

Better Nutrition Part 2 - A Better Nutrition Environment

Hello TD Fitness Family! I'm Coach T. and this is part 2 of my four-part Better Nutrition Series. And in this episode of the TD Fitness Podcast, my goal is to foster a better understanding of your environment and how it affects you, me, all of us as we strive for better nutrition. Sometimes we're dealt a hand that we simply can't control, and I want to talk about some ways to work through or around the things in your environment so that you can get closer to that positive, healthy change that you're looking for.

As you know, I'm going to do this by addressing some of the themes that I hit over the past month in my FitVids. And as always, you can view or listen to those at TDFitness.net, on the TD Fitness YouTube channel, the Facebook page and on Instagram.

But the first couple of points to take away from this really speak to this theme of controlling what you can control, and not worrying about those things that we can't control.

Your surroundings obviously affect your habits, right? But how do we shape our environments to increase the chances of success in living healthier? Food is all around us. And even when it isn't, there are reminders and advertisements for food just about everywhere we look. I'd point out that it's not like this in some other parts of the world. Sometimes it seems that here in America, food is viewed as more of a business than a means of sustaining and providing nutrients for our bodies. And it's no surprise that our obesity rates are higher and that as a nation, we are generally less healthy. But it's not all our fault. As I said, when your environment is set up to tempt, and promote less healthy options...when profit margins are the bottom line for many food producers, it's easy to get confused and to be coerced into less healthy eating. Your environment plays a huge role in your actions. So, one of the first things we must do in this discussion is to simply acknowledge that there is an interplay between your goals and desires, and the world around you. And those things, people, and attitudes around you may have more of an impact on your journey to success than you realize.

So, as we assess our environment and the things around us, it's important to make the distinction between those things that we can actually control and those that we can't. Some things benefit and promote our efforts along the way. Others don't. We may be dealt a less favorable hand and that's simply what we have to play the game with. But it doesn't make sense to spend a lot of time focusing on things we have no control over. We should focus on those things we can affect, and not worry about those things we can't. Let me give you an example of an area where I've decided to take full control. Hydration is one of the most important aspects of nutrition. It allows your body to function better, makes your muscles more limber, helps with digestion, and it has many other benefits. So that's an area that I don't leave to chance.

The first thing I do in the morning when I wake up is drink a bottle of water. No matter where I am. I also carry my water bottle with me throughout the day. When I travel, I have a water bottle with me in the airports and refill as needed. I keep water with me so I'm rarely at the mercy of a water fountain that's not working, or a long drive or flight where it takes extra effort to get water. It seems small, but it's second nature to me now. It's something I can control and it benefits my nutrition and overall health. So that's one example of controlling something in your environment that can benefit you from a nutrition standpoint.

Now as I pointed out, there are also things around us, instances or situations, that we simply have no control over. And as I've said before, we should try not to let those things get to us. But that's easier said than done. Dealing with those things can sometimes be difficult. But when we don't brush off those things that we can't control, it leads to stress. For example, the past few weeks for me have been extremely busy. I packed up my family as we've moved across the country. Dealing with packing and move timelines, purging things we don't need, protecting valuables, trying to maintain some form of consistency for the kids and ourselves, working with my spouse during what is historically a very stressful time during moves, and then getting settled into a new job and a new home...I was not able to be as consistent with my fitness, nor has my diet been as healthy as it should have been over the past few weeks. Now, I could stress over these things, these factors of my environment that I don't have much control over, or I can accept the situation, work fitness and nutrition in as best I can and know that this is a temporary period that will pass. Reflecting on a theme that we talked about in the last episode on mindset, this is where a positive attitude has been hugely beneficial. Yes, my habits haven't been as healthy as they usually are, but I'm not going to compound that by stressing over the fact that I didn't meet my fitness and nutrition goals over the last few weeks. Can I change my situation? Not much. Can I accept it, work around the limiting factors and not add to my unhealthiness by stressing? You bet. When you can't change a situation, try changing whether you'll let it affect you. Because chronic stress itself is unhealthy, and it affects how successful you are over the long term.

So that's one of the ways that you can start to create and shape your healthier environment. Another way is to take a look at *who's* around you. Seth Godin has written about a concept that is summed up in the phrase "people like us do things like this." It refers to the feeling of belonging, the association with a "tribe" if you will. And it's a good place to start the discussion as we talk about the people we surround ourselves with, our general environment, how it affects us, and what all of this means for our dietary and nutrition goals. The people in our lives can either be positive or negative influences when it comes to meeting our goals. And many times, those around us are unintentional, unaware even, of their influence. For example, it doesn't always take someone saying "we should have a healthier lunch today," or on the other end of the spectrum, "let's go get the greasiest meal we can for dinner!" It's usually the more subtle attributes of those you spend time around at work or at leisure. It could be that most of your coworkers seem to bring a salad or something healthy for lunch each day, and therefore you feel empowered and

motivated to do the same. It could be your friend that orders a single scoop of ice cream for dessert as opposed to the extra-large milkshake. The actions and habits of those around you absolutely influence your actions as well. To make this work in your favor, seek out and spend time with those who also have a desire, and take the necessary steps to live healthier through smarter nutrition choices.

And just as the people around us influence our actions and outlook on healthier living, the *things* around us do the same. And by “things” here, I mean your general surroundings...your environment. James Clear is quoted as saying, “To make progress, you can either alter your environment or be stronger. The more disciplined your environment is, the less disciplined you need to be. Don't swim upstream.” I love this quote because it speaks to both the path that most of us take in our attempt to change, and the smarter way to go about improving our health. We can try as we may to muster up motivation and willpower (that's the old school way of change), or we can understand a basic rule of psychology and the way in which we interact with our surroundings...that when given a choice, the easier route is usually preferred. If unhealthy foods aren't readily available, you are less likely to eat them because it requires effort to obtain them. Conversely, if healthier options are readily available, you're more likely to choose from those options. So, ask yourself, is your environment, your surroundings...are they conducive to helping you with your nutrition habit goals? Your environment is important. Make your environment work in your favor.

Now, certainly there will be times when you encounter obstacles along the road on your journey toward better nutrition and health. The best way to deal with these obstacles is to anticipate and avoid them if you can, but if you can't, it helps to have some support through it. And the people and things around you can either support and uplift you through those tough times or they can make things more difficult for you. Again, this is why the people you associate with and the settings you spend the most time in are so important. The thing to remember here is that you can exercise some control over your situation. If your family doesn't necessarily have the best nutrition habits, seek a peer group that does and bring some of those healthy habits and practices home with you. If you work in an environment that doesn't value and promote nutrition and healthy eating, start bringing your own lunch, one that is healthier than the options available at work. The ball is in your court, but sometimes you need an assist. Lay the foundation for the support system that will in turn support you in times of need.

Now I'd like to briefly hit some more specific examples of nutrition habits and strategies as they relate to your environment. You know I try to keep things simple, so I've narrowed the focus areas here down to four major things: how much water you drink, managing calorie intake, incorporating fruits and vegetables into your diet, and reducing added sugars. Now, I'm not saying that everyone struggles with each of these things, but in my experience many people can improve in some of these areas. And this list isn't all-inclusive of the nutrition challenges we all face but again, in my experience, these are the challenges that are most prevalent, and when addressed, can have the biggest returns.

So, let's start with water intake. Why is water so important? First, it's one of the simplest, yet most effective, changes you can make when it comes to improving your diet. Water is more important to life than any other nutrient. Earlier in this episode I mentioned some of the reasons why it's important to stay properly hydrated. One benefit that I didn't mention is that the body doesn't retain excess water weight when you drink enough of it. In other words, the body doesn't store as much water for use when you're drinking enough of it. Put simply, drink more water and lose weight!

So here are some of the things I try to do to ensure I stay hydrated. I already mentioned controlling the things I can control by drinking a bottle of water as soon as I get up and carrying my water bottle with me throughout the day. I'm also deliberate about scheduling my water intake. What this looks like for me is drinking that 16 oz. bottle of water literally as soon as I wake up in the morning. Then I work to drink an additional 33 ounces before lunch, and another 33 oz before I leave work. Then I'll usually have another 16 oz or so through the evening. This allows me to taper my intake before I go to bed so I don't wake up having to go to the bathroom. This strategy of drinking throughout the day also allows me to get 100 oz of water in daily, which I've found works rather well for my needs. If you're having trouble meeting your daily water goals, try breaking them up throughout the day.

Those are a couple of techniques I use to stay hydrated and stay healthy when it comes to water consumption. Pre-position that water bottle on night stand, carry water with you throughout the day, and set intermittent goals within the course of each day.

When it comes to eating more healthy foods, we often tend to think in terms of things we need to *stop* doing to be healthier. But healthier living is actually a combination of reducing less healthy actions and *adding* healthier habits. Honestly, the habit of adding fruits and veggies to my diet is the one I struggle with more than others. Largely because less healthy options are so much more readily available, and because my schedule is typically very busy. Those two things make it challenging for me. So, ways that I try to make it more normal to get those fruits and veggies are by setting weekly goals, packing my own snacks, increasing the amounts of these items in the house (while reducing unhealthy foods on the house), and by staying accountable to someone as I work through the habit. Each of these go back to principles that we've talked about before. I control what I can control by ensuring we have healthy options available at the house and my bringing my own snacks to work. I also set weekly goals for my vegetable servings and leverage other people and tracking systems to keep me accountable. Those are my support systems for this habit.

Finally, how do I manage calories? Reducing calorie intake is what most do in an attempt to lose or maintain weight. But simply reducing the number of calories you consume won't necessarily help you

meet, or keep you at your goals. I think we've all learned by now that starvation diets don't work over the long term. There are much healthier ways to control your weight that are also more sustainable and effective. It's about being smart about the number of calories you consume, when you consume them, as well as the *type* of calories you consume. It really comes down to having what I call an individualized (or personal) plan for managing calories. We're all different, but we all need to make sure we're getting enough energy, when we need it, without consistently going overboard.

So, some ways that I do this...what's worked for me is paying attention to portion control, paying more attention to my sugar intake, and in the past, I've tracked calories as well.

Now, however, instead of tracking calories, I've adopted intermittent fasting and I've practiced that for the past 3 years or more.

So, for portion control, you could try things like boxing up a portion of your meal *before* you start eating when dining out. Portion sizes are typically very large at most restaurants, and if you dive right in, there's a greater chance that you'll eat past the point of being full. And when eating at home, avoid eating directly from the box/bag/carton/container. Use a plate or bowl instead. Each of these techniques is a way of defining how much you intend to eat vs. mindlessly eating whatever is in front of you.

When it comes to sugar intake many of us can make great strides by simply reducing the amount of sugary drinks we consume. Try not to drink your calories...they go down a lot easier when you drink them. And if you have a sweet tooth like me, take a smaller amount with you. I love dark chocolate almonds, for example. So, I no longer take the entire bag to work with me with the intent of eating just a few. I found that "just a few" often turned into almost the entire bag. So now I only take ten or so just to satisfy that sweet tooth after lunch. And I also try to limit the amount of sweets in our house, but this is a constant struggle because we have kids!

As I said, I used to track my calories, but that just became too cumbersome for me. On occasion, I do still track the amount of added sugars I consume. The American Heart Association recommends men consume no more than 9 teaspoons or 36 grams of added sugar per day. That's about 150 calories. For women, the number is lower...it's 6 teaspoons or 25 grams per day. That's about 100 calories. Consider that one 12-ounce can of soda contains 8 teaspoons (32 grams) of added sugar! Going back to the earlier point about drinking calories, that's almost the whole day's allotment in one drink!

But what I do now, and I think this has had a huge positive influence in my personal calorie management, is intermittent fasting. It helps me to manage the amount I consume each day. It keeps me from constantly snacking throughout the day, which would keep my insulin levels relatively high all day long (a contributing factor in weight gain), and it's made me more aware and conscious when I eat. If you want to

hear more about my Intermittent Fasting Experiment and Tips for Following Your Meal Plan, check out Episode 30 of the TD Fitness Podcast.

Alright, so that's about it for this episode. We talked about controlling what you can control in your environment, creating and shaping your healthy environment and some examples of how to make your environment work for you. My hope is that there's something here that you can use in your continued efforts to improve your nutrition practices, or that this at least adds to your perspective as you seek to become your best self.

Do me a favor...if you like this, leave your thoughts through a rating or comment, and tell someone else about it! If there's something else you'd like to see, let me know that as well. My goal is to help you improve. Finally, If you haven't already checked it out, head to tdfitness.net where you can download my "25 Healthy Habit Ideas for Busy Lifestyles." It's a small tool that can yield big results when you take those small steps one at a time. That's all for now. Take care, be blessed. Coach T. signing out.