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Buddy Up for Better Weight Loss Results

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Whether you're figuring out a complex problem or embarking on a weight loss program, getting the right support is key to success. Indeed, studies show that working out with a partner not only promotes healthy competition so we work harder (and thus burn more calories) but it reduces stress levels to boot.

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Here are 3 strategies for finding the support you need to promote weight loss success.

1. Join a commercial weight loss plan. "Teachers and school administrators are accustomed to working in structured, highly scheduled environments," says Milton Stokes, M.P.H., R.D., Connecticut-based dietitian and co-author of *Flat Belly for Men*. "So they might naturally follow structured patterns in other facets of their lives, including eating and exercise." Plus, programs like Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers offer participants around-the-clock support through virtual networks, telephone support and personalized counseling. And it works. According to a recent study of more than 400 overweight and obese women published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, participating in the Jenny Craig program resulted in an average weight loss of 10% after 1 year and weight maintenance of nearly 8% at the 2-year mark. Researchers attribute the high success rates to Jenny Craig's weekly one-on-one consultations and personalized nutrition and activity plans. Now that's a buddy of the highest order!

2. Buddy up. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania compared solo participants in a weight loss program to those who joined with a few friends and found that those who used the buddy system were more likely to stick with the program (95% vs. 76%) and maintain their loss (66% vs. 24%) than those who tried to go it alone. Even just recruiting a colleague to walk the black top at lunch will suffice. Better yet, consider launching a competition among teachers and staff to foster camaraderie among teammates and add a layer of accountability to your plan. "Group weight loss challenges are a great source of motivation," says Jim White, R.D., spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association and personal trainer based in Virginia Beach. "They also provide an opportunity for teachers to vent to one another, release frustrations and share tips and motivational stories to promote success." A bonus: seeing your team members succeed may inspire you to work harder.

3. Partner with a gym. Trying to lose weight without an exercise component eventually backfires, explains Stokes. Don't worry. You don't have to spend an hour in the gym everyday to get results. But you do have to stick to a plan. According to White, when it comes to participating in an exercise plan, there's a 60% dropout rate within 6 months. By partnering up with a trainer, or just another gym member, you'll increase your odds of success. Gyms like Snap Fitness, for example, offer personal training for interested members, as well as free instruction and workout plans. "Hiring a personal trainer for 4 to 6 sessions jumpstarts the exercise process and helps people exercise safely so they avoid injury-related setbacks and frustrations. It also maximizes time spent in the gym," says Stokes. Plus, if you're paying a personal trainer, you're less likely to blow off your workouts. Can't afford one-on-one support? Most gyms have a system in place to connect people who are interested in finding a partner for workouts. White's advice: "Look for someone who is a little more advanced than you. You'll be more likely to work at a higher level of intensity."

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