

FOCUSED ON FITNESS



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Fit City Tyler serves to encourage everyone who lives, works, plays, and prays in the Tyler area to gain and maintain a health-conscious lifestyle, and the variety of the community health programs organized by Fit City Tyler provide easy enrollment and supportive involvement to kids and adults of all ages. The larger question is "Why?" Why does our Lighten Up East Texas regional weight loss challenge continue to resonate as an annual rite of passage for the annual participants? Why has our annual Healthiest Workplaces in Tyler Awards Program blossomed into an engaging method for companies to ensure health is engrained into the culture of their employee's workday? And why has our annual Fit For Life Youth Art Contest matured into an artistic garden of health-conscious seeds that are planted into our creative youth?

"I have stopped drinking sodas all together," says Yakeesta Mason, one of the 2,500 entrants in Fit City Tyler's Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge. "In addition to drinking more water, I am also eating more veggies, and I go on afternoon walks at least four times a week." To gain a deeper understanding of the psychological motivations for our entrants, Fit City Tyler has elected to create focus groups that ask our participants to share the underlying reasons why a person chooses to enter a weight loss challenge. Our randomly selected prize winners actually have better odds of winning as compared to purchasing a ticket in the Texas Lottery, while the main difference is that entry into Lighten Up East Texas is free.

"I was truly ready to make a permanent lifestyle change and I wanted a chance to win some money," said Angela Norman, a mother of two. "So I keep a log of everything that I eat every day and I avoid eating any processed foods. I'm being consistent." At Angela's job, she became the organizer of her company being a weighing station for their employees, which is similar to the experience of Jennifer Pittman. "My co-workers wanted to have a weighing station for Lighten Up East Texas at our job, so I organized it last year, and I am doing it again this year because they asked me to join with them."

Consistency is another distinction of our health-focused lottery. Each entrant has to adapt their day-to-day activities to ensure they are safely able to maintain a healthy body weight. Yakeesta Mason, Angela Norman, and Jennifer Pittman each described the transition in their daily food, beverage and exercise choices, and their conscious decisions are examples of the mental changes that an entrant of Lighten Up East Texas needs to perform in order to achieve their weight loss goal. For a person who weighs two hundred pounds, a weight loss of ten pounds equals five percent of their starting weight. Since the Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge occurs over the course of 4 months, this two hundred-pound person would only need to lose two and a half pounds per month, equal to less than one pound per week. The shortcut to solving this mathematical equation is to isolate the first two numbers of your starting weight and then divide those numbers by two. Each person who can lose five percent of their weight has their name entered into the grand prize lottery drawings for Lighten Up East Texas.

While the rules of entry are straight forward, we are more intrigued to learn why our annual entrants make the health-conscious decision to enter the Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge in January, maintain a healthy weight loss for four months, and return for a final weight to be taken in the latter weeks of April. A large cash prize motivates the majority of our first-time entrants, but there are intrinsic motivations that have compelled many of our entrants to become annual participants.

"I didn't have a weight loss goal," stated Courtney Burton. "I registered to improve my overall health, to become stronger and to be the healthiest version of myself that I can be." Reagan Fair tagged along with a friend who also entered Lighten Up East Texas. "I had been in a rut when it came to exercise. I wanted another form of motivation and accountability, so I decided to also enter Lighten Up East Texas with a friend."



Natalie Roberts



Stacy Miles



Kitty Springer



Reagan Fair

In the very first year of Lighten Up East Texas (2013), there were 3,188 persons who listed a starting weight, yet 577 people made the choice to continue their participation, equaling a retention rate of eighteen percent. A similar number of individuals signed up in the following year; nearly 1,000 participants completed the weight loss challenge and the retention rate increased to thirty percent. Subsequent years included a steady increase of the number of persons who weighed-in for Lighten Up East Texas in January and who returned to weigh-out in April, with the highest retention rate becoming achieved last year. More than forty-six percent of our weight loss participants completed the Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge in 2018, and our steering committee is eager to learn if this is the year that the retention rate will eclipse fifty percent.

Entrants of Lighten Up East Texas weight loss challenge have the opportunity to win one of several Grand Prizes through a lottery drawing for anyone who loses at least five percent of their starting weight. This year, Fit City Tyler has invited entrants of our weight loss challenge to join one of several focus groups. The first focus group relates to starting and continuing a physical activity routine, with the goal of learning how and why people are motivated to get exercise. Surveys were emailed to entrants of Lighten Up East Texas and respondents were asked how they have transitioned into a healthier lifestyle since their initial entry into Lighten Up East Texas.

Focus group invitees were also asked to describe the main reason(s) they decided to register for Lighten Up East Texas this year. Yakeesta Mason mentioned that “one of my main reasons for signing up is because I have loved ones who are currently overweight and suffering from some type of health condition, and I have since decided to take charge of my life, and I have chosen to live healthy.”

Reagan Fair had taken advantage of a free gym membership earlier in the year, which she used to help kick start her

weight loss and has continued to exercise at home. “Losing five percent of my body weight seemed like a very achievable goal and I wanted to challenge myself.” Phyllis Hodges-Floyd enters each year because it is fun. “I want to learn how to control my weight, and I learn new ideas each time.”

As our focus group entrants continue their strategies to reach their personal health goals, they were also asked to keep a food journal, to dedicate at least three days per week for getting some type of exercise, and to maintain a diary that will display the mental evolution of maintaining a healthier lifestyle over a four-month period. All participants of this first Fit City Tyler focus group were also provided with a free gym membership. The recruitment survey also asked for each person to list the types of workouts they would like to try if they were given the opportunity to try an exercise for free. Several of Fit City Tyler’s community sponsors include gyms and exercise facilities, and our focus group participants are receiving access to try kickboxing, Cross Fit, Tai Chi, swimming, Pilates, Kung Fu, and several forms of physical activity that they have never tried, or that they never had the chance to try. Fitness is fun and being physically fit is easiest to achieve when elements of joy, novelty, and experimentation are included.

Throughout the year, Fit City Tyler invites the community to join additional focus groups that will concentrate on additional aspects of wellness, such as the financial, emotional, nutritional and psychological aspects of becoming a healthier version of you. As the members of our current focus groups for fitness progress toward achieving their lifestyle goals, their stories will be chronicled on Facebook, Twitter, and website pages for Fit City Tyler.

Please email JoinFitCityTyler@gmail.com if you are interested in joining one of our future focus groups.