Welcome to the podcast entitled Health and Wellness Briefs, tactics for a healthier and better you. I'm Dr. Bernadette Melnyk, Vice President for Health Promotion and Chief Wellness Officer for the Ohio State University. This podcast series is brought to you by my CWO office and wonderful Buckeye Wellness team. In order to provide you with evidence based micro learning modules to optimize your health and well-being.

Our podcasts all start by taking a dose of Vitamin G, given that vitamin G or gratitude, is one of the simplest research-based strategies to improve mood, sleep and optimism, and reduce stress and blood pressure. Please take a few seconds now to think about who or what you are grateful for today. Give a dose of vitamin G to somebody today, for even more benefit.

Today’s topic is making or breaking a health and well-being habit. My wonderful guest is Dr. Megan Amaya, Director of Health Promotion in the Office of the Chief Wellness Officer at The Ohio State University. Welcome Megan!

Thank you, Bern. I'm really excited to be here and especially to talk about one of our favorite topics, behavior.

Yes, I always tell everybody changing behavior is most character building and most people don't change behavior. Sadly, until crisis happens or their emotions are raised.

So, Megan, given what I just said, and if somebody comes to you and says, Megan, I need the best evidence advice on how to make or break a new behavior habit in the next 30 to 66 days. What advice would you give them?

Great question and we're in a perfect time of year right now to talk about adopting new or even progressing down different or additional behavior change for healthy lifestyle behaviors.
First, I would say that if you set, let's say a goal for 30 to 60 days, there are a couple of key concepts as what I like to call them that you need to take into consideration when you're embarking on a behavior change process. A lot of folks out there have probably heard the term or going to phrase simple but not easy. Behavior change may seem simple face value, but there's a lot that goes on underneath the behavior that can help make or break that change.

Some of the key concepts that you can go into details on these, although simple for the purpose of our conversation, one is to set reasonable and realistic goals for yourself. We don't want to take on too much with the behavior change, so I always recommend one, maybe two behaviors at most. When we try to tackle three, four, five or six, that just gets overwhelming for someone. So, keep it simple. Keep it realistic.

You need to dig deep into the why. So, if you set that 30- or 60-day what are your reasons for that goal? Then, after you figure out why, you have to take a little time to think about that, that helps you then develop a goal. Like I said, that's reasonable realistic and that you can hopefully accomplish and work towards over those 30 to 60 days now. There are different concepts that we can talk about that help adhere to the behavior. But just to start that off, dig in deep with the why figure out those reasons and then that realistic goal can come from that.

00:05:11 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

Megan, I always tell people regarding this realistic goal cause most people set such high goals. That's why they fall off the wagon in the first week, cause it's not realistic, but my key phrase is this: “inch by inch, it's a sinch; yard by yard, it's hard.”

Finding your why. This is the power of story, because again, most people don't change unless crisis happens or their emotions are raised. You got to get emotional about your why. It also takes 30 to 66 days to make her break a new habit. So, if you're working with somebody again and in day six or seven, they're falling off the wagon. What advice would you give them?

00:06:26 Dr. Megan Amaya

Yeah. So first you have to keep the “why” out in front of you for a period of time. It may be you have that “why” out there for a long time and there may be more than one “why” as well.

So that why is really important to keep out in front of you wherever that is in your house, in your car, whatever is in your environment. Knowing what that “why” is and putting it out there can be really powerful like you were saying to your story and helping you move on
that journey forward because that is coming from the inside that is why it is your core values.

It is what is going to motivate you through some of the challenging times of behavior. So first of all, have that out there first and foremost.

Second of all, here’s a couple of tips or concepts that you want to keep in front of you that I would with a client work on these with. 1.) Who can you bring in your world in your social environment to help you? It's an accountability piece, but also friends, family members, children. I even say the dog, right? Taking the dog on a walk.

Folks can keep you motivated and be there for you as a source of support, especially if you're adopting a new behavior, but certainly if you're changing behavior down the line to progress. Those individuals can be really powerful in your journey. So, the social piece as well.

Then, what's also really important is kind of back-to-back here. 1.) When you monitor your behavior or keep track of what you're doing, you can see success with it and your accomplishments of the goals that you set out. Monitoring your behavior is really important whether that's through an app or a device, or an old-fashioned Excel document.

Also, what's really important as your working with a client. What are the barriers or the anticipated barriers that an individual might be going through? If an individual is able to identify some barriers that keep them from progressing, maybe it's lack of motivation, maybe it's physical, maybe it's mental. Develop a couple of strategies to work around those challenges and that can be really powerful when those challenges arise because you already have a game plan in place to work around and through them. Not that they're the magic bullet, but they can help individuals stay on course towards their goals.

00:09:05 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

That's great advice. The other pieces of advice I also like to share with folks that you have visual triggers and help you stay motivated. So, write the goal down the realistic goal down. Put it where you can see it visibly every day because we have a lot of research evidence that visual triggers actually can trigger certain behaviors.

The other tip I want to share with people is the tip we use in cognitive behavior, and that is behavioral activation. What does that mean? That means do it even if you don't feel like doing it. So, say you set a realistic goal to increase your business collectivity from 10 minutes 3 days a week, to 15 minutes for the next 30 days. You get up one morning, you say “I don't feel like exercising for 15 minutes.” Do it anyway.
The effect that's positive that you're going to get later is feeling of accomplishment. I didn't but I can continued to do it even when I don't feel like it.

So, Megan, last tips of advice if you're working with somebody and they're trying to make or break a new health habit.

00:11:07 Dr. Megan Amaya

I wanted really quick piggyback on what you were saying, and we'll get to the additional tips. That's where the identifying those barriers or those challenges that come into play. So, let's say that you tried to exercise for 15 minutes, but you only got 10 in 10 is awesome. Make sure you record that and give yourself kudos for accomplishing that.

So, then segueing on to another tip, rewards and recognition are really important in behavior. It can be something small, it can be something large depending on the goal that you are working towards and what you've accomplished. So, you can certainly build in rewarding yourself. It could be something tangible, intangible, that's up to the individual. Those can be really powerful ways to motivate yourself.

Then, I would also say along with the social networks and monitoring, celebrating your success can be really important. Bring those people in that have been there along your journey and they can celebrate with you and make sure you give yourself that pat on the back because that can be a really great way to continue to be motivated as you move forward in your journey.

00:12:18 Dr. Bernadette Melnyk

Again, great advice. Thank you so much for your expertise to help people make or break a new health habit. Thank you for listening to Health and Wellness Briefs, tune into other podcasts in this series to learn more evidence-based tips for a healthier and better you.