

Episode 044: Healthy Living Part 2 - A Roadmap for Healthy Living

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T, episode number 44.

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

Hey, guys welcome back to TD Fitness. This is episode number 44 and it's part two of our Healthy Living series. This one's called, "A Roadmap for Healthy Living". If you recall in the previous episode, I used the road trip or the journey analogy to describe the road that you take, the path that you take to healthy living. We talked about the Stages of Change Model which tells you where you are and therefore, can help you determine what's required to continue to move forward.

In this episode I want to go a little bit deeper. I want to go beyond the stages of change because the stages themselves aren't really detailed enough. They describe where you are and they generally tell you how to move to the next stage but there's a lot more within each stage that is needed to describe what we actually have to do from day-to-day. In this episode I am going to lay out the mileposts if you will along that road map and in the next episode or two we'll round things off with the exact nutrition and fitness steps and habits that are required for healthy living and long term results.

I had to start more generally and get more specific as we went on so that you have an understanding of why I chose those specific nutrition and fitness habits. What you'll find on the roadmap that I present here is that a big component, arguably the largest component of healthy living, is the mindset and different mental and planning steps that must be considered and accounted for in order to ultimately live a healthier life.

Now depending on how you break things up there are anywhere from 8 to 12 different steps or mile markers that you will go through as you progress through the stages of change. I've created a visual representation of this roadmap so that you can follow along. If you've been watching the video here, then you'll see it on the screen and if not you can still download it as the freebie for this episode at tdfitness.net/044download. It's called, "A Roadmap for Healthy Living". If you want to follow along while listening, then just go ahead and pause it here and download that freebie and then resume the audio.

Now one thing to point out and I'll hit this again at the end of the episode but I want you to look at this, think about this as a journey because it is. You don't get there overnight, right? I mean you go through different stops, different stages, different stops along the way and there are a lot of paths and different trails that can take you off track. That is okay because the road to success still exists and as long as you can jump back on at any point then you can continue to move forward.

So where do we start this thing? Well I have to go back to the stages of change and if you recall from the last episode the first thing you want to do is assess your readiness for change. If you're a pre-contemplator, then you're not even on the road map yet. You're not in your car. You're not planning for a trip. You're not even thinking that you need to move. Remember the pre-contemplator says, "Hey, I'm comfortable where I am and there is no need to change."

They're just unaware that there is a need for a healthy living change. They haven't started that journey yet.

Now if you're a contemplator though which is the next stage if you recall, then you're considering making a change. You're saying, "Maybe I do need to go somewhere," and this is where our journey begins. This is where mile marker one comes in on your healthy living roadmap and you can see that I've listed a few things by that mile marker: awareness, education, knowledge. Really you begin to understand here.

So awareness, you start to realize, "Yes, I could be healthier. There are some things that I probably need to do here." Education and knowledge, why do I break these two out? Well it's because I feel like education, anyone can receive an education but knowledge is actually on the receiving end. That's where you begin to comprehend. That's where you begin to understand and that is where you start to enter the land of preparation. You have traversed the land of contemplation and have now entered the preparation stage. Here you gain an even greater understanding of what needs to happen, what's required, why it's required and most importantly you start to think about the how.

I mentioned that mindset is really important on this journey and that's true for a number of reasons. The first is that your motivation will serve as the driving force. Yes, that's pun intended. The driving force on this journey so what are some things to consider with motivation?

If you're familiar with Simon Sinek. He has a great TED talk and eventually wrote a book entitled, "Start with Why". He talks about how people are inspired to do things to make change. He points out that it has to come from within and motivation in our case here in dealing with healthy living, it can't be driven by the doctor for example telling you that you need to live healthier or by what others tell you about the need to lose weight or to exercise or to quit smoking. True lasting change takes place because of what you believe.

If you follow the doctor's advice and do the things that he or she suggests it's because you believe in that too. That belief can ultimately be traced to something that you value whether it's being around for your family and kids or being able to perform at work, being a role model or wanting to feel better within. If you start with that, if you start with the why, that will be your driving factor and you can avoid so much of the on again off again, the start stop, the yo-yo habits that so many people go through.

So, how do you start with why? We get into this in the Fit Life Program and it takes some working through and some thought about where you're coming from and what motivates you, what drives you but one technique is to keep asking yourself the question, "Why" when you set out to make a change. For example, "Why should I do this?" "Okay, the doctor said so." "But, why?" "Well because it'll make me healthier." "Okay, and why is this important?" "Well so I can live longer. So I can feel better. So I can be pain free." "All right. Why is any of that important? Why does that matter?" "Well I care for my spouse. I care for my kids. I want to be around for them," or maybe, "I want to be able to exercise with my spouse or play outside with my kids like my parents did with me".

If you keep asking yourself why, ask why to the answers to the previous why question then you'll eventually get to the root of what it is that actually motivates and drives you. Typically, you'll hit that sweet spot when the true value of your change gets to something of tangible importance to you such as health, love, time, or even money sometimes.

Starting with why helps us tap into what's called intrinsic motivation. That's the motivation that comes from within. It's not the motivation that's derived from external factors. Again, that comes from connecting motivation to values.

My wife and I do marriage mentoring and one of the things that I like to tell couples is that love isn't something that happens. It's something that you do. Love is a verb not a noun. Therefore, you don't fall out of love. You choose either to practice love or not to practice love so here's the thing to realize about motivation. It's not something that happens to you. In order to find motivation, your goal has to directly relate to the thing that is important to you. What's the real reason you want to be healthier? It's probably not just to fit into an old pair of jeans, right? It's likely something deeper and as I said wanting to be able to play with your kids or wanting to improve your health so you can live a longer and healthier life with your spouse, those are some examples. Relate those actions to an inner motivation and you'll find that motivation is not really a problem for you at all.

This means that if you're unmotivated, you merely need to find the true motivator, the thing that really motivates you because there's something that's important enough to you that will drive your efforts from day to day. If there isn't, then maybe we need to reevaluate the stage of change you're in. It goes back to assessing your readiness for change which as you recall is the very first step in this entire process. Thinking about what you value in life and figuring out how your goals are related to those values, help to ensure that you have the right goals and that they're relevant to you. Then you can frame your lifestyle behaviors in those terms. Okay?

Now closely related to starting with why and having intrinsic motivation is possessing a belief that you can in fact make a positive change, having a yes I can mentality. In health coaching, this is called self-efficacy and self-efficacy is similar to self-confidence but it's a little bit different in the sense that it is always situation or behavior-specific. For example, you may be very confident in your ability to reduce your calorie intake for example but you may have a low self-efficacy when it comes to sticking to an exercise program. Those are some of the motivation and mindset considerations on our roadmap to a healthy living but there's more to it than that, right?

There's also an element of planning, planning so that you can take action and with any good roadmap one of the first things you have to do is to determine where you're going. In our case, this is done by setting goals but you can't just set any goals there's a bit of an art and some science to this so let me hit a few of the basics.

First a goal to lose weight or exercise more doesn't really do a whole lot for us. Neither, does a goal to drop six dress sizes or run a marathon. Those don't do a whole lot for us tangibly. Because, there are times when ... So certainly there are times for setting big goals, right? But, when it comes to starting and maintaining lasting healthy habits your goals need to be broken down into smaller bite-sized pieces. Let me explain why.

So it takes time to accomplish big goals, right? That's kind of-

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It takes time to accomplish big goals, right? That's kind of part of the definition of a big goal. And those big goals can serve to demotivate and overwhelm you when achieving those goals doesn't take place before your motivation starts to wane, starts to go away. Because most of the time we confuse true motivation, that's that intrinsic motivation that starts with why, we

confuse that with the excitement of starting something new, and the excitement of being at the finish line. Many times what we feel is motivation is really just the excitement of actually seeing ourselves or envisioning ourselves reaching our goal. And that excitement wears off. And you won't reach your big goal before that excitement wears off. That's why finding your true motivator is important and why you should break your big goals down into smaller goals.

When you find your true motivator, that does not wear off. That's something that when you wake up every day, is in the back of your mind and you can relate the actions that you take that day to that true motivation, that intrinsic motivation.

So you can reach small goals quicker, right? One of the best ways to maintain motivation and excitement for that matter is to continue to get small wins. Your pants fitting a little looser. Your coworker saying, "Hey, you look like you've lost some weight." Feeling better when you wake up. Feeling less pain throughout the day. Things like this, these are all kind of small indicators of your ... or smaller goals that play a part into a larger goal system, but are small goals in themselves.

Another benefit of small goals. They allow you to direct energy to manageable actions and tasks. Remember, goals are translated to day-to-day life through habits. And your habits are more easily aligned with small goals. Small goals should be meaningful to you as I said earlier, and they should be within immediate reach. This means that a relatively short timeline like a daily or maybe a weekly task that is ... it sounds a lot like a habit, right?

So transforming the larger goals, visions, aspirations into a series of smaller goals provides a clearer picture, provides a clearer road map for success. In fact, what I'm doing right now is breaking down a large goal into smaller goals for you, right? That's what I'm doing with this episode. I mean I could've done a three minute podcast episode where I just said, "Hey, you need to go and live healthier," but that doesn't do much good. But when I tell you that what you need to do is start with an awareness and then get some education and knowledge of what's required, then develop an understanding, then consider your mindset and belief that you can, and then set goals in a certain manner, these are all smaller more tangible steps that you can focus on to move along the path.

And the final thing about small goals: small goals can grow into bigger changes. Adding one serving of vegetables to your diet three times a week can grow into adding five times one serving of vegetables to your diet five times a week. And that can then grow into an even greater healthier change. Healthy change leads to a healthier life, and a healthier life means feeling better, moving better, less pain, and better overall health. So your goals are translated to day-to-day life through habits, so make those goals simple.

Next about goals. Goals should be based on your performance, not the outcome, okay? This means that you should base your success on not on how much weight you lost but rather on how successful you were to take the steps you said you would take in order to lose that weight. Ultimately, we cannot control whether the scale says we lost ten pounds, but we can control whether we ate a serving of vegetables each day like we said we would, or whether we exercised four times this week like we said we would. Those are performance measures. Whether we performed up to the standard we set. It doesn't matter how difficult it was to meet, as long as it was some type of improvement in what we were doing before.

So if you're not getting any exercise then try walking once a week. That's an improvement. So base your success on your performance, the performance is something that you can control. Don't base it on the outcomes that you really have no control over. Focus on behavior, not outcomes.

So next, goals should be smart. And smart as you probably know is an acronym that stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. So an example of a bad goal: I'm gonna lose weight. An example of a good goal: I'm going to add one serving of vegetables to my diet on five days each week for a month. That's specific, it's measurable, it's attainable, it's relevant, and it's time bound. It's bound by a length of time.

Now, once we know where we're going with properly formed goals on our path to success, then we can plan how to get there. Okay? So when it comes to planning there's this thing called the planning fallacy. And the planning fallacy basically states that people consistently underestimate the time, energy, and other resources required to complete a given task. So I bring that up just so you can realize that. It's really, okay. It's not just you, it's an actual thing. So that's the first thing to understand about planning.

Next, when it comes to planning, I really want you to personalize your approach. How many times have you tried to make someone else's goals, someone else's plans, someone else's program try to work for you? You should fit change into your life, and don't try to fit your life around change. It has to fit your lifestyle. So personalize it, right? Are you more likely to go to a gym across town because your coworker goes there? Or will you probably be more likely to go to the one that's just two blocks away? Again, personalize it. You don't necessarily have to do what everyone else is doing, and in fact, a lot of times those solutions aren't necessarily for you, right? You're not gonna stick with a veggie detox when you've never been a fan of green vegetables in your life. You have to start change with what's gonna be reasonable for you to implement.

So we need to get out of this mindset that change requires a lot of effort. I want you to think about making the change effortless. And this goes back into breaking your goals into bite-size pieces, and getting quick wins, right? Because new behavior should require as little self control as possible so they can become habits as quickly as possible. Just set modest goals, take small, manageable steps that reinforce those feelings of self-efficacy, and the belief that you can stick with the program. And then try to make the change as convenient as you can at first. Then as your motivation and your confidence and your self-efficacy increase, then healthy changes start to stick and you can broaden or expand those goals. Alright?

Another thing that's important in planning, and we're at milepost number six if you're following along on the Healthy Living Roadmap. So, another important thing with planning is to prioritize change. So think about the first of the year when the New Year's resolutions abound and we want to change our diet, we want to exercise more, and spend more time with family and work less, and get more sleep, and on and on and on. So you know we can only truly focus on one thing at a time. Multitasking is a myth. Okay? When you multitask, you are actually moving from one thing to another very quickly and spending very little time on each thing. But I want you to focus truly on one thing, because that's all that we can do as humans, okay? When it comes to changing behavior, trying to do too much is just like tackling a goal that's too big. It can have the opposite effect by overwhelming you. So don't try to do it all at once. Prioritize your small goals and tackle them one by one. Again this goes back into making this personal for you, personalizing your approach to healthy living.

Another important principle: Anticipate and overcome obstacles. So, think about things that could impede your progress. I will tell you right off the bat that across the board, this is a scientific fact, it's not just that it's something that everybody faces, it is indeed ... there are studies that show this. So the biggest obstacle to implementing healthy living changes, the biggest obstacle is stress. So managing stress is going to be vitally important for you. I want you to identify those stressors. This is where the personalization comes in. Stress is common among everyone, but your specific type of stress, that's something that is unique to you.

So identify those stressors and either work around them, or wait for them to subside. Maybe it's just a temporary stressor. Maybe you have something, maybe you're about to graduate and you have one more month of classes and you're going through midterms or something like that, so that's a temporary stress that will go away after a month, so it's best in that case to wait until that month is over and then start to start your roadmap of healthy living because then you'll have more bandwidth frankly, and you can devote more attention to living healthier.

So once you identify those obstacles, I want you to remove barriers to healthy living. And this could be as simple as placing your exercise clothes and tennis shoes right beside your bed so that they're there when you wake up, or maybe taking a healthy snack to work so you don't buy a candy bar in the afternoon. One of the things you can also do is modify what are called environmental cues. So for example, I have a sweet tooth, so I try not to keep a lot of desserts in the house because I know that if they're there, then I'm gonna eat them. If they're in my environment then I will eat them. So that's one of the things that I do to modify environmental cues in our household.

Or the barriers could be something bigger than that too though. They could be something like distancing yourself from someone who negatively affects your motivation. Okay? So believe that you can live healthier, right? If someone or something is detracting from that then maybe you need to separate yourself from that. If there's someone or something that brings ...

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... from that. If there's someone or something that brings negative influences into your life, unhealthy habits, then consider that, okay? All of these things have to be considered as you plan how to live healthier. But with a solid plan in place, then now you can move to the next mile marker, which is taking some action. You can act, and you can start to practice healthy living.

I'll say too that this plan, act, and I'd even throw adjusting in there, I think that that's a three-part circle that just continues round and round. You constantly have to adjust to things that you may not have accounted for, and that's okay. So, you plan. Then, you act. Then, you adjust based on what you've learned or experienced through your actions. Then, you plan again, and then you act, and then you continue to adjust. It's a circular loop.

Many of the things that we considered in planning, whether it's personalizing things, setting priorities, anticipating obstacles, removing barriers, when done thoroughly, that makes taking action so much easier, and that is where you want to get to, okay? Because once your actions continue over a period of time, then now you're entering the maintenance zone, okay? That's the maintenance phase, and that's looking at milepost number eight and that final stage on the stages of change. You're basically on cruise control, man. You've gotten some consistency over time.

This is where as a health coach we talk about some of the other things that go into maintaining a healthy lifestyle, things like operant conditioning, which essentially says that behaviors that are followed by some type of reward are likely to be repeated and behaviors followed by some type of negative or punishment are less likely to be repeated. So for example, when we eat, the consequences of feeling guilty for overeating or indulging are going to compete with the enjoyment reward that you may get from the taste or from the nourishment of that food. It's in these consequences and rewards that we subconsciously

weigh in our minds on a constant basis, and that lead us to continue behavior or to stop a behavior. So, it's important to understand these things.

A lot of the health coaching, I'll go back to one of the things I said earlier, a lot of the journey on this roadmap and these health coaching principals, a lot of it has to do with the mental and mindset. A lot of it is psychological, okay? I could get into this in so many other different areas, when I talk about like the long distance endurance events for example. I strongly believed that those are so much more mental than they are physical. The same thing is true here. It's one thing to practice healthy habits, but it's another thing to practice healthy habits consistently, because having the ability to do that consistently is largely a matter of your mindset, motivation, and your ability to maintain that consistency, which is affected by so many of the things that we're talking about here in this episode. Ultimately, right, that's what we want. We want consistency, so it's important to understand these things.

Now, when it comes to consistency, there are a few things that can help. One is self-monitoring, okay? That's basically actions that increase your self-awareness by providing data that you may otherwise be unaware of, or by letting you spot trends that would be hard to recognize otherwise. They help you evaluate your actions and your progress. Self-monitoring mechanisms also helped to link the goals that you set and the performance that you ... your performance in trying to reach those goals. So, a very simple example is like a written food log or an exercise log, even activity trackers and wearable devices that provide stats on a consistent basis. Those kind of fall into this category. Even weighing yourself on a scale from time to time is a way of self-monitoring. Online food tracking, that's another way of self-monitoring.

Now, in addition to self-monitoring, there are other accountability mechanisms that are helpful as well. For example, in the FitLife program, we use an app for all of our FitLifers. So, I can help the Fit Lifers stay accountable because they check in with their habits on an app every day. Having someone else track your performance or having an accountability partner also works as well.

One thing I always say about consistency, and I know you've heard me say it many times before, be consistent over time, not perfect all the time. We're all busy, right? Our hectic lifestyles can produce so many disruptions to a lifestyle modification program, even if we have the very best of intentions. So, it is important to understand that perfection is impossible. You're going to overeat sometimes. You're going to skip exercise sessions for one reason or another. It's okay.

One of the health coaching resources that I use points out that successful behavioral change is almost always the result of small achievements accumulated over time, okay? But think about this: The opposite is also true. So if you repeatedly engage in a negative, seemingly small behavior, like getting a little less exercise every day, eating a few treats every day, skipping a meal or two every few days, getting less and less sleep, all of these things can have a big impact over time. The habits that you practice lead to change, for better or for worse, so you are in control.

Now, there will be setbacks as I said, right? That's life. Lapses occur. It's normal. Everybody goes through it. And not if it happens, but when it happens, the goal is simply to return to action. As I said at the beginning of this episode, look at this as a journey because it is. You don't get there overnight. There are things that can and will take you off track, but you can always get back on the road to success and continue to move forward.

Now remember, all of this starts, again, with identifying your readiness for change, okay? In fact, that's the entire point. So if you're a pre-contemplator I do have something for you, but

it's not on this roadmap. It's things like this podcast and the other podcasts on the TD Fitness website, the blog, other website features and social media resources, all of those things that I provide to help with awareness and education, hopefully to move you to the point where you're starting to think about making a change.

Obviously, I wouldn't prescribe a five-day-a-week exercise program to someone who doesn't think exercise is important, and I wouldn't tell you to drink 100 ounces of water a day if you barely got one glass per day in now. I think I mentioned that before. So once we identify that you're not in ... that you're beyond the pre-contemplation mode, that you're in the contemplation stage or even further along, then we can refine an individualized approach to incorporating and maintaining healthy habits.

One of the things that I did not mention but I think is important here, because this is kind of prevalent throughout the roadmap and along the entire journey, and that is this: it is that freewill and your ability to choose and to make decisions about what steps you will take, that is absolutely critical throughout the healthy change process. One of the tenants of behavior change is what's known as the self-determination theory. Basically, people don't like to be told what to do. So when it comes to creating and instilling those behaviors of exercise and eating healthier, it's human nature that we want to be in control. So if someone tells you to eat or drink this every day at this particular time, that may work initially, but I'd question whether that's truly sustainable. Because again, we want to be the masters of our destiny. That's the self-determination theory, okay?

That's something that I wanted to point out because I think it's important, and it may be something that you haven't heard before. A lot of times we like to get a okay checklist. This is what I need to do. Check, check, check, check. Well, the truth is that you have to have some input into that process. That's one of the things that we do in the FitLife program. You decide what it is that you're going to do to improve on where you are right now, okay? I help people through all of these steps presented here with the through the FitLife program, and that supports you and walks you through all of the things we talk about here in this episode and more, okay?

So, you're going to hear a really short clip on the FitLife program in a second. But first, I want to wrap this up. I want to remind you not to forget. Don't forget to grab that freebie, a roadmap for healthy living. You can go to tdfitness.net/044download. The show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/044, and I'll see you in the next episode where we talk about the most important specific nutrition and fitness habits on this roadmap to healthy living. So, thanks again for tuning in. Have a blessed one. Stay tuned for a quick clip. Coach T. out.

Why did I create the FitLife program? I wanted to provide something that wasn't just for weight loss, not just for feeling better, not even just for better health. I wanted a more complete solution, and I also wanted to make it sustainable. It's not just about starting something or sticking with it for a month or two. Healthy living, which includes fitness, nutrition, and a healthy mindset is about practicing healthy habits consistently, not all the time because no one is perfect, but practicing those healthy habits more than you are right now. That's how change begins and that's how healthy living continues. Find out more at fitlifeprogram.com or tdfitness.net/fitlife.