

Pair Up to Pare Down: You Could be the Key to His Success

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True, you love your partner...but not necessarily *all* of him. Lately, you've noticed the pounds creeping on, and so has he—even though he's blaming the dry cleaners for shrinking his pants! Your man may be on the fast track to becoming overweight.

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Nearly two-thirds of Americans live with an overweight partner. If you want to help yours get healthier, start by looking at your own behavior. There's a thin line between wanting to help and coming off as nagging or critical—and you don't want to cross it.

Support and encouragement, rather than nagging, are key. Rovenia Brock, PhD, a leading expert on nutrition and fitness and best-selling author of *Dr. Ro's Ten Secrets to Livin' Healthy* (Bantam, 2008), lives with a "big guy," her husband, Murray. She knows from

His Preferred Weight-Loss Approach

According to the book *Weight Watchers She Loses, He Loses: The Truth about Men, Women, and Weight Loss* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), many men tend to have more of a delayed reaction when attempting weight loss as compared to women.

But, as the book's author, Karen Miller-Kovach, Chief Scientific Officer for Weight Watchers International, said, "once guys make the decision to lose weight, they commit themselves and are more likely than women to adhere strictly to a weight-loss plan."

Miller-Kovach's research has shown that

personal experience that “nagging and criticizing don’t work.”

What does work? We compiled 10 tips from industry experts that will help you help the one you love win the battle against extra pounds.

1. Be a role model.

Remember the recent study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that found that obesity is [socially contagious](#)? What these findings *didn't*

highlight is that it's just as possible for thinness to be contagious. The researchers from Harvard Medical School and University of California, San Diego, found that people are influenced by the behaviors of those around them, so if you watch your weight, your mate might, too. Other researchers from Duke and Yale Universities found that a woman's own healthy changes were often enough to influence her spouse to make his own.

men prefer weight-loss approaches that are less time-consuming and less factual than the options women research. “[Men] want to know the bottom line before they get started, yet when men commit themselves to losing weight, they tend to be more compliant and stick to the details of the approach more closely than women do.”

So, once your guy starts following a weight-loss plan, you could probably learn a thing or two about discipline from him.

2. Don't sabotage: be supportive.

If your guy is complaining about trimming down his nighttime snacks, don't bring back his unhealthy standbys in an effort to make him happy. Instead, tell him how great he looks, or, if he's hungry, suggest 94-percent fat-free popcorn or fruit to snack on. Paul Lessack, PhD, a Connecticut-based specialist in the psychology of weight loss and overeating, says that 80 percent of spouses of dieters sabotage with kindness, while 20 percent do it for evil reasons. Being supportive goes a long way in your loved one's struggle.

3. Try different preparations.

Don't forbid certain foods, instead, offer [healthier substitutes](#). If your guy loves his baked potato topped with sour cream, suggest non-fat or low-fat plain yogurt, which can have a similar taste. Greek-style yogurt is especially thick and creamy. Rather than sneaking it in, say something like, “We discussed good food substitutes in my (Weight Watchers) meeting, and this one gets everyone's vote!”

4. Ask action questions.

“Often, a simple question like, 'What can I do to help you be healthier?' will help,” says University of Alabama clinical psychologist Joshua Klapow, PhD. Asking questions helps you understand what he needs, not what you *think* he needs, he says. If you offer information about losing weight and exercising, it often is enough to get the ball rolling.

5. Catch him in the act.

If you notice behavior changes that indicate he's moving in the right direction, mention them. Maybe you observed him cutting down his beer consumption, or you saw him searching the Internet for health and weight-loss information. Michelle Weiner-Davis, founder of [divorce-busting.com](#) and best-selling author of *Getting Through to the Man You Love* (St. Martin's Press), says that praise goes a long way to help boost a person's self esteem and incentive to change.

6. Show him the love.

It's effective to let your partner know that you love and support him, notes Brock. One of the ways Jill V. of Long Beach, N.Y., helps her new husband, Neil, shed pounds is by offering to do things together. This not only includes time spent walking their dog and taking regular bike rides along the boardwalk, but also food shopping and preparing lunches for work. “It's fun to be together—and Neil's gotten to be a lot healthier,” she reports.

7. Dish out defined portions.

Lessack points out that since so many overeaters are sight-addicted; just seeing a huge plateful of food makes them struggle with their willpower. Putting a pre-measured portion on his plate will help increase the chances that he'll be satisfied when there's nothing left to tempt him.

8. Eat home-cooked meals.

You'll not only save money, you'll save calories, too. [Cooking together](#) can be a fun bonding experience; even better, it's easier to control portions and ingredients when you prepare the food yourself.

9. Make simple lifestyle changes.

"Nothing brings on success like the feeling of success," says Weiner-Davis. Start small, by walking 10 minutes a day, or cut out ice cream after dinner. This will "breed hope and help maintain desire to keep it going," Weiner-Davis says.

10. Hail the health benefits of weight loss.

Lessack says that it's more common today than it was 20 years ago for people to lose weight for health reasons. Jill and her husband Neil regularly discuss the health benefits associated with eating right. Rather than tell your guy not to eat something because he won't lose weight, "Remind him that you want him to be healthy so he can be active with the [family]," Lessack suggests.

About the Writer

Sheryl Kraft is a Connecticut-based freelance writer. Her work on health, fitness and wellness has appeared in JAMA, AARP, Bottom Line/Health, Bottom Line/Women's Health, Caring Today and assorted regional publications.

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