

Need to lose weight? Team up with friends

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(HealthDay)—Researchers have found that having friends who gain weight—especially friends of the same gender—raises your chance of becoming overweight by more than 50 percent. That's far more than if

your spouse gains weight.

But they've also found that the same type of [social influence](#) can help you lose weight. In fact, sharing a [fitness goal](#) through your social network can help everyone in it. The [team approach](#) is most effective for people 18 to 35 years old, but has been successful for older Americans as well.

One large-scale example took place in Rhode Island. With resources from the wellness company Shape Up, now part of the Virgin Pulse group, the state encouraged thousands of people to start teams to promote weight loss and physical activity, and compete with each other.

In one year alone, nearly 1,000 small teams, some with just a few members, participated. Self-selected captains recruited team members, monitored their group's progress, and motivated members by sending encouraging messages and updates.

New York City has its own Shape Up NYC, an initiative that offers communities throughout its five boroughs a variety of fitness options. It reported that 65 percent of participants lost weight and experienced improved health benefits, and 83 percent said they felt an increase in energy.

Successes in Rhode Island and New York validate the team approach to weight loss, the researchers say. But you don't need to live in an area that sponsors such a program to start a team among your own circle of friends or co-workers. Set goals and initiate a friendly challenge to help everyone stay on track.

More information: Health.gov has [7 challenges to start with co-workers](#) for weight loss and fitness goals.

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