

Getting Support from Family and Friends

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Good Support Helps

When you have decided to lose weight it is important to have the support of family and friends to help you achieve your goals. There has been a lot of research on the value of having positive relationships and supports when losing weight and keeping it off.

Talk to your family and friends about how they can help you.

We all know that it is hard to change behaviour and sustain change over time. Researchers agree that losing weight is a major challenge. In order to lose weight a person often needs to combine several strategies. Having weight loss surgery is only the first step. You must also make permanent positive changes to your diet and eating habits as well as exercise to lose weight and maintain weight loss.

Most people need and want support to make these changes.

After surgery, there may be an emotional adjustment to your new life. You will need to deal with changes in your relationship with food and changes in your new body image.

- Sometimes you may expect more or different changes.
- Sometimes the changes can be overwhelming even though it is what you wanted.

You may find a change in your lifestyle such as exercising more and going out less to eat interferes with your previous relationships. You may feel your role and identity with your family and friends has changed and this can sometimes lead to anxiety and depression.

It is helpful to have family and friends listen to you and encourage you as you go through these changes. Seeking individual counselling might also be of benefit. You may want to join a support group, chat-line or on-line forum. It can be helpful to hear from others who are going through some of the same experiences as you. If you use the internet remember that all sites are not safe, reliable or give accurate information.

You may need to combine several strategies of support to help you lose weight and adjust to the changes in your life.



Monthly Support Group at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton

You are invited to attend a monthly support group at St. Joseph's Hospital after bariatric surgery. The Bariatric Support Group provides a chance to have peer to peer support from others who have had this type of surgery.

You will be able to talk to others about your challenges and experiences, share recipes and ideas and you may even find an exercise partner. You will be given more information about this group after surgery or feel free to ask about it.

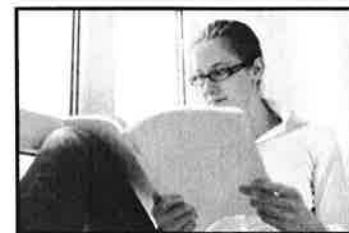


Ways Family and Friends Can Help

Here are some helpful hints for family and friends with examples of how to help you.

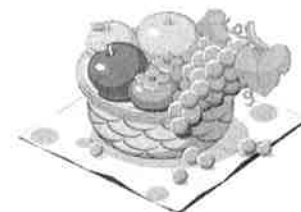
Ask your family members and friends to read this section.

- Learn about obesity, weight loss and bariatric surgery. As you learn about this subject you will discover that no one plans to become overweight. Obesity is a result of a combination of physical, chemical, psychological and emotional issues. Losing weight is a major challenge and requires support from everyone around.



- Avoid becoming a "food cop". What you may see as support, your family member or friend may see as harassment. Constant nagging, rolling your eyes or talking behind your family member's or friend's back is not healthy for the relationship. Offer support in positive ways.

- Serve your family member or friend healthy food. When you invite him/her to dinner offer healthy choices in small portions and plate the food at the counter instead of serving family style. Offer fresh fruit instead of cake or pie for dessert. Call in advance to discuss menu preferences so you can relax and enjoy each visit.



- Be patient. If you feel that your attitude is changing such as you are getting irritated or frustrated watching your family member or friend cheat...walk away, read a book or go out for a while.

Bariatric Surgery

- Avoid eating poor choice foods in front of your family member or friend. Some people will say, “I am not on a diet so why do I have to suffer”? You do not. However, it is hard to convince someone that you love him or her when you eat chocolate in front of him or her. Wait until you are not together. For example, treat yourself at work or school before you come home.
- Enjoy the benefits of being healthy yourself. Many people could use losing a few pounds or kilograms themselves. There are many benefits of eating healthy and being a healthy weight.
- Take part in activities and support others getting involved too. Help your family member or friend plan activities that he or she may like to do or want to try such as kite flying, golfing, dog walking and swimming. Help him or her build a routine with other friends and family. For example walk with you on Mondays, swim with another friend on Tuesdays, bike on Wednesdays with neighbours, walk on Thursdays with you etc.
- Avoid sabotaging your family member’s or friend’s plans. Do not cook or serve unhealthy, high calorie foods. Change traditions to support his or her weight loss and maintenance goals. For example, on Fridays, Jon and Ali had date night. To show his continued love for Ali, Jon brought her favourite chocolates home. When Ali expressed her desire to lose weight, Jon was upset as his tradition would be broken.



Ali asked Jon to bring a flower or fresh fruit instead but Jon resisted and continued to bring chocolates. Ali tried hard to not eat the chocolates but having them there each week was tough.



You have probably heard people say things like “It is a birthday. Everyone has to have some cake” or “I made this especially for you”. Change the way you think and respect your family member’s or friend’s plans.

- Talk about what type of support your friend or family member wants and how much you can offer. Here is an example. Sharyl asked her friend Jenna to support her during her weight loss plan. Sharyl gave Jenna a copy of the book she was following and asked her to read it. Sharyl also asked that Jenna e-mail her once a week to encourage her and ask her how her plan was going. She did not want Jenna to check up on her by asking what she ate each day or how much exercise she had done. She felt that was asking too much and not Jenna's responsibility.

Jenna agreed to Sharyl's requests and read the book and sent emails and called Sharyl regularly. Jenna also randomly sent cards of encouragement and gave Sharyl interesting healthy recipes found in magazines and articles on various types of exercises such as yoga and Tai Chi from newspapers.

Sharyl appreciated the support and said that it was up to her to stay on track. She joined a fitness program to get support from trainers and friends she met there. When Jenna and Sharyl met once in a while, they walked and talked instead of meeting in a café.

- Avoid being the only support person. This can be hard to take on and keep your relationship going. Encourage your family member or friend to find other supports as well.
- Continue to communicate. Be clear, open and honest about how you feel. Every so often, take some time to evaluate how things are going. Talk to your family member or friend and ask how you are doing supporting him or her in these weight loss and healthy lifestyle plans. Relationships change over time and yours will too. Celebrate together as good relationships are worth keeping.

