Okay? So I encourage you to help and do your part, and I'm here to help you any way that I can. You guys, thanks again. Have a blessed one. Coach T out.

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