



# Managing Others: Navigating Relationships During Your Health Journey

Starting a health and fitness journey is challenging enough without having to navigate unsupportive relationships. Whether it's active sabotage or subtle undermining, the people around you can significantly impact your success. This booklet will help you understand why this happens and provide practical strategies to protect your goals whilst maintaining important relationships.

# Understanding the "Crab in a Bucket" Theory

The "crab in a bucket" phenomenon describes a troubling but common pattern: when you place multiple crabs in a bucket, any crab trying to climb out will be pulled back down by the others. Rather than escaping together, they prevent each other from succeeding.

This mirrors what happens in human relationships. When you start making positive changes, some people in your life may consciously or unconsciously try to pull you back to where you were. This isn't necessarily because they're bad people—often, it stems from their own insecurities, fear of change, or discomfort with the shifting dynamic in your relationship.



# Why People Pull Others Down

## Fear of being left behind

Your transformation may trigger anxiety that you'll outgrow the relationship or that they'll lose you as you change.

## Mirroring their own failures

Your success may highlight their own perceived shortcomings or abandoned goals, creating uncomfortable feelings they'd rather avoid.

## Disruption of established patterns

Relationships develop comfortable routines. Your new habits may require them to adapt, which can feel threatening or inconvenient.

## Loss of a companion in unhealthy behaviours

If your relationship was built around shared unhealthy habits (like regular takeaways or drinking), they may feel judged or alone when you change.

## Simple selfishness

Sometimes people prioritise their immediate wants (having you available, sharing meals they prefer) over your long-term wellbeing.

# Recognising Sabotage and Undermining

## Active Sabotage

- Ordering takeaways or bringing home treats when they know you're trying to eat healthily
- Creating scheduling conflicts that prevent workouts or meal prep
- Refusing to help with childcare or responsibilities that would give you time to exercise
- Pressuring you to skip workouts or break your nutrition plan
- Making plans without consulting you that interfere with your routine

## Subtle Undermining

- Making negative comments about your appearance or progress ("You're getting too thin," "You're obsessed")
- Dismissing your efforts as a phase or fad
- Questioning your need to change or suggesting you were fine before
- Eye-rolling, sighing, or showing irritation when you discuss your goals
- Comparing you unfavourably to others or to your former self
- Minimising the time and effort required for your goals

# Strategies for Managing Unsupportive People

## 1. Have an Honest Conversation

Choose a calm moment when you're both relaxed. Explain why your health goals matter to you and how their behaviour affects you. Use "I" statements to avoid sounding accusatory.

**Example:** "I feel discouraged when takeaway is ordered on nights I've meal-prepped. My health goals are really important to me, and I need your support. Can we talk about how to make this work for both of us?"

## 2. Set Clear Boundaries

Be specific about what you need and what behaviours you won't tolerate. Boundaries aren't about controlling others—they're about protecting your own wellbeing and goals.

### Examples:

- "I'll be working out Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 6am. I need you to handle the morning routine on those days."
- "Please don't offer me food that's not part of my plan. If you want to eat something different, that's fine, but I'd appreciate not being pressured to join."
- "Comments about my body or eating habits aren't helpful. I'd like us to avoid that topic."

# More Strategies for Success

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## Lead by Example, Not Preaching

Nothing triggers defensiveness faster than unsolicited advice or appearing judgemental. Focus on your own journey without critiquing others' choices. Your results will speak for themselves.

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## Find Your Tribe

Seek support from people who understand and encourage your goals. This might be:

- Workout buddies or fitness communities
- Online support groups
- Other clients in similar situations
- Friends who share your health values

Having external support reduces your dependence on validation from unsupportive people in your life.

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## Make It Easy for Them

Sometimes people aren't actively sabotaging—they're just finding your changes inconvenient. Where possible, find solutions that work for everyone:

- Find healthier alternatives that everyone enjoys—healthy doesn't have to mean boring or bland
- Experiment with nutritious versions of family favourites that satisfy everyone
- Schedule workouts at times that don't require help
- Don't make your health goals the centre of every conversation
- Show that eating well can be delicious and include foods the whole household loves

# Maintaining Your Boundaries

## 6. Reframe the Relationship

If someone continues to undermine you despite your efforts, you may need to reconsider how much you share with them or how much time you spend together. This doesn't mean ending relationships, but rather:

- Limiting discussions about your health journey with them
- Spending time together in contexts that don't challenge your goals
- Accepting that they may not be the support person you need in this area

## 7. Stay Firm but Compassionate

Understanding why someone is unsupportive doesn't mean you have to tolerate sabotage. You can be empathetic to their feelings whilst still protecting your boundaries.

**Example:** "I understand this change is hard for you too, but my health isn't negotiable. I'm happy to discuss how we can both feel good about this, but I need you to stop undermining my efforts."

## 8. Address Specific Concerns

Sometimes undermining comes from genuine concern (even if misguided). If someone worries you're overdoing it or developing unhealthy patterns, address their specific concerns directly and, if appropriate, reassure them about your approach.

# When the Unsupportive Person Is a Partner

Romantic relationships add complexity because you've chosen to build a life together. Here are additional considerations:

## Make Them Part of the Solution

Instead of framing your goals as something they need to accommodate, invite collaboration:

- "What can we do together that would be active and fun?"
- "Can we try new healthy recipes together at weekends?"
- "How can we balance my workout time with quality time together?"

## Address Deeper Issues

Persistent sabotage from a partner may signal relationship issues beyond your health goals—fear of abandonment, control issues, or resentment. Consider couples counselling if patterns persist.

## Create Win-Win Solutions

Find ways your health journey can benefit both of you:

- Healthier home environment for everyone
- More energy for quality time together
- Improved mood and confidence
- Modelling positive behaviour for children

# Special Considerations and Practical Tips

## Special Considerations: Children and Dependents

When the unsupportive person is a child (especially teenagers), remember:

- Changes to family routines can be genuinely difficult for kids
  - They may feel like they're losing time with you or familiar comforts
  - Explain your goals in age-appropriate ways
  - Involve them where possible (family walks, cooking together)
  - Maintain special one-on-one time that isn't disrupted by your health routine
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## Practical Tips for Staying on Track

1. **Plan ahead:** Anticipate situations where you might face pressure and have strategies ready
2. **Stay consistent:** The more automatic your healthy habits become, the less others can derail them
3. **Document your progress:** When undermining makes you doubt yourself, look back at how far you've come
4. **Remember your why:** Connect to the deeper reasons behind your goals—reasons that matter more than temporary discomfort in relationships
5. **Celebrate privately if needed:** If others won't celebrate your wins, celebrate them yourself or with your supportive community

# Final Thoughts



You deserve support in your health journey, but you may not always get it from the people you expect. This doesn't mean you're selfish, obsessed, or wrong—it means you're growing, and not everyone knows how to grow alongside you.

Be patient with others where you can, firm with your boundaries where you must, and always remember that investing in your health is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and, ultimately, for all your relationships. A healthier, happier you is better for everyone—even if they can't see it yet.

Your health goals are valid.  
Your boundaries are valid.  
Your need for support is valid.  
Keep climbing out of that  
bucket.

