

Better Nutrition Part 4 - Defining Success in Better Nutrition

This is the final episode of this Better Nutrition series. And here I want to focus on defining Success and how to view progress. This is important because the right perspective in what it means to make progress helps us understand what's really important when we measure change.

So let's start here...why do we measure what we measure? In nutrition, health, weight loss, or anything else? I think there is really just one reason that has a number of different sub-parts. The reason is that we need, or want to compare. When it comes to nutrition, we compare what we ate to what we were supposed to eat on a particular diet. We compare to what our friends next to us are eating. We compare what we're eating today to what we ate yesterday. And the measuring itself is not bad. But, it's how we view the measuring that makes all the difference, because it determines how we define success. What you do...how you eat is important. But it's important because we or someone else have made it important based on a standard that we or someone else has set or defined. We know that too much sodium in your diet, for example, can lead to high blood pressure. But I also know that if I reduce the amount of sodium in my diet, I'll be healthier, even if that amount is still higher than recommended levels. So when it comes to improving, when it comes to living healthier, having the right perspective on what it means to make progress helps us understand what's really important when we measure the improvements that we seek to make.

So let's jump to something that your nutrition plays a huge role in and the thing that we tend to pay the most attention to when we talk about what to measure. That thing is your weight. Why do we feel compelled to measure weight? One reason is that it's an established norm. There are charts that tell us how much we're "supposed" to weigh based on our height. But those norms don't account for weight distribution, or body composition. So weight isn't necessarily the best measurement in that case. Another reason we measure weight is because, like I mentioned, we want some metric for comparison. Am I lighter or heavier than I was before? Well, this is only somewhat helpful when you consider that weight can fluctuate significantly based on hydration and hormones. So again, weight may not be the best choice here either. But another reason we use weight to judge success?... Because it's easy. Step on the scale, look at the number. But the point here is that just because something is easy to measure doesn't mean

it's the right thing to measure. I urge you to measure the right things, not just the easy things. When it's difficult to measure what's important, we tend to make what we can measure more important in our minds. I don't want you to fall into the "measuring what's easy" trap.

We don't always think about how the feedback that we get from measuring progress affects us. We are, perhaps, our own toughest critic. And when we don't get the results that we're looking for, our motivation and our confidence both take a hit. Going back to our very first principle of changing for the better, we know that our mindset sets the stage for everything that follows. Therefore, it's important to protect that positive mindset and to push negative thoughts aside. I can't overemphasize this point enough...what we measure influences our confidence. Yes, how we do plays a role, but that's why it's important to measure the right things. Make your metrics things that you can control, not things that you have no control over. And when you do that, you'll find that it's easier to make progress, to truly change for the better, and to maintain that confidence and motivation that is so important. Protect your mindset by choosing the right things to measure your progress against.

So, understanding that we don't just measure things simply because they're easy to measure, what then do we measure? When it comes to healthier living, I'm always a proponent of measuring actions, not outcomes. The key word in improving your health is to be healthier. That means improving what *you* do, the things you can control...not what happens *because* of what you do. This is particularly applicable in nutrition because we control what we eat. And by focusing on *how* we eat, we remove the stress of not being able to control what happens because of the *way* we eat. It's about consistent habits, remember? This is an action-based approach, not an outcome based one. You can improve actions. You have less control over outcomes.

Olympic season just ended, and I'll tell you I loved watching the competition. The particular sport doesn't even matter so much to me as seeing our nation's and the world's top athletes battling it out for Gold. But it's not just the winners that we admire, right? I mean, every one of these athletes is a winner in their own right, simply because they've made it to the highest levels of competition. But we've also seen, this year and in years past, stories of hope, of determination, and of commitment to compete. Not because they necessarily had a chance at a medal, but because that's what professionals do. They see what they're capable of, and they learn from every experience. They do this because they know that there

is no "finish line" when it comes to self-improvement. They constantly work to get better. And even when it's all on the line, and when the next shot isn't for another four years, they use the experience to learn. Now, we may not be Olympic athletes, but we can further grow our capacity to learn. And if we want to eat healthier, to live healthier, to *be* healthier, we must improve through what we learn. If one diet experience or an attempt at change doesn't work out, that's fine. In fact it's *good*...as long as you learn from it. So I want you to think about replacing the phrase "win or lose" with the phrase "try and learn." Learning *is* winning. That's why Olympians are winners. That's why you are too. Going through your improvement process is an opportunity to learn more about yourself. And it's part of a long-term outlook.

Another part of the long-term outlook is having patience. This is particularly important when we talk about improving a diet or a way of eating because our eating habits are some of the hardest habits to change. But this is usually because the results we seek start off as imperceptible. We can't necessarily see the changes in ourselves right away because the types of changes you see take time. If I eat better today than I did yesterday, my body knows it, but I don't necessarily see it. And oftentimes, unless we can see the change, it doesn't exist in our minds. That's why patience is important. Patience gives us the wherewithal to stick to it, knowing that although we don't see results, they are forthcoming. Stay patient. Positive change takes time...at least if you want it to stick it does.

You know, sometimes we work and work and work at change. We try and try and try. But the progress we seek just continues to elude us. So what do you do when this happens? Not just how do we respond, but what do we do...to continue, to press on toward the change we seek. It's an important question, because for most of us, it's easy to continue when you start to see the results you're looking for. It's easier to maintain a particular diet when you see the weight continue to come off, or when you can feel a noticeable difference in your health. But those positive outcomes aren't always as quick to manifest themselves. And it's in those moments, when we have a decision on whether to continue or to quit, that determines our future path and destination. But again, our perception of success is defined by what we measure against. So, let's say you've decided to add more vegetables to your daily intake by replacing your usual lunch of a burger, fries and a soft drink with a healthy salad option on weekdays. Your initial expectation was to lose weight, but after two weeks, the weight isn't coming off. Well, maybe the real benefit is that you're consuming less fatty food and fewer empty calories. You wouldn't know that by

looking at the scale, but you are becoming healthier. Or maybe the real benefit is in making the decision to replace a less healthy habit of eating fast food every day for lunch with a more nutritious option. And by making that choice, implementing that change and sticking to it, you've opened up a whole new set of options and possibilities that can lead to even more healthier changes in other areas of your life. When progress eludes you, ask yourself, if you're a little bit healthier now, or if you now have a mindset that will allow you to make more improvements, has progress really eluded you? By understanding what's really important in your path to improvement, you may realize that that you're actually making progress you never considered before.

Once you start to understand what healthy progress and improvement really means, you can really start to refine your plan through the habits that make up your routines. And you can do this by asking yourself the right questions. How did I do? Did I improve? Am I healthier now than I was before I started? Was I successful? Remember that we determine success not by the outcomes, but by the actions we've taken. If I wasn't successful at my intended actions, why was that? What can I change? Should I move my efforts to another area or was my goal in this area just a bit too lofty? Sticking with the example of salads for lunch, suppose you just aren't able to get yourself to eat salad for lunch on five days a week. Perhaps you change your goal to salad for lunch on three days a week, or two or one day a week. That's healthier than no days a week, and it's a great place to start. If you can't stomach a salad, maybe you opt for a fruit smoothie instead. That's also healthier than a burger, fries and a soft drink. Or maybe you go from the supersized fast food option to a regular size. Or perhaps you just replace the large drink with a small soft drink, or a water instead. If something isn't working for you, don't be afraid to cut your losses and try something else. Remember, healthy change is all about sticking to healthy habits. If you can't stick to the habit, it's not going to work. Just don't give up on yourself or on a particular habit too quickly. Change is difficult, but there are ways to make it easier. Remember, your habits are repeated actions, and these actions define your behaviors. And behaviors make up your lifestyle. If you want a healthy lifestyle, it starts with healthier habits. To continue to improve your health, choose improvement areas that you can stick with. Believe me, you'll continue to grow from there.

Alright, wrapping this up, in this Better Nutrition series we've stepped through my principles for healthier living as they relate to better nutrition. And at the end of the day, it really comes down to making

better nutrition choices. And as with just about everything in life, it starts with the right mindset, not just through the vision of your future self, but with a realistic understanding of where you are right now, and an acknowledgement that the past doesn't define your future. You can make healthier nutrition choices. You can. It doesn't matter what you've tried before or how you did. You're here now for a reason. And now's the time to move forward. That's where to start, with an internal mindset that helps you realize that the change you seek is indeed possible. Then consider the reality that your environment gets a vote. But even then, you should seek to control those things that you can control, and shape our environment to work in your favor. Don't settle for having unhealthy options around you if you don't have to. Create your own options for healthier food by planning ahead. As you go through the process, keep in mind the type of person you want to become, not just the things you need to do to get there. Healthy people generally do these types of things within their diet. They make these types of choices. Ask yourself, "how can I apply some of that to my situation, by planning better, prioritizing, taking a small first step, not trying to be perfect, or by being more consistent?" And finally, as you measure your progress, make sure you're measuring the right thing. Are you keeping the bigger picture in mind, which is your ability to live healthier over the long-term. Or are you getting caught up in the day-to-day comparisons and the trap of things that are easy to measure? Continuously ask yourself if you're doing the things that will make consistent healthier habits easier. If you want better nutrition, that's how to get there.

I truly hope this has been helpful for you. As a reminder, if you like this, please leave a rating or comment, and spread the word! And as always, if there's something else I can provide, drop me a line so I can give you the help and advice you need.

Finally, download my "25 Healthy Habit Ideas for Busy Lifestyles" if you're looking for a tool that can help you out with simple ideas on where to start. You can find it at tdfitness.net. Thanks for joining me in this Better Nutrition series. Have a blessed one! Coach T. out.