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## Building \_\_\_\_\_ support |

### With a Bit of Help From Family and Friends

Coaches aren't just for athletes and actors. Over the past twenty years there has been an increased awareness of the role that supportive relationships play in helping people achieve academic, professional, and personal goals and to cope with challenges.

True, people can go it alone when it comes to weight loss, but the road to success may be swifter if you have support. Judging from the number of visitors to online weight loss support groups, many dieters feel that support is essential. If you are a veteran dieter, you may be reluctant, even ashamed, to tell family and friends that you are dieting again, much less ask for their support.

"Don't make the mistake of letting yesterday use up too much of today" — Anonymous

Don't let old history derail your plans for a healthier future. Building support may be crucial to your weight loss success. Psychologists use the term "social support" for the emotional support we receive from friends and family for the choices we make and the challenges we undertake. People who feel supported report less stress, fewer illnesses, and a greater sense of success.

Although it is understandable that you may be reluctant to share your weight loss goals, trying to lose weight without sharing your plan may be a recipe for failure. Be a recruiter and take time to explain the benefits of losing weight for you to others. Encourage others to join your efforts to eat healthier and exercise regularly. As noted psychologist and lifestyle change expert Dr. Phil McGraw says, "You can't change what you won't acknowledge."

### tools for success

- Understand the need for support.
- Identify sources of support.
- Develop new support systems.
- Recognize your role in supporting the efforts of others.
- Identify and eliminate sabotage.

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## How Do You Stay on Course?

A dose of assertiveness is good armor. If you have a passive personality, you may find it difficult to set limits on the way others treat you or to ask for their support. You may feel people walk all over you. On the other hand, if you have an aggressive style that offends people, they may get angry and avoid you. Whether your personality is passive, aggressive, or somewhere in between, learning the principles of assertive behavior can help you get the support you need and want with a minimum of conflict.

Assertiveness involves expressing your feelings and beliefs in clear, honest, and respectful terms. Use "I" statements, such as, "I need your help keeping tempting foods out of the house," rather than "you" statements like, "You need to get your junk food out of here. It's sabotaging my diet." Note how the "you" statements sound confrontational and accusatory. Remember the Golden Rule: Treat others with the respect you want to be shown. Be open to negotiation and compromise.

## Tips for Getting Good Support

- State your intention to achieve a healthy weight. If people try to deter you, politely but firmly explain that it's important to you and your health to tackle this challenge.
- Tell others the types of support you need. For example: fewer sweets in the house, words of encouragement, or a walking partner.
- Set limits on any behaviors or situations that threaten to sabotage your weight loss efforts.
- Avoid "naysayers" who put down or otherwise undermine your efforts.

- Nip unavoidable negativity in the bud. If your working or living arrangements make it impossible to avoid a particular pessimist, set clear limits on your interactions and focus on the positive changes you are making.

### the **value** of **support**

People who feel supported report less stress, fewer illness, and a greater sense of success.

- Give constructive feedback. Remember, no one is a mind-reader. Supporting your weight loss efforts may be new territory for some of those closest to you. Sometimes well-intentioned "help" ends up being hurtful. If this occurs, calmly let others know what's helpful and what's not. Begin by stating what the person is doing right; then, politely ask them to change the unhelpful behavior.
- Recognize that others may have difficulty adjusting to the changes in your lifestyle. Overweight friends may fear losing their "eating buddy" or they may feel guilty or envious that they are not achieving similar goals. Your spouse or significant other may fear that you will become more attractive to others and abandon them. Given all the changes you are going through, try to be patient and supportive of those closest to you. Modeling supportive behavior can help them respond to you and your needs in a more caring fashion.
- Team up. Find a "buddy" who is also motivated to lose weight and lead a more physically active lifestyle. Positive change is contagious.

## Social Support Questionnaire

Researchers classify social support into different categories, such as Listening, Emotional, and Informational. This questionnaire is designed to help you decide how much of each type of support you need and identify those people who are likely to supply it. Your perception of the support you get may be as important as the actual support you receive!

Read the definition of each type of social support carefully before answering the questions. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. If no individual fulfills a particular type of support for you, leave the question blank.

**Listening Support** – People who are prepared to listen to your problems related to weight management without giving advice or making judgments and who might praise your efforts and successes; people with whom you can share the joys of success as well as the pain and frustration of challenges.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5
How much listening support do you need?						
How much listening support do you receive?						

Write down the initials of the person(s) you are most likely to look to for **listening support** (spouse, friend, expert, co-worker) and then rate the degree of support you get from each.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5

**Challenge Support** – People who motivate and encourage you to achieve your weight management goals and/or people who challenge you by questioning if you are really doing your best to achieve your goals and overcome obstacles.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5
How much challenge support do you need?						
How much challenge support do you receive?						

Write down the initials of the person(s) you are most likely to look to for **challenge support** (spouse, friend, expert, co-worker) and then rate the degree of support you get from each.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5

**Informational Support** – People who know as much or more about health and weight management as you do and whose advice and information you can trust.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5
How much informational support do you need?						
How much informational support do you receive?						

Write down the initials of the person(s) you are most likely to look to for **informational support** (spouse, friend, expert, co-worker) and then rate the degree of support you get from each.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5

**Emotional Support** – People who are willing to stand by you in a difficult situation even if they do not understand your viewpoint.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5
How much emotional support do you need?						
How much emotional support do you receive?						

Write down the initials of the person(s) you are most likely to look to for **emotional support** (spouse, friend, expert, co-worker) and then rate the degree of support you get from each.

	None 0	1	2	3	4	Very Much 5

## Support: Past and Future

### In The Past

Think about goals you have achieved in the past: getting through school, learning a skill, finding a job, adjusting to a loss or a major life change. Who supported you and in what ways?

Accomplishment	Support Person(s)	Type(s) of Support

Asking for support from others can be difficult. Perhaps you don't want to impose, or you may fear humiliation if others know you've tried and failed in the past. Asking for support feels less risky when you identify with the role of supporter and recall when you have been supportive to others.

Situation	Supported Person(s)	Type(s) of Support

How did you feel in the supportive role?

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### Picture Your Future

Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and picture yourself weighing less and being more active. Now imagine yourself making an entrance before each important person in your life as they view the "new" you for the first time. Allow yourself to clearly see the response that you envision each person would have to your success. What might each person say or do?

- Thrilled or pleased? ("Wow, that's great!")
- Envious or threatened? ("Are you certain you're not anorexic?")
- Cautious or discouraging? ("I hope you can keep all that weight off.")

Notice your emotional response to each person's reaction. Are you delighted, afraid, or apologetic? When you are ready, open your eyes and write your observations and feelings in your journal or on paper. Try practicing assertive responses to each situation.

## My Support System

Take a few minutes to think about the types of support you need, who you need support from, and how you will go about asking for it.

Then use this form to outline your support plan.

Family Members	Type(s) of support needed/offered	How will I ask for support?
Friends	Type(s) of support needed/offered	How will I ask for support?
Co-workers & acquaintances	Type(s) of support needed/offered	How will I ask for support?
Program support	Type(s) of support needed/offered	How will I ask for support?
Role models	Type(s) of support needed/offered	How will I ask for support?

- Seek support from OPTIFAST weight loss program staff. If you can't find the support you need among family and friends, remember that the OPTIFAST Program is designed to support participants during and after their weight loss program. Many clinics offer long term management support services such as group support meetings, special holiday weight management plans, and individual counseling. Talk with staff members about the best option for you.
- Find a weight loss role model to help you visualize your goal, inspire you to work around your obstacles, and share success tips.

Ask a role model about the weight loss road blocks they may have encountered and what techniques were the most helpful in managing those issues. If you don't know anyone

personally, your OPTIFAST Program staff will have successful participants you can talk to or whose stories you can read. Visit [www.OPTIFAST.com](http://www.OPTIFAST.com) for inspiring stories of successful weight managers.

- Strengthen your support system by adding a variety of positive influences to your environment. Build non-food related rewards into your schedule. Surround yourself with positive energy. Play your favorite music during drive times or while taking a daily walk. Read inspirational stories or buy a book of quotes. Keep flowers on your desk or in your family room. Spend time with upbeat, can-do people. Above all, stay positive.

## basics of support

Ask others to:

- Respect your efforts.
- Allow you to be responsible for your own actions.
- Applaud your successes.
- Overlook your lapses.
- Give you the opportunity to create your own solutions

## Building a Support Network

Different people in your life can offer different types of support. Family and friends can listen supportively, applaud your successes, and help you build a health-friendly environment. OPTIFAST clinic staff can give you accurate weight management information and use proven coaching techniques to help you overcome hurdles. Role models can help you see ahead on the road to success and can relate to your feelings because they have experienced the same situations you are encountering. Don't forget to include yourself in your support network! After all, you are captain of your weight loss team. Others can assist you, but you must chart the course toward success.

### Virtual Support

Your OPTIFAST Program, friends and family can be very supportive of your weight management goals.

However, there may be times when people aren't available to interact with you or you are unavailable to attend a group session. Another alternative for support may be through the internet. There are many sites and programs that offer the ability to be part of a discussion or ask questions of other weight managers. Studies show that people with support tend to lose weight and keep it off more effectively than those who go it alone. It's also a wonderful way to interact with other dieters with common goals and interests.

Look for sites that are set up to protect you with rules in place for users. The goal of the site should be to encourage a positive, safe and supportive environment for users. Message boards offer users encouragement, helpful suggestions and tips. This option may not be the best option for you to receive support and if the site you try doesn't meet your needs, ask other weight managers for suggestions.

## Separating Support from Sabotage

Sometimes sabotage is easy to recognize, such as when someone leaves your favorite foods within your reach, blames you and your weight loss efforts for making his/her life difficult, or watches you closely and criticizes every food and activity choice you make. In these instances, it's important to calmly but firmly explain how the particular behavior is hurting you, then ask the individual to be part of your weight loss solution, not one of your obstacles.

In other cases, sabotage can be subtle enough to seem like support. For example, the friend who insists that you take just one bite of your favorite cake or a little piece of dessert because you've "been so good." It may seem like they are acting out of genuine affection and a desire to reward your sacrifices. But this brand of caring is undermining your success, and you need to rechannel that form of nurturing. Start by saying, "I appreciate your efforts, but what I really need is for you to help me stick with my plan." Then suggest some non-food activities you can do together.

Repeated invitations to eat out "to celebrate your weight loss" or attempts to get you to stop losing weight may be thinly disguised attempts to pull you off course. People who engage in these types of sabotage may secretly feel that the more weight you lose, the less control they have over you. If a heart-to-heart talk can't help the person see the connection between his/her feelings and actions and if the relationship is a particularly close one, you may need professional counseling to resolve the issue.

Recognize the difference between support and sabotage with a message, "Please don't love me with food." You may want to try this approach if someone close to you has trouble separating the two behaviors. The OPTIFAST® Program facilitator can help you role-play enlisting your friends' and family's long-term cooperation.

### Letting Go

Not everyone is an appropriate match. You may have people your life who makes you feel bad about yourself, doesn't share any of your interests or values, or you just don't mesh well in your interactions. It's perfectly acceptable and may be healthy to put that relationship on the back burner or decide not to develop it in the first place. Even if you were at one time close, people change and grow in different directions. That doesn't mean there's something 'wrong' with either of you. It may be beneficial to remember not to count on them for support, if they're not able to give it to you. Only you know if the relationship is worth keeping or not.

## key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

1	
2	
3	

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*The serious solution for weight loss™*

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