

Healthy Challenge Rules

**RULE 1: Cut out the crap.**

So the healthy challenge itself works on a simple point system. There are 5 goals to follow every day, with a couple of extras the facilitators have thrown in for good measure. The first two involve No Soda and No Junk. This means even diet soda is off limits (the stuff they have to add in there to make it diet is just as bad for you anyway). Junk includes anything with added unnatural sugar, like desserts or candy, as well as "junk food" such as chips, french fries, chocolate chip granola bars...you get the picture. Several of the participants have come up with their own healthy version of recipes that were completely acceptable, such as no-bake cookies sweetened with honey or popsicles made with coconut milk and fresh fruit. Outside of cheat days, which you are allowed once a week, everything luscious is off limits. This is especially hard when trying to get through parties or special occasions when you really, really want to eat that piece of birthday cake or baby shower cookie. A little tip I discovered that helps alleviate that insufferable sense of deprivation is to take some with you anyway and pop it into the freezer for cheat day. You'd be surprised at how much harder it is to say, "I can't have this," than it is to say, "I can't have this right now." You can choose other items you'd like to avoid, such as gluten, potatoes, or red meat (like I tried to do), but that's the great part of the challenge. It's simple enough for anyone to follow, and customizable to you!

**RULE 2: Learn to love veggies.**

Next on the healthy challenge list: a combination of 5 fruits and vegetables every day. This isn't hard at all if you just know how to do it. "It'd be, like, 8 o'clock at night and I'd suddenly remember I hadn't had enough vegetables and I'd have to go open up a can of peas..." explained a friend of mine who'd joined the challenge with us. Yeah, sorry D., that's not how it's done. The trick is to substitute, not supplement. Cut out those pizzas and potato chips and replace them with fruit and veggie packed goodness. Just because it's healthy doesn't mean it has to be torture. You just need a tasty plan.

*Step 1: Have fruit with breakfast.*

Honestly, as much as I LOVE to cook, breakfast just isn't my thing. At least, you know, not during breakfast hours. I'm all for bacon, eggs, hash browns, blueberry pecan pancakes, biscuits and chocolate gravy. Just not at 8 am. I have entirely too much on my plate every morning to spend 2 hours cooking and then cleaning up. What I can handle, therefore, is a protein shake. This has been wonderfully successful at our house. Traditionally, most people aren't used to big breakfasts anyway, nor do they have the time. This way you get something relatively healthy in your belly without feeling the need to graze the vending machine or donut box in the break room. Just make sure you keep in mind the amount of sugar that's going into your shake. Read the labels on whatever protein powder you use. Products like Nectar or V Core have as little as 2 grams of sugar. Don't be afraid to throw in some extras, like Ovaltine or Vitamin C powder. Frozen fruit makes it thicker, and if you use refrigerated coconut milk (my favorite) you may need a spoon!

*Step 2: Have a salad for lunch. Every day.*

Seriously, it's not as bad as it sounds. I've actually grown to quite enjoy my daily salads. The trick is to think outside the salad box, past the traditional chef or caesar. My favorite is the Black Bean Mango Chipotle Chicken. I have about four I rotate through during the week, and all of the salads have premium lettuce, fruit, nuts or beans (for added carbs and protein and to keep you full longer), cheese, grilled chicken, and are topped with a vinaigrette dressing. If you really wanted to branch out, you could stuff pitas or wraps with the same ingredients. The key is just to pack as many of those fruits and veggies in as possible.

*Step 3: Have a lean protein and at least two veggies with dinner.*

This is where you can really start to have fun and get creative. From Chicken Eggplant Parmesan to Apple Pecan Porkchops with Butternut Squash, the key is to make sure you have a lean meat, at least two vegetables, and a healthy grain. My favorite weeknight meal is Chicken Fajitas, with sautéed peppers, fresh pico de gallo and homemade guacamole. Trust me, as the healthy challenge weeks go by, you'll enjoy each one of these meals even more and eventually a meal just won't feel like a meal without plenty of vegetables.

*Step 4: Always have healthy snacks on hand.*

Having a protein shake every morning inevitably means I'm hungry by 9am. That's ok, it's just more of an opportunity to get more of those fruits and veggies in! The key is to follow the PRO rule. PROtein and PROduce. Some of my favorites include cottage cheese and pineapple, bananas and peanut butter, cucumbers and hummus, apples and almonds, fruit smoothies, Greek yogurt and raspberries, strawberries and cheddar, and cucumbers and tuna salad. The important part is to always have healthy snacks handy, whether in your own kitchen or in your desk at work (I keep nuts and dried fruit in my bag). Eventually you're going to get hungry. Having something healthy to reach for just makes it all that much easier.

**RULE 3: Drink A LOT of water. (I mean, like, a TON.)**

Next on our list is a minimum of 80 oz. of water per day (that's the traditional 64 plus extra because we'll be exercising). To give you a bit of an idea about exactly how much water that is, it's 2 liters PLUS 2 cups. Every morning I fill up a 16 oz cup and a 64 oz jug. I use the jug to continue to fill up the cup throughout the day, until it's completely empty. It's a lot of water--trust me, I know--but eventually you will get used to sucking on a cup of water all day long (add flavored drink enhancers if you have a hard time getting through it). You will also get used to going to the bathroom every hour or so. All of this sounds like a huge hassle, but the benefits of staying hydrated are phenomenal! Not only are you flushing toxins out of your body, you will find yourself more energized, and your skin will literally begin to glow! Just make sure you find some way to keep up with how much you're getting, whether filling bottles or jugs, and stick to that 80 oz. You'll be glad you did!

**RULE 4: Move.**

Next to the fruits and veggies, this is probably one of the most important parts of the entire challenge. You can "diet" and deprive yourself of all those sugary goodies all day long, but you're never going to have the level of success you could--or feel as good as you could--without adding in an increased level of activity. What you do is totally up to you and depends entirely on your body and what you and your schedule and situation can handle. For me, it's walking every day. I've tried everything from Tae Bo to swimming to jogging to Pilates. Walking at a brisk pace of 3-3.5 mph for an hour each morning gives me time to myself to think, gets me some sunshine and fresh air, and gets my blood flowing. Just find what works for you and stick to it.

**RULE 5: Get accountable.**

I'll be honest, I had started "dieting" as early as January. Unfortunately I was nowhere near as successful as I was in the first few months of the year as I have been in the last 10 weeks or so that I've been participating in the healthy challenge. What was the biggest difference? Accountability! Having to check off a checklist everyday, calculate points, and then report them to people I am in direct competition with made a huge difference in how well I stuck to my diet and exercise plan. In the end the constant drive of knowing I was going to have to publicly report my successes (or failures) was enough to keep me on track. You don't necessarily have to get together 40 of your closest friends and pay into a pot the way that we did (whoever had the most points at the end won the pot), but at the very least, get yourself a partner or start a Facebook group page to report your points to every week.

Using the checklist as a guide for your daily activities, each checkbox counts as one point (with every 30 minutes of exercise counting as one checkbox). There's even a section to add one area you want to work on daily that's not listed. The way we did it was to have a max amount of points each week (the above chart would equal 49 points, with all points "free" on cheat day) and then get extra points based on the total percentage of weight loss. FitWatch was the site we used to calculate the percentage of weight lost each week. There are other items that we included in our challenge, like adding an extra challenge point each week ranging from taking a multivitamin to flossing. Customize your challenge to meet your needs, but the basic outline and simple steps above will definitely get you started on the right track!

Who I’m accountable to: ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Start date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Initial weigh-in: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Weekly weigh-in day: ­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

End date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Final weigh-in: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total percentage lost: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Good luck. You’ll do awesome.

Cause You Rock!