



BEYOND BELIEF NETWORK

Beyond Belief Network Guides: Living Healthily Through Team Support

Living a healthier lifestyle is a goal that many individuals often pledge to accomplish, but struggle to follow through. However, team support can make a lifestyle change not only easier, but also more enjoyable. You can use this guide for group support ideas and to encourage participants within and outside of your team.

Individual Healthy Living Goals

Different people may have different goals for their health: increasing their activity levels, improving their nutrition, sleeping better, preventing or treating chronic diseases, losing weight, gaining weight, rehabilitating after an illness or injury, stopping smoking/drinking, or changing their body composition (losing fat while gaining muscle). Ensure that your group is prepared to accommodate different individual goals.

An active lifestyle is one of the best medicines for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease, and has the added benefits of improving energy, mobility, bone and muscle strength, and sleep. A diet rich in variety and nutrients, with sensible portion sizes, is also a great way to boost health and energy while helping to achieve body recomposition for those seeking it.

Any healthy lifestyle change is best achieved through consistency, and learning to love and embrace the new way of living. A change that causes misery is not going to last very long, so your group's goal will be to support its members in making achievable and consistent changes that they enjoy.

Tips to Get Started

1. Decide on your aims. Will you be holding this group primarily as a way to improve the lives of your community members, or would you like to use it as a fundraising opportunity too? If it's the latter, consider charging an entry fee for group members, and donating the proceeds to charity. This is also a good way to increase people's investment in the group: if they've paid to be part of it, they're more likely to stick it out.

2. Gather your group. Spread the word that your team will be starting a healthy living support group. Create a place for people to sign up for the group. Provide a list of suggested healthy-living goals, and allow people to indicate which goals (including goals they write on their own) are most important to them. Set a date for a first meeting.

3. Open the door. If you decide to make this event open to members of your community, promotion will help draw participants. Use social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Meetup as an advertising tool. Post flyers at your local gym, community center, work, or other public place. Ask members to recruit people via word-of-mouth. Don't be afraid to be creative with your promotion.

4. Assign research volunteers. You want your group to be as evidence-based as possible, which means doing your research. Assign a volunteer to oversee research and planning for each of the goals. For instance, you could have one volunteer responsible for researching nutrition, another volunteer looking into exercise for beginners (suitable for retired people, those who haven't exercised in a long time, or those in rehabilitation), and another for more advanced fitness. Consult experts in your area and online. [Lifehacker](#) has an excellent, evidence-based series on all facets of healthy living. [Brazil's dietary guidelines](#) have been widely celebrated by doctors and food politics experts.

5. Set tangible goals. For each healthy living change, it's important to set an achievable and tangible goal within a certain timeframe. Examples of these goals could be working up to 10,000 steps a day within a month, doing 30 minutes of physical activity per day for three months, or eating 7 helpings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day for four weeks. Allow individuals to tailor their goals, and then commit to the goals that have been set down.

6. Community support. The point of this group is to support everyone's health journey, so have regular support meetings! A weekly or monthly healthy potluck with a report-back on how the goal-chasing has gone is an ideal way to hold people accountable to their goals in a supportive (and healthy) setting. You could also sign up for charity events such as walk-a-thons, 5K, or 10K race, have a group consultation with a personal trainer or registered dietician, attend farmers' markets together, or attend health lectures or programs as a group.

7. Rewards. Offer prizes for people who have adhered closely to their goals. Keep with the spirit of your event and make them health-oriented. This can include giving away items of exercise gear, a gift certificate to a sporting goods store, a trip to a health spa, or a membership at a local fitness center. You could use some of the entrance fees to pay for the prizes, contact local businesses for donations, or collect donations from team members.

8. Don't be taken in. The health industry is awash with products that claim to help consumers live healthier, skinnier lives. Healthy living may not be easy for people who are used to very different habits, but it is not overly complicated. Anything that tries to complicate it by setting overly strict rules (that are doomed to fail), or that makes money out of the process, should be viewed with skepticism. Obviously there are legitimate health-related business, like gyms and dieticians, but there are many products that should be taken with a pinch of salt. Do your research and avoid quick fixes.

Online Resources

Make use of the wide range of online resources for your team. This includes searching for reputable, reliable sources of information, and also the wide range of websites and social networks designed to track health goals and offer community support:

1. <http://www.fitocracy.com/knowledge/>
2. <http://www.myfitnesspal.com/>
3. <http://www.mapmyfitness.com/>
4. <http://www.sparkpeople.com/>
5. <http://www.oobafit.com/>

Questions or Concerns?

If you need help with planning your event or have additional questions, the best way to contact Beyond Belief Network is to use the contact webform, which enables us to track the resolution of your question: foundationbeyondbelief.org/contact-bbn. You can also email us at bbn@foundationbeyondbelief.org.