**Benefits of enlisting a health coach**

Many people have a desire to improve their health and wellness but aren’t quite sure how. If you want to create a wellness plan tailored to your personal goals, hiring a health coach can be an excellent way to begin.

Health coaches possess knowledge and experience in topics ranging from nutrition to exercise to mood regulation. Rather than simply telling people what to do, they collaborate with their clients and provide support and accountability.

One of the things your health coach will want to talk about are your goals. One approach is helping clients identifying their strengths and challenges. For example, someone might be dedicated to exercising but their lack of sleep prevents them from maximizing their workouts. A coach can provide tips for improving restful sleep.

Another popular strategy is the SMART format, which stands for “specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound” goals. This helps individuals avoid vagueness to form an effective plan. When a person says, “I want to exercise more,” that lacks specificity. What does “more” mean? Is it 30 minutes a day? If so, can you realistically achieve that goal—and in the timeframe you want to? Same for weight loss. Stating, “I want to lose weight” needs more definitive explanation.

It’s helpful to put goals in writing and keep track of the good days and the bad. Then, people understand why they may have fallen short of a goal. Or, best case scenario, exceeded expectations.

When you can say you accomplished something, I mean, that's an amazing feeling — no matter how small or big the goal is, right? You have that internal feeling of joy. So, it's a really great way to also help you stay on track and remind yourself what your goals are.

The following simple tactics can be used on a daily basis to improve overall health:

• Move your body, no matter how “minimal” it seems (e.g. parking farther from the door, walking to the mailbox). Research shows that adding just 10 minutes of walking a day has positive health benefits. Wearable devices and smartphones have options where you can track your steps. This often serves as motivation for hitting a daily benchmark or beating the previous day’s step count.

• Eliminate added sugars as much as you can, as they cause inflammation and weight gain among other things. The American Heart Association states too much added sugar is harmful and can put people at risk for diseases like cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. The nutrition facts panel on packaged foods now specifically shows how much added sugar is in a product. Many people are surprised to learn that foods like peanut butter and beans actually have added sugar. But many times, you can find brands that avoid this practice.

• Take steps to ensure proper sleep, every night. Sleep is so important for physical and mental well-being. It’s recommended to turn off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bed. Keep your room dark and cool. Some people benefit from sleep stories or calming sounds (ocean waves, raindrops). Also, try to go to bed at about the same time each night—and avoid “catching up” on sleep on the weekend.

• Connect (or reconnect) with others. Over the past three years, it’s been tough to maintain some relationships due to the isolation the pandemic forced upon us. Human interaction is really important for mental and emotional health. You can even combine other healthy habits like walking with these interactions. Invite a friend, neighbor, or colleague to go for a walk. Maybe you join a healthy cooking class. There are many opportunities to be social and healthy at the same time.

The National Board Certified Health & Wellness Coach provides an online directory for individuals looking for a coach. You can also call me at 760-499-3825 or visit [www.rrh.org](http://www.rrh.org/) to find more information. This is definitely an area I'm passionate about, and I have found that even small changes can make huge impacts!

 *Tera Moorehead is the Director of Community Outreach at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital. With dual master’s degrees in nutrition and education, as well as a national board certified health and wellness coach, Tera shares her passion for health and wellness through various programs offered free to the community through RRH. You can contact her at 760-499-3825.*