

Exercise: Steps to a Healthier Lifestyle

As Mike and Maria's story shows, taking care of your health is important to a happy marriage. But changing your habits around diet, exercise, work, and relaxation can be challenging. Mike and Maria's experience also shows that it *can* be done, however—especially if you attend to the emotional issues that may be keeping you from making self-care a top priority. Once those matters are addressed, you feel more motivated to follow through on basic advice for healthier living.

Research on behavior change shows that people who set goals, make a plan, and then track their progress have the most success. We recommend you consult with your personal physician on a regular basis, and especially if you're starting a new exercise program or food plan. If you're ready to make some positive changes, the following tips and questions may help:

Tips for Goal Setting

- *Make your goals specific.*
- *Make your goals measurable.*
- *Think about the pros and cons of making healthy changes.*
- *Break big goals into little ones.*
- *Ask for support.*
- *Anticipate obstacles and have a backup plan.*
- *Make a daily plan and track your progress.*
- *Reward yourself for short-term and long-term success.*

1. WHAT LONG-TERM GOAL WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACHIEVE? Think about it in a way that's *specific* and *measurable*. (Example: Don't say, "We need to talk more." Say, "Let's schedule a date every other Saturday morning. We'll use the time to go to the coffee shop and just talk. Then we'll go for a jog, or hang out together at the bookstore.")

2. MAKE A LIST OF PROS AND CONS OF ACHIEVING THIS GOAL.

Pros	Cons
Example: Regular dates will help us feel closer to each other.	Example: It will be expensive to hire a babysitter each week.

For each "pro" on your list, close your eyes and imagine achieving this benefit. For each "con," consider how you'd respond to a friend with the same concern.

3. WHAT SMALLER STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR LARGER GOAL? (Example: If your main goal is to "get in shape," smaller steps might be "Work out with weights for thirty minutes three times a week; run or swim for forty minutes two times a week.")

4. WHAT OBSTACLES CAN YOU FORESEE? HOW CAN YOU BREAK THROUGH OR GET AROUND THESE OBSTACLES? It pays to have a backup plan. (*Example:* If your goal is to exercise and you usually walk outdoors, think of what you'll do when the weather is just too lousy. Will you go to a gym? An indoor pool? Walk the mall?)

5. NAME THREE PEOPLE YOU CAN COUNT ON TO SUPPORT YOU IN THIS CHANGE.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Contact them and ask for their encouragement. Call them when you need a boost.

6. HOW WILL YOU REWARD YOURSELF? Make a list of things you enjoy that also support your changes. Think of rewards for both short-term and long-term achievements.

- Rewards for meeting my one-week goal (*examples:* massage, lunch at my favorite restaurant, a music CD, flowers for my desk):

- Rewards for meeting my one-year goal (*examples:* a trip to Mexico, season tickets, a week off to do whatever I want):

7. HOW WILL YOU KEEP TRACK OF HOW YOU'RE DOING EACH DAY?

Will you jot down notes on a calendar or in your Palm Pilot? How about a star on your calendar for each day you meet your goal? Would you find it helpful to keep a special journal related to this issue?

Whatever method you choose, try to

- Review your goals daily, remembering the reasons you want to make changes.
- Decide on your intentions for the day. (*Examples:* "I'll stay away from the doughnuts at the staff meeting," or "We'll spend at least fifteen minutes of uninterrupted time tonight talking about our day.")
- Review what happened the day before: Were you successful at meeting your goal? What worked? What didn't? What could you do differently today to have more success? Use this information to revise your goals as needed.