

# The FoodCoachMe Guide to Getting Back on Track *when old habits creep back in after Bariatric Surgery*

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The unthinkable has happened. You've gained weight after weight-loss surgery.

The very thing you thought you would never do. The thing you swore to never let happen to you.

Those bad habits you kicked to the curb for good and vowed to a life of junk food celibacy, except here you are. You've fallen off. Those habits are creeping back. Those desserts you swore off. They're back. The fast food you judged and said "how disgusting!" It's back too. Because life got crazy. And because life is hard. And busy. And messy. And...because it happens.

As it turns out, after the clouds of weight-loss surgery have parted, the kids still have too many commitments. Your job is demanding and your family looks to you for what to eat at the end of a long day. When things get busy in life, the first thing that usually goes out the door is healthy eating and your overall self-care. Why?

Because no one is counting on you to take time for yourself! They are counting on you to take care of *them*. Thus, the habit of grabbing food and rushing through your day comes back in full force. **It happens to the best of us!**

The key to finding the balance in work, family and health is to **never stop trying**. Friend, do not beat yourself up if this "unthinkable" and completely normal experience of bad habits creeping back in is starting to get the best of you.

# If there is air in your lungs, it is not too late to get back on track.

1. **Re-ignite your motivation:** What is the carrot that drives you to keep moving forward? If you have a beautiful tropical vacation coming up, you're more likely to stick to your budget to save money for your beach days. The ocean is calling your name and the carrot is dangling before you. Perhaps the motivation that brought you success in the past is still what will light that fire now.

On the other hand, that carrot may not motivate you in the same way, and you need to find a new motivator to spur you on. Ask your post-op friends how they stay focused. Sit down in a quiet room and spend some time with yourself to identify what reasons you have for getting back on track. For some, it will be fitting into clothes comfortably again. For others, the carrot may be to get to get off (or decrease) diabetic medications. What is it for you?

What is the carrot of motivation for you?

2. **Set a realistic plan:** Once you've identified your carrot it's time to make a realistic plan to get back on track. Your realistic plan should include meal planning. Planning ahead for your busy day will ensure you eat the best foods for yourself and keep your blinders up when temptations come lurking. We've all forgotten to pack a lunch and felt ravenous and "snacky" throughout the afternoon. Stay one step ahead of yourself and of your hunger.

3. **Focus on Four Key Areas:** When patients come to see me with the hopes of turning things back around again, I always encourage them to focus on four key areas:

- *Water* - While water is certainly easier for some more than others, I encourage my patients to aim for a very lofty goal of 100 ounces a day. Why would I do that? Water is the cheapest appetite suppressant we have and it's also fantastic for fat burning. Drink (or even increase your water) and you may find you aren't nearly as hungry as you thought.
- *Meal structure* - The next area to focus on is establishing a fairly routine meal structure. If you've become relaxed about eating breakfast, put your car keys in the refrigerator next to your cheese stick so you don't forget. Shoot for breakfast within the first hour of waking for your day. This will do wonders for your metabolism, and help control your blood sugars and hunger throughout the day.
- *Food choices* - We cannot underestimate the importance of making the best food choices. I hate the word "fail" but the old saying "failure to plan is planning to fail" is painfully true when it comes to any weight loss plan. Do you want to see serious results? You have to make changes. Set a day to make

your meal plan, create a list and stick to it with no impulsive, off-your-plan food choices, and set a day to get to the store.

- **Exercise** - Make an exercise schedule. It's not going to happen by accident! Exercise gives you endorphins and makes you feel awesome. Nothing makes you wake up feeling healthier than when you've been working out consistently- am I right?!?! If you are trying to get back on track- you must make a game plan for exercise!

4. **Meal Planning:** Plan your meals around a solid lean source of protein such as chicken, pork or beef. Pair your protein sources with low-starch vegetables such as green beans, asparagus or bell peppers. Utilize seasonings, dry rubs and spices to keep the variety exciting in your meals. Pack leftovers for your lunches to make meal planning a little easier.

The biggest struggle of all is the most important one for success: **cut out the starchy foods and sweets**. Starches such as breads, pasta, rice, potatoes and sweets like pastries and cookies are addictive foods. This is why old habits sneaking back in is something we will all deal with for the rest of our lives!

5. **Trash the triggers:** Kick the trigger foods out of the house or ask family members to keep tempting foods in another cabinet. In my home, certain foods are totally off limits to bring into the house because they are just too tempting.

6. **Create your support system:** Call a family meeting and have an honest conversation with what foods need to stay away and what foods are okay as long as they are kept out of sight or hidden. When you cut back on the starchy foods and sweets, the first three to five days will be harder on your hunger and energy as your body adjusts to less of these foods. Stay the course and drink your water. By day six you will feel better than ever and so happy you stuck it out.

7. **Move it:** Be sure to move your body and get some exercise. Even light walking will not only be great for weight control, it will also bring stress relief to your body and mind, and leave you feeling more at peace. Play your favorite music and carve out that time for yourself.

8. **Taking care of yourself:** Self-care is not being selfish. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The better you care for yourself, the better you are able to care for others in your life. Caring for yourself means staying hydrated, eating healthy foods at consistent meal times and getting the exercise that you enjoy. As far as any bad habits that have crept back in, you can pick yourself up and dust yourself off. **You are still in this thing!**

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