

Relationship Advice: What NOT To Do When You're Upset With Your Partner's Weight



By Toni Coleman, LCSW, CMC for [Divorce Support Center](#)

What do celebrities like [Oprah Winfrey](#), [Britney Spears](#), [Mariah Carey](#) and [Christina Aguilera](#) have in common? They are all beautiful, talented women who have faced public scrutiny as they struggled with their weight. As people age, many struggle with their weight. It seems that between the stress, lack of time and energy, competing work and family demands, poor food choices and eating on the run, a healthy lifestyle often ends up at or near the bottom of many people's priority lists. This behavior can then be exacerbated when significant others, family and/or friends attribute the problem to the

individual's apathy, lack of motivation or discipline, or an unwillingness or inability to make better choices. All of these assume something negative—which is not only unhelpful, it often leads to a continuing downward spiral. If your partner is not taking care of himself or herself, you may have fallen into using one or more of the following counterproductive strategies. If so, it is time to find positive and healthy ways to offer the support and encouragement your partner needs especially from you with a little [relationship advice](#)!

Relationship Advice: What Not To Do About Your Partner's Weight

1. Telling them how great they would look if they were thinner. When someone is carrying too much weight, they are well aware of it. In fact many people, especially women, feel badly about themselves because of it. It isn't useful for them to hear how much better they would look without those extra 20 pounds; it only makes them feel worse as it reminds them that you are very aware and thinking about it. Even though this might seem counterintuitive, what you should do instead is offer compliments on their hair, outfit, how hot they look at that moment, or anything about their appearance that you find attractive. By doing so, you will help lift their spirits and sense of self, and offer them something positive to focus on, which will encourage and support them in taking their next steps towards a healthier lifestyle and weight.

2. Making 'useful' suggestions for what, when, and how much they should eat. "Useful" suggestions are often badly veiled attempts to control and manipulate someone's behavior. They can lead to a dynamic where one partner nags the other with their constant stream of suggestions, which then leads to feelings of anger and resentment that get expressed through their partner acting out, usually in the form of eating more

of the unhealthiest food they can find. Dating tip: What you should do instead is be a good role model for your spouse. As a relationship expert, I think that you should make good choices for yourself in what and how much you eat. You can suggest (not push or insist) a date night where you do some meal planning, shopping and cooking together, while remaining open to their input and suggestions. Cooking several meals a week at home is a great start, as you will be eating healthier because the meals are made from fresh, whole ingredients. Taking good care of yourself will result in a happier, healthier, and more attractive you—this is what your partner will notice and want for himself or herself.

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3. Signing them up for a gym membership when they didn't request one. It's likely they will repay your investment of money and effort by never using it. No one likes to be managed or to feel coerced or guilt-tripped into anything. The result is that it kills all motivation instead of encouraging it. If you enjoy working out—go to the gym or participate in a physical activity or sport. Definitely ask your partner if they would like to join you for a walk, a hike, to walk the dog, or any activity that you do that you would enjoy sharing with them. If they do express an interest in taking a class or joining a gym, ask them if they would like company. When we have a buddy, we are more likely to follow through and it is more fun. The key here is to listen to them and let them initiate, then you can jump in with an offer of support and companionship.

4. Commenting on how good someone looks since they lost all that weight. Adolescents sometimes do this in order to get someone to act out of jealousy; teachers of young children also use this as a way to motivate their other students to do the same and earn some of that praise. But feelings of jealousy, competitiveness, and/or insecurity are not effective

motivators for adults who want to make lasting behavior changes. All this does is pile on their already present feelings of insecurity and self-disgust, which leaves them feeling less lovable and more unworthy of their relationship. When you are having a down day and don't feel good about yourself, do you find your motivation and enthusiasm to be higher than when you are having a good day? I didn't think so. A simple way to keep these kinds of comments in check is to ask yourself how you would feel if your partner used the same approach in their attempt to motivate you into action.

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5. Bringing home their “trigger foods” because they aren’t a problem for you. Here’s another instance in which it is useful to ask yourself how you would feel if you could not consume something due to a medical or other condition, yet your partner frequently brought it home and consumed it in front of you. It would probably feel as though they were unconcerned or unaware of your feelings. You would also be confronted with more temptation, which could lead to feelings of deprivation and resentment. If this were the case how might you act? Would you sneak the food when your partner wasn’t looking? Would you seethe quietly and want to find some other way to act out, or just withdraw and feel worse about yourself? Whatever your response, it’s likely it would be a negative one. Therefore, loving and concerned partners need to be aware of how their behavior can impact their spouse and then be willing to make adjustments to help create a more supportive and helpful environment. After all, if a partner can stick with their goal and make those necessary lifestyle changes, it’s a win-win.

6. Sending mixed messages by voicing concern, then encouraging noncompliance. This is a classic scenario where a spouse who is upset about their partner’s weight or alcohol consumption places them in situations that lead to them consuming unhealthy food, overeating, and/or drinking to excess. It’s as

though the partner sends a strong message to them to maintain discipline and healthy habits, then sets them up by insisting they join them in activities with people and in places that will surely sabotage their efforts. When this happens, some partners even say things like, "it's okay this one time," or "you are not as much fun as you used to be," when their partner is trying to abstain from certain food or drink. A driving factor behind this scenario is that the partner doesn't want to be deprived just because their significant other has an issue. They want them to deal with their issue, but not if it means they have to sacrifice something as well. Could this be you?

7. Withdrawing affection and sex because you are angry at their weight gain. Negative reinforcement rarely works. It has been demonstrated repeatedly to be an ineffective motivator. If you withdraw your affection, it will lead to them feeling unattractive and unlovable, which often leads to a sense of hopelessness and despair. My relationship advice is to stay engaged, show affection, offer positive and caring feedback, and remind them of all the ways they are special and important to you. This will help to energize and motivate them to do more and do it better. A belief in one's own abilities encourages us to reach beyond our fears in pursuit of our goals.

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If your partner is struggling with an unhealthy lifestyle and carrying extra weight, a loving and supportive environment will be important if they are to make any significant and lasting changes. The tone you set, the words you choose and the attitude you take towards them will play an important role in their success or failure. You cannot do it for them, nor can you threaten, cajole, intimidate, or guilt-trip them into being who you think they should be. They have to want it and work for it. But having you as their partner in success,

celebrating their good choices and big steps along the way will help ensure they never feel alone.

Have a tip for how you and your partner powered through weight struggles together? Share in the comments below!

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