

The Healthy “WEIGHS” Weight Loss Challenge

Submitted by Anne Zok
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In an effort to get healthy for the Holidays, Hospitality Services at Western University organized its first Healthy “WEIGHS” Weight Loss Challenge. Launched in October, the event (which ran for 7 weeks), piqued the interest of 50 staff within one week!

The logistics were really quite simple:

- Interested persons were asked to register either online, or directly with the Nutrition Manager. As part of the registration process participants were required to sign a waiver to ensure everyone understood the terms of the challenge [i.e., They agreed to be weighed weekly, they agreed to have their results publicly displayed, they agreed to take full responsibility for any complications that may inadvertently arise as a result of the challenge, etc.]



- Participants were asked to each contribute \$15 toward the prize pool.
- Participants were weighed weekly and their % of body weight loss was calculated. (For those participants who preferred to remain anonymous, it was suggested that an ‘alias’ name be selected and it was this ‘alias’ or ‘pseudo’ name that was publically displayed rather than their own name.) When time permitted, participant’s blood pressures were also recorded.

So why was this program initiated? Health experts agree that people may gain health benefits from even a small weight loss if:

- They are considered obese based on the body mass index (BMI is a tool that is often used to determine whether a person’s health is at risk due to his/her weight. It is a ratio of weight to height. BMI is calculated by taking one’s weight (kg) divided by their height (m), squared. A BMI of 18.5 – 24.9 is considered healthy, a BMI of 25 – 29.9 is considered overweight and a BMI of 30 or more is considered obese.)
- They are considered overweight based on their BMI and have weight-related health problems or a family history of such problems.
- They have a waist circumference that measures more than 40 inches (men) or 35 inches (women).

And although one might argue that healthy people do indeed come in various shapes and sizes, weight is considered a determinant of health. Being overweight increases ones risk of developing various conditions including:

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- Diabetes
- Heart disease and stroke
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Gallbladder disease
- Some types of cancer
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea (interrupted breathing during sleep)

Furthermore, given the fact that most people who make lifestyle changes aim to invariably lose weight, this challenge became an ideal opportunity to provide weekly coaching and guidance to participants relating to healthy weight-loss strategies; dispelling myths and misconceptions around diet and nutrition in an effort to prevent participants from embarking upon potentially damaging weight loss strategies.

The challenge wrapped up the week of December 10th. Collectively the group lost a total of 253 lbs. (an average of 5 lb. per participant) over the 7 week period. The first place winner lost a total of 12% of his body weight. AMAZING! Rick is a runner. He vowed to run 5 days a week while tracking his food intake. Rick actually lost a total of 26.5 lbs. He collected \$400 – first prize. The 2nd place winner lost 9.4% of her body weight. Carol lost 12.8 lbs. Carol needed to lose less weight (was much smaller than Rick, therefore a smaller weight loss in lbs., translated to a greater % of body weight loss.) Carol collected

\$225 – 2nd prize. The 3rd place winner lost 7.8% of her body weight. Brenda lost a total of 15.4 lbs. and collected \$110 – 3rd prize. Honorable mention went out to 6 additional participants for losing over 5% of their body weight. They were acknowledged for their efforts with a \$25 Hospitality Services gift certificate. (We're hopeful it will be used toward the purchase of healthy options ... LOL.) Healthy "WEIGHS" t-shirts were also distributed to all participants who lost weight and certificates were given to everyone – an acknowledgment for a job well done!

At the completion of the competition, participants were asked to fill out a feedback form. Based on the positive response, we are gearing up for our 2nd Healthy "WEIGHS" Weight Loss Challenge. This challenge will run a total of 10 weeks. We hope to also include some mini challenges along the way with workshops/wellness sessions to help motivate and encourage participants to focus on health and lifestyle behaviors that can be maintained for life.

Motivating staff toward a healthy lifestyle can be challenging, to say the least. The Healthy "WEIGHS" Weight Loss Challenge is one event that has proven to help engage our staff toward becoming healthier!

"Healthy Weighs" Weight Loss Challenge Agreement
Hospitality Services – Western University

Challenge hosted by Hospitality services. (Please print) agree to participate in the 7 week Weight Loss

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____

- I agree to allow Anne Zok (Nutrition Manager) or other delegated Manager to take and record my weight on a weekly bases
- I agree to allow Anne Zok (Nutrition Manager) or other delegated Manager to take and record pressure at the start and at the end of the 7 week Weight Loss Challenge
- I agree to remit \$15 dollars towards this challenge with the understanding that after the challenges, the participant who has lost the greatest percentage of his/her body weight will receive the full amount.
- I agree to make myself available for weekly weigh-ins and understand that if I miss more than one weigh-in, I am no longer eligible to win the final prize although I am welcome to continue to participate in the challenge.
- I agree to have the results publicly displayed either through social media outlets, email or as a hard copy. (Please note: Participant are more than welcome to use an "alias name" if they prefer to remain anonymous.)
- I agree to consult a physician if I feel there could be any complications as a result of this weight loss challenge
- I agree to take full responsibility for any complications that may inadvertently arise from this challenge and that Hospitality Services is in no way responsible or liable.
- I agree to use caution and common sense throughout the challenge and refrain from using drastic weight loss means.
- I agree to view this challenge as a "wellness challenge" first and foremost and recognize that at times, despite making positive lifestyle changes, weight loss might not be achieved. (Weight loss is a complicated physiological process.)

Participant Signature: _____
Date: _____