

Sweat Equity

WITH THESE NEW INCENTIVES, YOUR WEIGHT-LOSS EFFORTS MAY FINALLY PAY OFF.



Dropping the ball again instead of dropping actual weight? Well, you may need a new motivator. According to two recent studies—one from the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and the other from the Mayo Clinic—you may be more likely to lose weight when a financial incentive is on the line.

One way to cash in on the concept is by enrolling in a wager-for-weight loss website like the sponsor-supported Healthy Wage (healthywage.com). For a \$75 per person registration fee for group challenges, teams of five compete for a \$10,000 reward if they earn the highest weight loss percentage. And for roughly \$150 in individual challenges, users can earn double their wager simply by losing 10 percent of their body weight.

Need another incentive? Well there's an app for that. Gym Pact (gym-pact.com) is one such app (available for Android and iPhone) with which you can win cash for keeping your commitment to the gym. Participants set a dollar amount they'd wish to be automatically withdrawn from their account if they don't "check in" (via the phone's GPS) according to the gym schedule they've established. Each week, the pot is divided among all those who meet their goal. Depending on the size of the pot and the number of days you exercise, users can take home roughly \$10 a month.

Similarly, even personal trainers are seeing big successes among their clients by offering their own financial incentives. Celebrity trainer Kenya Crooks (kenyacrooks.net), who runs several workout groups throughout the Southeast, started rewarding his clients with \$2,000 prizes, professional photo shoots, Christian Louboutin shoes and even vacations for winners of weight-loss challenges and other milestones. He likens these incentives to a dangling carrot, in which the incentives provide not only extra motivation for the more immediate fitness goal but also a distraction from the arduous, lifelong race that is wellness.

"They've tried so many things [and failed]," he says, "but you put that carrot out there, it gives them the extra drive. And when it works, they become a believer." —Nina Hemphill Reeder



Molding the Mind

FOLLOW THESE TIPS TO BOOST YOUR BRAINPOWER.

Since it's our Empowerment issue, I wanted to turn this month's focus on brainpower. After all, your brain health is just as important as your physical health when it comes to your overall well-being. Your brain is the control tower responsible for thinking, feeling, communicating, regulating body functions and so much more. It's important enough for you to want it to be in its best shape all the time. So is there a way to make your brain work better?

Lately, readers have asked about the proliferation of new websites and tools devoted to "training" our brains almost like we train our bodies. But do they work? The short answer is that, from a strictly scientific perspective, we don't know enough yet about whether these "cognitive training" activities actually make us smarter, which ones are most effective and under what conditions they work.

However, there are a few things that can promote better brain health, therefore ensuring better brain functions. So I offer these tips to boost your brainpower:

1. Your brain is part of your body; it works best when you work best. Make sure you exercise regularly, eat sensibly and don't forget to rest your brain with sleep.
2. Stress really gets in the way by distracting us with worries, causing the release of hormones that result in tension and discomfort and producing fatigue. So don't underestimate the benefits of regular meditation and relaxation to "clear your head."
3. Lastly, make sure you take time to read. That's a time-honored way to keep your brain engaged—and it's free!

As for brain training: if it helps your concentration and makes you feel more alert, then why not experiment!

Got a question or observation? Send them to me at drreed@tucksonhealthconnections.com.



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