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## Season 2, Episode 8: From Small Wins to Big Changes: Harnessing the Power of Lifestyle Coaching – Part 2

Welcome to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness, a podcast to help Vanderbilt faculty and staff live their healthiest lives.

DC: Welcome back everyone to the Healthier You Podcast, a podcast to help you live a healthier life. I am really excited to introduce Madeline Morrison, a clinical inpatient pharmacist here at VUMC. You've mentioned perfection a couple times during our conversation, and I want to pause there for a second because I think that looking at perfection as it relates to our health journeys can be really powerful, so how did you shift your focus from striving for perfection to celebrating your accomplishments?

MM: Yeah, this is so hard, and I would almost go on a limb and say that this is like one of the number one reasons people fail is because they're striving to be perfect, And I think that is a mindset that is not compatible with sustainability. If you are striving to be perfect and nail all of these new habits and tasks, that can be really hard, especially in the context of life, that's stressful and unpredictable, you're setting yourself up for failure. And so, you really do need, I think I've heard people say or talk about the 80/20 rule, 80% of the time, you're working toward your goals, trying to meet these goals that you set out for yourself, and then 20% is for life, because life happens. You have to give yourself some grace and celebrate the progress toward that goal instead, and so that was, I think, one of my biggest takeaways from coaching was don't sweat that you didn't get 100%, celebrate that you got

75% of the way there, you know? And that, I think, just totally changed my outlook on all of this. And then that can help really alleviate a lot of that guilt around, "Oh, I missed a workout because I had to work late," or "Oh, I didn't meet my protein goals or I ate something that probably wasn't the most in line with my caloric needs," you know? That's okay. That's the 20% of life that happens, and as long as 75% to 80% of the time you're on the right track working toward those goals, it's going to be okay.

DC: I think that when we consider, really, self-talk, right? And just the power of what we say to ourselves and the impact of that on our health and wellness, you know, that can really be a huge piece to this puzzle. So, within the coaching context, we really try to focus on progress versus perfection, because perfection is not attainable by most, if not all of us, right?

MM: Totally. And that, I think that was another super helpful thing that happens in coaching. So, I would bring you, and you know I'm a data person again, so I would have data from the month of like how many days I hit my protein goal, etc., and through those discussions with you saying, okay, so, we hit it this many days, what can we do to improve that, or what worked? And that really helps you reflect and kind of make a game plan for the next month or chunk or time, however you're kind of subdividing that, to say, okay, what lesson can I learn from this? You know, step in the right direction to keep that progress.

DC: Yeah, well, you have just been so gracious with us with vulnerably sharing, and I just want to take it a step further if you wouldn't mind answering what is kind of a vulnerable part of all of our health experiences, which is "failure," and I say that in quote, right, because we kind of talk about reframing failure, you know, in this context. But with that, can you share a moment when you felt like you were failing but later realized it was a step toward your success?

MM: Yeah, for sure. And I'll be vulnerable again and say, so sleep was one of my first goals, and I did make strides in sleep, but it continues to be a struggle. You know, it just kind of depends what's going on the month, or whatever. So, I think there was a month I'd had a big win. I had moved the needle on my sleep, like my average sleep, up above kind of the threshold that I wanted, and we celebrated that, and then the next time we checked in, it had drifted way back down, and I was super bummed out because I was like, ah, I had made all this progress on sleep and now I feel like I'm not meeting these goals and it's worse, and you kind of helped me examine what contributed to that, and that helped me kind of reflect on what was causing this, like were we going to bed later, etc. And I think, I'm trying to remember the specifics, specific examples, I think it was something about our nighttime routine had shifted, and I was basically able to realize, like, I was laying in bed for

a long time awake because I was still really wired from the day, and so it kind of helped me incorporate some new wind down techniques, like reading in bed and kind of like dimming the lights, cutting out screen time, because I think that month was really stressful, and so I was like going to bed super wired. So that conversation or that "failure" helped kind of illuminate some of those nuances for that time period and why I wasn't as successful, and then that led to me getting back on track. So, I think that's one of my favorite examples of me feeling so crestfallen that I hadn't met the goal, and then our conversation kind of leading me to some new conclusions and like better habits.

DC: that's a real part of our health journey, right? We're not always going to nail it the way that we want every single time. And so, we're not spending time like, "Oh my goodness, Madeline, you didn't meet your goal, like why didn't you meet your goal?" But rather, what can we learn from this past month. And we use that model whether you "meet the goal" or "not meet the goal." It's like, what did we learn either way and can we use that learning insight to help you progress forward for the next month.

MM: Yeah, for sure. That's another benefit, I think, of something that I had never really done prior to doing coaching, but in preparation for our meetings, I was compiling this data and reflecting on it so that I could kind of report back to you like how things went, and that's not something I had ever done before. I had never really paid attention to that or looked in detail at, you know, a concrete goal and how many days was I meeting it or not meeting it or where was the needle on that, and that is really powerful to just compile that, but then the reflection in the conversation is really a huge tool toward progress, because you could just, otherwise you're just kind of throwing things at the wall and hoping that it works. But if you're not evaluating, like this continuous evaluation of how are things going, how am I doing, and kind of reflecting on, oh, what happened, how can I change? I mean, that is literally how you grow, and so I think that was like another huge reason that the coaching was so helpful.

DC: Yeah, yeah. And really, what I'm hearing is you were tracking in your own way, which is a huge tool that many use, whether it be in their nutritional journeys or even their physical activity, we can track almost anything, and honestly, we do track. We track our finances, we track how much gas is in the car until we have to go to the gas station, so we are tracking a lot of information or data, a lot of times without even knowing it. So, kind of bringing that into the health and wellness context, . For you, you had your spreadsheets, and you had your app, which is, like, totally cool, but maybe tracking for someone else is just a journal. Maybe it's a quick note in your phone. Maybe it's just being intentional with setting some

time to think about it before your coaching call. So, tracking can look like whatever works for you, like we've been talking about,

MM: Yeah, for sure. I mean, and it's funny because I've had this ring that gives me all this data for a couple years, but until we had that kind of intentional monthly meeting to discuss and review and brainstorm what was affecting it, I would look at it, and sometimes it would even be a stressor, like, "Oh, my sleep is bad this month." But I wasn't really taking the time to dig into that, why is it bad or work to make a change. And so, yeah, it really helped me leverage that data and information to move it toward ultimate bigger goals.

DC: I know we're kind of coming to the end of our chat, but I really want to just talk about your non-scale victories, because that's something that we kind of discovered together. So, how did celebrating non-scale victories help you to stay motivated and positive?

MM: Yeah, so just a little context. My ultimate goal included, but wasn't solely based on, some weight loss. Working toward attaining a healthy BMI was part of this kind of overall goal of general health and wellness. And that can be really frustrating, because if you're doing it right, it takes a long time and you have to be consistent over a long period of time and make sure that your nutrition is dialed in, and actually sleep plays a big role in that, too. And so, there would be some really frustrating times when the scale would just not be budging, and so in those times, to kind of keep the momentum going, I think we talked about looking for some of these non-scale victories to just help. Recently, so, one of my goals was to be able to squat my husband's weight, and I'm 5 pounds away. I'm so close.

DC: Yay!

MM: I started with squatting only a fraction of that, you know? And so focusing on those non-scale victories was really awesome. And then another thing that was really just like super motivating and rewarding was watching how your body changes, despite lack of change on the scale. So, I was fitting into clothes that I hadn't fit into for years and like really seeing noticeable change in like muscle definition and just feeling more confident.

DC: Yeah, wow, yeah. I think you're sharing just some really incredible insights that are so valuable because when we think about non-scale victories, we're not emphasizing that weight is no longer a priority, because for some, and some who may be listening, it may be, and that's totally fine. Right? So, identifying some other non-scale victories can be a really powerful way to celebrate yourself on the journey, even if it's weight loss.

MM: Yeah, for sure. It's just another way to move that needle in the, like, glass half full direction or keep that kind of momentum of, okay, it's not 100%, but I'm on the right track, and just keep your motivation up.

DC: Yeah, well you have such a powerful story, and I know that I have just really enjoyed seeing you grow over time, and I know our listeners have been able to see your journey through this podcast episode. So, to kind of land here, what insight or encouragement would you share for our listeners who may be struggling on their wellness journey?

MM: That's a great question. I think it's kind of a combination of things we really talked about, but there's not going to be a perfect time to start, so just pick something small and do it. Do it tomorrow. Do it this afternoon. Whatever that is for you, just do it and start small. So, I think that's number one. And then, number two is find support, whether that's through coaching, which I, obviously, highly recommend, or through girlfriends or coworkers or a significant other, find someone to tell about it and check in with, or honestly even yourself. Set a reminder on your phone for every week or every month to say, okay, I'm going to review like how this thing that I implemented went and check in and say, like, okay, how is that going, what can I do to change or improve that? And I think that's kind of the place to start and go from there. Take those little wins as you get them and keep going.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Well, I am so appreciative of you being here with us today and really sharing your story. It has just been a treat to hear it all in one conversation, but even more so just to journey with you as your coach, and this is truly an honor.

MM: Thank you so much. I so appreciated our time together, and it was really fun to come and kind of condense it all in one conversation today.

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