

FAST TRACK GUIDE:

Staying on the Health Track



Fast Track Guide Staying on the Health Track

After you reach one of your main health goals, you may feel like you have finally “arrived” and that you can now take a break. Wrong. You still have areas you need to work on. If you put your healthy lifestyle habits and goals on the back burner, you can easily lose your focus, momentum, and motivation. To get healthy and maintain that health, you have to stay on track in order to make and meet new goals, as your life changes.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks you will face is staying motivated. Staying motivated is the key to making progress and meeting goals. Unfortunately, motivation issues don't just affect you when you're a beginner or when you start working on a new goal. Motivation plays a large role throughout your life. However, you can stay on track concerning your health goals with the help of a few simple adjustments.

Celebrate Your Achievements

Once you achieve a goal, you should always take time to celebrate your determination, hard work, and your overall success in reaching your goal. Celebrate by doing or getting something (related to the goal) that you could do or get before you met the goal. For example, if you toned up those upper-arms, buy a new tank top and wear it without a “cover-up” shirt. Another example might be, if you made it across the finish line at the 5k run, schedule a day at the spa, get a massage, or throw a party and invite your friends.

Do something that is fun or motivational to mark the occasion. But, don't do or get anything that does not support your healthy habits. For instance, if your goal was to lose 5 pounds before your college reunion and you did, don't celebrate by eating 3 pieces of chocolate cake.

Depending on your health goals, you may want to work in some of these rewards, ideas, and suggestions. While each section has ideas for that topic, you can mix and match to meet your likes and needs.

Weight Goals – These suggestions can work well with a variety of weight goals. You may want to get a massage, sign up for a mini-marathon, have a full spa treatment or something that aligns with your healthy lifestyle. You can also go shopping for new clothing and get a makeover. Many people try to save money as they make progress in order to splurge on a great reward.

Blood Test Goals – This is an important goal achievement because the tests tell you how healthy you really are. The blood test should spur you on to even greater healthy habits because it's proof that what you're doing is working. Celebrate by having a healthy picnic with friends and family. Pick a great spot that offers a variety of activity options for your group. You might want to consider a local lake, a beach, a state park, or even a national park.

Multiple Goals – Trips can be a great way to celebrate reaching a goal. You can adjust a trip's length, location, and more to match the “size” of the goal. For example, meeting weekly goals may include taking a trip to see a movie, while meeting a monthly goal might include going to a favorite place for the weekend. Meeting your goal for the year or

a major goal might include a longer trip or taking a cruise. Trips are also great ways to work in your other interests.

Set New Goals

Anytime you meet a goal, it's time to set a new one. There is more to health than getting to a healthy weight or walking 10 thousand steps a day. Now you can set new goals that further refine your health.

For example, if you worked hard and lost 50 pounds, you may find that maintaining your healthier weight can be difficult. You're no longer in "must-lose" mode because you met your goal. However, now, you need to shift into "must-maintain" mode, where your focus/motivation is more on a healthy lifestyle. Since this is a bit ambiguous, you need to set a new goal that is specific to your maintenance stage. A quick example might be to set a goal to eat a dinner salad 2-3 times a week. Once you gain ground in an area, you've got to hold that ground, even as you continue to make progress in other areas of your overall health.

Look at your health and decide what you can work on next. Maybe you feel that you could be more toned. If so, you may want to add toning exercises into your exercise options. Set a toning goal and create an action plan to reach your goal.

If you have achieved all of your original health goals, set new goals, such as improving your form while you work out. You might also consider expanding your cooking skills. Take a cooking class that will help you learn how to prepare healthy meals using a specific tool, utensil, or cooking method.

Continue Healthy Habits

Achievement of a goal is a milestone, a celebration point, on your life long journey towards better health. It's not your cue to resume unhealthy behaviors and habits, which caused or contributed to your health problem. It's easy to fall back into old patterns, especially if you think achieving your goal means you're "cured," you've beaten the odds, or you're finished. This type of thinking means you need to work on your mindset, perspective, and/or your understanding of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle. In order to maintain your health, you must continue to make good choices and take appropriate actions concerning your overall health. Keep the following in mind as you reach your goals and continue to focus on healthy habits for life.

- **Eat Healthy Amounts** – Remember that you need to eat the right number of calories for your body style and frame. You can't cheat the system because your body will start demanding the calories in any form if it's hungry. You're less susceptible to that cookie or bag of chips if you don't let yourself get too hungry.
- **Eat Healthy Foods** – Whether you're on a low-carb or low-fat diet both types of diets promote the same thing regarding calories and eating whole unprocessed food. Eat foods that are as fresh and natural as possible. Consuming the right amounts gives you the nutrients that you need to build a healthy body.

- **Monitor Progress and Results** – When you set your goals, you included ways to track/measure your progress and success. Depending on your goal, you may have chosen to track and measure distance, weight, repetitions, calorie intake, test scores, etc. This data verified how well your strategies worked and let you know when you reached your goal. Even when you're in "maintenance mode," you still need to track and check your data, occasionally. This allows you to pinpoint and fix a problem quickly.
- **Supplement With Dr. Approval Only** – At different times during your life, you'll probably need extra vitamins, minerals, or nutrients. However, before you start taking any supplement, including herbs, it's crucial that you talk with your doctor first. Some supplements can be downright dangerous if you take too much or they are contraindicated with one of your medications. Ginseng is one such supplement. Even some "healthy foods" can interfere with medication, such as grapefruit.
- **Drink Water** – There is no substitute for water. Water is what your body needs when you're active and especially when you're sick and/or can't keep food down. Try to drink at least 64 ounces of water a day. You may need to adjust the amount depending on your weight, height, activity level, and weather. Pure water (no flavoring or additives) is best because the added ingredients must be metabolized, making your body do extra work. Get your quota of water before drinking other beverages, your body will thank you.
- **Keep Moving** – Set a minimum amount of exercise you will do each day. No excuses allowed, unless you're gravely ill. For some people "minimum" is 10 thousand steps a day, for others, it's 20 minutes of walking a day. You want to plan for the minimum amount that you can do to stay healthy. Make a requirement of yourself. In order to do anything else, you must complete the minimum amount of exercise, even if it means you stand in a corner and pump your legs up and down, simulating walking.

Healthy habits need to be maintained for a lifetime. To motivate yourself to continue following healthy practices, read about other people's successes and achieving success. Listen to motivational music and audios. Watch YouTube videos and workouts that inspire and encourage you. Surround yourself with success and you'll be more likely to stick with your healthy habits.

Focus on Permanent Change

When it comes to your health, the changes you make must be long-term changes. While you may need to adjust your calorie intake once you've lost weight, the calories you add should be healthy calories. But your ultimate goal will always be to maintain a healthy eating lifestyle. The same principle holds true for other aspects of your health, such as exercise. For the rest of your life, you will need to make a conscious effort to get the right amount and type of exercise to maintain your overall health. That won't change. However, as your body changes with age, you may need to adjust your action plans and expectations to meet your overall health goals.

Biggest Loser contestants often gain back their weight due to the unrealistic methods used during the show. It works...for a short time. They burn more calories than they consume and they work out 8 hours a day. But in real life, no one can do that.

Make sure that you focus on permanent change by using sustainable, realistic, healthy exercise strategies and methods. If you can only get in 20 minutes of exercise a day, that's fine. Just make sure that you do the most effective exercise for the goals you want to achieve.

When it comes to food, if your budget is limited, be realistic about what you actually need in a healthy diet. Use sustainable, realistic healthy eating strategies and methods to reach your goals. Consider building meals around inexpensive healthy foods like beans, rice, leafy greens, etc. You may even want to grow some of the more expensive vegetables and herbs in containers or a square-foot-garden. Not only does this help reduce the food bill but it can give you additional food options that aren't normally available to you.

Be Honest With Yourself

When your jeans feel tighter, you might be tempted to make an excuse such as, "They shrank in the dryer." If those jeans have already been washed and dried 500 times, they did not shrink the last time you dried them. However, unless you collect the data/proof by weighing regularly and documenting the data, you won't know the truth. The truth is more likely that you're gaining weight because you didn't follow your healthy plan. It's ok to gain a little weight as long as you take steps to lose it again. Facts are facts, whether you want to admit the truth or not.

All of your goals should be measurable so you can assess what works, what doesn't work, and make needed changes. Once you allow yourself to accept a lame excuse, you will continue to make excuses, until you can't deny the cold, hard truth that shows in the mirror. By this time, it's usually made your situation much worse. Don't let denial, self-deception, or excuses creep in and derail your progress or success.

Common excuses and rationalizations:

- **Healthy food is too expensive.** This excuse is a lame attempt to continue eating unhealthy foods. Where there is a will, there is a way. Even if you're on a tight budget, you can eat healthy foods. Go to the library and get books about eating healthy on a budget. You may also want to print out free recipes and download free or low-cost cooking/recipe books in pdf format. Learn about making healthy substitutions to keep your grocery bill low.
- **My pants shrank in the dryer.** This can happen but not usually to pants that you've had for years. The best way to avoid making assumptions and rationalizations is to keep it real by weighing yourself. Most people shun scales but numbers don't lie. Weigh at least once a month, even on maintenance, when you're not having your cycle just to help you keep yourself honest, realistic, and moving forward.

- **I worked out so I can eat a treat.** This is often an attempt to cheat on your diet and rationalize the behavior so you don't feel guilty later. Many people, who experience permanent weight loss, don't need to exercise more and they don't use exercise as an excuse to eat unhealthy things, either. Yes, if you burn 200 extra calories, you can consume 200 more calories without gaining weight, but those calories should be healthy high-nutrient calories. Adding 200 calories from saturated fats will not help you stay healthy.
- **It's OK to indulge on weekends.** This is an attempt to rationalize poor health choices and go back to unhealthy habits. Indulging occasionally, such as on your birthday, a special holiday, or one day on vacation, is okay. It is not okay to indulge every weekend. Your goals and plan include reward times. Stick to those times and special days/events.
- **It's in my genes and I can't do anything about it.** Using this excuse is meant to take the "blame" or responsibility off of you. While genetics can play a role in your health by predisposing you to some illnesses and diseases, they are not the only determining factor. You are responsible for your choices and actions, for better or worse. You have the power to shift the balance towards a healthier life by adopting a variety of strategies and behaviors, that tend to take precedence over the genetic factors.
- **That TV doc said it's healthy.** Don't fall for the scams. That doc may not be a doctor and on top of that, the people on those commercials (they aren't shows) are being paid to say what the sponsor wants. There are people who will claim certain things are good for you when they're not. Doctors used to say that menthol cigarettes are good for you. When a new fad comes along, give it time to percolate before jumping on the bandwagon. TV is full of law firm advertisements regarding class action lawsuits based on deceptive products. Stick with the tried and true methods, as well as the long-term reputations of reliable experts.

When your outlook, determination, or motivation level begins to slip, start keeping a daily journal. This will help you avoid problems in the long run. Plus, when you write in your journal, you'll have a safe place to admit, acknowledge, and vent things that you don't want to say aloud or share with others.

Make Plan Adjustments

The key to staying on a healthy track is to stick to the plan you set for yourself. However, if your current plan isn't helping you meet your goal effectively, you need to make adjustments. For example, if you originally planned to include cycling as one of your exercise activities, but your old knee injury flares up, you may need to switch to another exercise that isn't hard on your knees. Adjust your plan for the long-term. If you want to try adding a certain nutrient into your daily diet, tweak your weekly and/or monthly plan to make sure you can sustain the plan for more than a few weeks or months.

Anytime you start to feel bored with your plan make adjustments that inspire and motivate you. Stick with the same goals, if possible. For example, give yourself a 30-day challenge to eat an apple a day or drink a gallon of water a day or something else if you're getting all the macronutrients that you need to stay healthy.

Understand the Long-Term Benefits

Sometimes it's hard to focus on the long-term benefits, because they aren't as noticeable...yet. However, you can see and feel some short-term benefits. For instance, you know you look better and feel better. At first, this seems amazing, but you will get used to that being your new norm, after a while. The long-term benefits aren't as obvious but they include things like better bloodwork numbers, improved cardiovascular function, lower risk factors for some diseases, etc.

- **Healthy Skin** – Healthy skin regenerates itself over time, has more elasticity, is more resilient, and resists damage more effectively. Together, the benefits can make you look and feel much younger.
- **Higher Metabolism** – As you age your metabolism naturally slows but with a healthy diet and exercise, you can keep your metabolism operating efficiently for a lifetime.
- **No-Brainer Healthy Habits** – The longer you stick to a healthy lifestyle the more it becomes second nature. As this happens, you may find that maintaining your health is easier than you ever imagined it could be.
- **Longer, Active Life** – Living longer can be a wonderful thing. However, the quality of the life you have is important. Overall health increases your level of activity and your joy, allowing you to experience life to its fullest. And, it's all due to your commitment to live a healthy lifestyle.

When you focus on these benefits and envision what your life can be in the future, it's easier to follow your health plan for long-term success. Another thing that can help is to remind yourself how far you have come by looking at the numbers when you started and your most current numbers.

Arm Yourself with the Right Tools

One way to stay on the health track is to arm yourself with the right tools. Even when you're a veteran of eating right and living healthy, having the right tools at your disposal can make a huge difference. Continue to collect helpful tools as you move through each stage of life to help you stick to your goals.

Currently, there is a wide variety of tools available to help you achieve your goals and maintain your healthy habits. Here are a few types of tools you may want to incorporate into your plan and add to the "needed equipment" section.

- **Auto Shipping & Paying** – Amazon.com offers auto shipping on some Prime merchandise that can be very helpful to your healthy endeavors such as putting any supplements you need on auto ship. When you know that they're coming regularly you will be more likely to stick to your regimen. If you like getting massages, join a message club like the one Massage Envy has. If you know you already paid for a message (at a discount too) you're going to be more likely to make it a habit in your life.

- **Scheduling** – If you really want to stick to goals, schedule everything into a calendar. You can use Google Calendar, on multiple devices, to schedule eating times, exercise times, as well as prep and travel times. Include everything you do in your calendar so it only takes a glance to see what you need to do and when you need to do it. The calendar will even help you find a good time to schedule a new event or activity.
- **Online Macronutrient Trackers** – You can get an app on your mobile device that allows you to track your diet, exercise, and even hydration. If you have a Fitbit, you can track everything using the app on your device. It's a lot like scheduling exercise into your calendar. If you can see things scheduled, you're more likely to stick to your goals. When you track your data, you're more likely to succeed. Make it easy on yourself and get the tools you need, based on your goals, plan, and preferences.
- **Exercise Equipment** – The truth is you only need the basics to exercise but some types of equipment can make sticking to your plan much easier. Tension / Resistance bands are among the things you may want to consider getting. You can take these wonderful pieces of equipment anywhere. This means you can exercise while waiting for your flight, sitting at your desk, or in the hotel room.
- **Fun Useful Accessories** – Adding elements of fun and style to your goals and activities can help motivate and encourage you. One way to accomplish this is to check out your favorite print-on-demand site, such as CafePress.com. Look for accessories or pieces of equipment with an image and/or sentiment that inspires or motivates you. For example, you may choose a water bottle, exercise gear, a calendar, or other items you use as part of your plan. Adding a little pizzazz to cool tools and equipment can definitely make your experience more fun and interesting.

Finding and using new tools can enhance your fun-factor as well as your efficiency and success rate. Keep your eyes open for tangible tools and equipment, as well as digital and online items. New items are developed frequently, especially when it comes to apps.

Try New Things

When your stamina and overall health increases, you can start getting more adventuresome. For example, if you always wanted to visit another country, now is the time to start saving for your trip. Set up an account specifically for the trip. Reward yourself by adding a certain amount of money each week that you meet your goal. The more goals you reach, the sooner you'll be packing your bags to celebrate.

Just as you set your health goals, you can do the same for other goals too. When you add life enhancement goals into the mix, you create opportunities to enjoy your newfound health. Your life enhancing goals act as a reward for your previous successes, as well as motivation for your new goals.

Bounce Back From Slip-Ups

Slips happen. No one is immune to this. When you have a history of living a healthy lifestyle, the impact usually isn't major. Everyone experiences a miss-step from time to time. Don't waste time beating yourself up about it. You have things to do that are more important. Patting yourself on the back for getting "this far" and taking steps to get back on track are two examples.

To get back on track quicker, accept that the slips will happen. Use them as learning opportunities. You may even want to challenge yourself to see how quickly you can refocus your efforts and get back on track. You can't do that effectively if you keep thinking about the slip or allow yourself to feel guilty about it. Move on. Concentrate on the present and future, rather than on your past mistakes. You can't change the past.

Let Go of Before/After Thinking

Some people are unable to reach and maintain their goals because their approach to making changes is very limited. They think in terms of "before and after," which is short-term thinking. An example might be, "To lose the weight, I'll exercise 6 hours every day, until I lose the weight. After I lose the weight, I can stop exercising." The problem is that there isn't a built-in strategy to keep the weight off. As the saying goes, "Nothing changes, if nothing really changes."

If you want long-term success, you must think and plan far beyond meeting your immediate goals. In short, you need to change everything you do in your life that contributes to your unhealthy state. That's why it's called changing your lifestyle. You have to replace old, unhealthy ideas and habits with healthy strategies and actions that you can continue to use successfully for a lifetime.

Change Your Perspective

When you started your healthy eating and exercising programs, you probably looked forward to reaching your ultimate end goal. That's great because you need it in order to set your milestone goals, which lead you to your ultimate goal. It's also important to focus on the process, as well as how you'll reach each goal. When you stop associating overall success with a particular number or end goal and focus on the process, you've found the key to permanent success.

When you focus on the process, you concentrate on healthy behaviors, such as eating a good breakfast and working out when scheduled. Instead of only doing it for the reward or the excitement, you start following the plan because it has become a habit. When the habits become a way of life or a lifestyle, you experience long-term or permanent success.

You can stay on the health track by creating healthy habits. Habits are the cornerstone of everyone's life. Forming healthy habits takes a lot of practice on your part. Set your intentions, check yourself often, and you will be successful.

Support Others

Up to this point, you have experienced things from a personal or participant's point of view. Along the way, you may have helped others by sharing what you were going

through. Sharing with and learning from others is a terrific way to stay on track with your own goals, regardless of where you are on the journey.

However, mastering the skills of maintaining a healthy life, gives you a unique opportunity to help others. Because of your advanced experiences, knowledge, and understanding of implementing healthy lifestyle changes, you see things from a slightly different perspective. You can see the big picture better than people who are just getting started. You have inside information that can truly help others change their lives for the better.

Even as you take steps to maintain your healthy lifestyle, consider helping others reach their goals. It's been said that if you really want to understand or learn the nuances of a concept, you should teach what you know to others. Not only can you inspire others and be a good role model but in the process, you also reinforce the healthy habits and strategies that help you in your own life. In short, when you help others, you also help yourself.