

## Hitting the Reset Button - Overcoming Setbacks in Healthy Living

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 85.

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, what's up guys? This is Coach T. Welcome back to TD Fitness. This is episode number 85, where we're talking about overcoming setbacks. When we're deliberate about planning to live healthier, which is really where I want all of us to be, in that planning stage so that we can see what's coming, we can plan for the things in our lives that are going to possibly prevent us from meeting our health and fitness goals, that's a great place to be, right? But that's not always possible. And setbacks sometimes come about, and sometimes they can overwhelm us and sometimes they can demotivate us.

Setbacks are part of the game, right? It's a part of life. And since we focus on healthy living for busy individuals, that's what we focus on here with the TD Fitness Podcast. Setbacks are even more common for those of us who are busy, because of our busy lifestyles. I mean, if all we had to do was focus on eating healthy, for example, and we didn't have to worry about work, we didn't have to worry about a job, we didn't have family obligations, then things would be so much simpler, right? But that's not life. That's not realistic. And many of those things that come with stress also come with a great deal of joy. I love my family, and I am happy to accept the work that comes along with being a husband and being a father. I find my job very rewarding. Even though it's stressful at times, it's still what I want to do day in and day out, and I'm passionate about this, about TD Fitness, because this is my opportunity to help you live a healthier life, but it's not easy running a business with a full time job and a family, right?

So the point is that life is made up of many different things, and we have to deal with the unexpected things as well as the expected things, and we have to move past some of those setbacks and get back on track, particularly when we get derailed on our health and fitness journey. So that's what we're talking about here in episode number 85. How to overcome setbacks when you've had success in the past with healthy habits.

I think a good place to start with this topic is to go back to the stages of change model, which you may have heard me discuss before on the TD Fitness Podcast, and certainly if you've been a member of the Fitlife program. But this is also called, the stages of change model is also called the transtheoretical model of behavior change. And really it's based on the psychology behind going through what we all go through when we try to implement something new and we try to implement change. It basically emphasizes the importance of determining your readiness for change, but the bottom line is that people who change their behavior go through several stages, and in this model they lay out five stages. So those stages are pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

So really quickly, pre-contemplation, someone who's a pre-contemplator is not even thinking about change, right? They're not even ready. So if I had to put it to words, it would be the equivalent of someone saying, "No, I won't." Or, "I can't." Okay? So if you're, for example, trying to get your friend to exercise more and they're just saying, "No, I'm not going to do

that." They're a pre-contemplator. They're not even considering that they should do that at this point in their lives. They're not even aware of the problem that they have, or maybe they are aware, but they just feel like it can't be solved, right? So that's a pre contemplator.

The second stage, contemplation, that's when you're weighing the pros and cons of changing. This is the equivalent of your friend saying, "Okay, I might do that. I might exercise." Maybe they don't know how to go about doing it. Maybe they don't know exactly what to do, but at least they're thinking about it. And then the third stage is the preparation stage, where your friend says, "I will do that. I will exercise with you." So they're getting ready to make a change and they're looking for an opportunity to do so. In this stage, we like to say they combine intent with that behavior and that activity.

And then in stage four, that's the action stage, where they're actually practicing a new behavior. Your friend is actually meeting you to exercise, and they're looking for opportunities to maintain that activity. The benefit here is that some of their beliefs and their attitudes are starting to change, but one of the downsides of being in the action phase, which is really the topic of this podcast, is that you're at a high risk for what we call lapses and returns to that undesirable behavior

And then the final, the fifth and final stage is the maintenance stage, where you've incorporated that new behavior into your life. So now your friend doesn't need to meet you to exercise, because it's something that he or she has committed to doing in their own lives. So they have a desire to maintain that, and they're more capable, frankly, of dealing with the things that tend to threaten that positive track or that habit that they've been practicing oh so well. So the risk is lower that they'd have a lapse at this point.

Now, some of the general guidelines, when you think about these stages of change, it's important to understand that you can be at a different level. You could be at a different level in one area of your life than you are in another area of your life. So in the nutrition area, you may be a contemplator, but in the fitness area, you may be in the maintenance stage. Maybe you have no issue going to exercise several days a week. That's something that is just a normal part of your routine, but you're still struggling maybe with trying to improve your diet. So it's okay to be at different stages as long as you recognize that, and generally speaking, the goal, and this is the approach that we take from a health coaching perspective, the goal is simply to move you to the next stage, nothing more.

You don't try to jump from being a pre-contemplator to someone who's in the action phase. No, you deliberately go through each one of those stages and all you focus on. Really all I focus on when I work with people is to get them to the next stage, and then also you can move up and down this ladder at different times in your life depending on your life situation, depending on how busy you are, depending on what type of stressors you're dealing with, and what stage of life you're in.

So now let's loop this back to the point of this podcast, which is the fact that lapses and setbacks can occur. In fact, in some versions of this model, there's a stage six and it's called the lapse or relapse stage. Now, it's not an all versions of this model because it's not something that's necessarily linear. Just because you go through the pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance stage, that doesn't mean that then you've move from maintenance to lapse or relapse all the time. But this lapse or relapse can occur.

So everyone encounters a lapse at some point in their lives. No matter what you're focusing on, no matter what habit you're trying to implement, it's just a part of life. And when I say lapse versus relapse, understand that there's a difference between the two. A lapse is a brief

deviation from what you have normally been doing. A relapse is where you revert to your old behavior for a longer period of time, sometimes permanently. And that is what we want to try to avoid. Okay? But again, everyone encounters a lapse at some point, and sometimes we relapse too, but it's important to understand that we can get back on track, we can get back to where we want to be, and that's kind of what I want to talk about briefly here in this episode.

So let's think about this from an example standpoint. So a lapse versus a relapse. If we're talking about nutrition, for example, and you've been good ... Let's say your healthy habit that you've been trying to practice is to cut back on the amount of sweets that you eat. This is kind of a segue or kind of a continuation, if you will, from last week's topic because this is something that hits home to me. As I said in last week's episode, I've been struggling with trying to get away from the sweets, because they tend to pop up in my life from time to time with people just being nice, bringing over sweets and things like that. And as I said, during stressful times, it's I don't have as much of that willpower.

So let's say your healthy habit goal is to limit the amount of additional sugar that you have in your diet on each day. A lapse in that, if you've been doing well with that, a lapse may be, "It's the weekend, and all of my friends are enjoying this birthday cake. I think I'll have a piece. I think I'll have two pieces. And I really would like a soft drink to go along with that." So that's a lapse, because I've been doing well all this time and now I have two pieces of cake and a soda, and that's a lot of additional sugar, right?

Now, a relapse in that category would be if I say, "Okay. It's Sunday now and I had all that sugar yesterday. Man, it was really good. I think I'd like to have some more sugar today." And then I just start going down the negative train and each day gets a little bit worse, and before I know it, I'm off of my healthy habit track of trying to cut back on added sugars. So that's kind of a relapse where I'm more permanently stepping away from the positive behaviors that I had before, lapse versus relapse.

To use a fitness example, you could say the same thing with exercise. "I plan to exercise three times this week." A lapse would be, "Man, I only got one workout in this week." But a relapse would be for me to say, "Well, I guess it's all shot. I guess I'll just wait until September to start exercising again, because I know things will be a little bit easier for me then." And before you know it, September turns into October, which turns into November, which turns into December, and you're not practicing healthy habits in the fitness arena.

A real life example from work would be that if you wanted to spend more time with family and you had the goal of coming home from work at 5:00 every day, a lapse would be, "Hey, something came up at work. I know that I had promised that I'd be home by 5:00, but I really have to handle this. I'll make it right tomorrow. I promise." A relapse would be continuing to follow that same behavior of staying later and later and later. So I think hopefully you get the point here that there's a difference between a lapse and a relapse. Lapses are temporary. Relapses are more permanent, but you can recover from either one of those. Okay?

Now, the other important thing to understand, as I said, going back to the stages of change, in the action stage where you're actually looking for opportunities to maintain that healthy behavior, in the action stage is when you're at the highest risk for lapses and returns to undesirable behavior. So it's important to understand that, because you're taking action, you feel good about yourself, but you're not quite at the maintenance stage where it doesn't require as much brain power and as much discipline for you to stick with it. So just understand that when you're taking action, particularly when you're just starting out, you are at risk for lapsing. It's important to understand that.

Now, one thing to point out too is that it's not a lapse. If it's a brief planned deviation. That's called getting ahead. When you see something coming down the road, you know you're going to have a busy week at work, you know you're going to be traveling, you know you're going to be with friends who don't eat as healthy as you typically eat, and you plan for that, then that's not a lapse. That's just getting ahead, and we encourage that, okay? That's where we want to ultimately be, but we can't always plan for it. So that's kind of the angle that I'm coming at this topic from.

So how do you handle it? How do you handle a lapse versus a relapse? Well, as I said, a lapse is a little bit easier to recover from because it's a temporary deviation. A relapse is a little bit harder because now you have to replace another bad habit with a good one, and it's closer to starting over. But what we find is that many of the strategies that we use to deal with lapses and relapses are similar to what you would do when you were just starting out initially anyway. And the good thing is that now you have some wins in your corner. You know that you can. You've practiced healthy habits before. It just so happens that you're not practicing them right now, but you know you can do it. And that is huge, because it gives you that confidence and you can go back to the person, to those actions that you were performing and be the person that you want to be.

So when we think about how to fix it, it's important to figure out why we're practicing those less healthy habits now, so we identify, we try to identify those triggers. Why were you doing so well before and now you're struggling? What has changed? What can you change back? And again, going back to our nutrition and our fitness and our life examples, perhaps on the nutrition front, if you think about that habit of trying to cut back on sweets, maybe it's something where your spouse has started to buy more of those things, and is bringing those things into the house, and you just don't have the wherewithal to resist them. So that could be a change. Maybe you're hosting your niece and nephew and they like sweets, so you have more of that stuff in the house for that reason. It could be anything, but it's important to identify what it is so that you can address it. On the fitness front, maybe the local gym that you like going to closed down, or maybe the friend that you liked to work out with moved away. Those are all things that could trigger you going back to unhealthy habits.

So it's easy to start, right? The beginning is not as difficult as it is trying to maintain a healthy habit, because our motivation is higher. We see typically the most dramatic results in the beginning, and we're excited about what's to come. So in the beginning it's a lot easier, but then as things move on, as life happens and as you get farther and farther into the journey, things can be a little more difficult.

Another reason why we revert to unhealthy habits or have a lapse or relapse is that sometimes we just feel like we need a reprieve. We need a break from trying to eat healthy so much or trying to exercise a certain number of times a week, and that's why if you think about it, you've heard me talk about this before with the Fitlife program, and in our monthly membership program, we don't strive for perfection. We look for ways to simply improve on what we've been doing little by little. So that's why we take that approach, but it's not uncommon to feel overwhelmed a lot of times for people if you don't approach this prudently, if you don't look at it in a way that is simply improving what you're currently doing. If you take the traditional approach and say, "You know, this year I'm going to exercise five times a week and cut out saturated fats from my diet," well, that's probably going to be tough if you're not anywhere close to doing that right now. So that's why we take that building block, that step by step approach, and that's why we don't strive for perfection.

I mentioned before that another reason why we could get into these lapses and relapses is the environment, like for example, having those sweets in the house. So all of these things are important to consider. There are triggers, there are things that cause us to perform any action

that we take, whether it's positive or negative, and we need to identify those triggers. Whether it's because we're in the beginning stages, because we need a break from what we've been doing, because we have added stress in our lives, or because our environment is kind of pushing us to do whatever action or whatever habit it is that we're performing, that's what I want you all to take away from this. There are triggers, so it's important to identify them.

Now, what can we do, though? Self-monitoring is one thing we can do. That's basically tracking your habits. Track what you're doing in your diet, track your exercise. Whatever habit that you're trying to implement or improve on, tracking it, keeping yourself accountable, is the best way to do that. Another good way is to have somebody else keep you accountable, maybe an accountability partner, and both of these things, when it comes to self-monitoring and tracking and having an accountability partner, these are things that are part of the monthly membership program. This is what the action takers in the monthly membership program are doing week in and week out. They are tracking their progress. They are annotating whether or not they perform the single healthy habit that they had hoped to perform that day, and it's not laborious either. It's simply a yes or no question that they get on the app every single day. You click the yes button or the no button and it logs your answer. So making this easy for people and unintrusive is one way that we tackle this accountability piece when it comes to some of the programs that we offer through TD Fitness.

Another way to get out of the lapse or relapse area is to reinforce successes when you have them. So think about this from a parenting standpoint, and the positive reinforcement that you give your child when they do something well. You give them a, "Good job," you give them a pat on the back. You give them the "attaboy" and then they feel better and they want to repeat that habit over and over and over again. Well, the same psychology works with us as adults, because when we're successful at something and we recognize that success, then we want to maintain or continue that success, so positive reinforcement is key.

So those are some of the things that I want you to take away from what we can do to handle lapses and relapses. But just a couple of more notes. A couple more notes on this. You know, your actions are just that. They're just your actions. They are not who you are. They don't define you. You decide who you want to be. You've heard me say before this quote from Seth Goden. He says, "People like us do things like this." So what I'm telling you is to do the things that the person you want to be would do. Decide in your mind that you're that person. The big picture is that getting back on the wagon by going to the same things that worked you before is something that that can help you here. You want to remind yourself of past successes.

And remember too that it's got to be specific to you. It's your journey. You can't take someone else's goal and try to impose that in your life, put that into your life, because it may not work for you. It's got to be specific to you. I'm reminded of just this week, one of our action takers was very open and honest about the struggles that she's been having during the past couple of months. I'm just going to read a little bit of what she wrote here in the the private Facebook group for the action takers. She says, "So I'm struggling this summer. I stopped working out with my trainer and my eating is a mess. I love the email you sent yesterday about forgetting the last three weeks and focusing on what you're going to do today. So starting today, I'm recommitting to the gym or 45 minutes of physical activity three times a week, and this week my nutrition goal is really back to the basics. Nothing from the drive through. Resetting my habits."

I love this post because of the honesty and really understanding where she is. So identifying that there's a problem, forgetting the past and saying, "This is what I'm going to do to move forward." There is so much in this post that she wrote, and it is so powerful because she has a plan, she has very specific goals, and she's going to move out and she's going to be successful

because that's what we do in the Action Taker Monthly Membership Program. We encourage one another and the mechanisms are there for all of us to succeed.

What I told her and what I'm telling you all here is, today is indeed the first day of the rest of your life. So forget about what you've done in the past. If you're in a lapse or relapse period, it doesn't matter. You can start today. Our past does inform our way forward, but it does not define us, and I want you to consider this. Consider that there is a reason for everything that happens in our lives. That lapse or relapse is now part of your story. It is, so use it to your advantage. You know, one of the things that I'll tell new members that come into the Fitlife program or come into the Action Taker program is that you are exactly where you're supposed to be, and that applies now, no matter whether you're starting or you've been doing this for a while, okay? Maybe that lapse was just what you needed to get you re-motivated, or maybe it's just what you needed to point out an area where you were susceptible to lapses in your life, and isn't that nice to know going forward?

Remember, life is a journey of learning, and we can and should use these lessons to learn. We can't be perfect and we don't need to try to be perfect. Once we accept that, then it's just a matter of understanding how to deal with setbacks. So the gold standard, in my opinion, is in understanding how you can handle the setbacks in your life, because knowing really is half the battle, and then you just have to take action to change it. And this time, though, you've got a history of success to look back on and to build on.

So that's it. That's what I wanted to pass to you guys this week. Also, I'll say if you too would like some help on the accountability side, you know our Action Takers in the Monthly Member Program are reaping the benefits of that accountability every day, so you can become an Action Taker and get help with what to do for healthy living, with how to do it, and just let me help you stay more accountable.

You can learn more about that at [tdfitness.net/monthlymember](http://tdfitness.net/monthlymember), to be notified when I opened the membership up again in a couple of weeks here. You should be getting some more emails about that, too. A reminder that the show notes for this episode can be found [tdfitness.net/085](http://tdfitness.net/085). As always, I want to thank you all for tuning in. I want you to have a blessed one. Coach T signing out.