

About Health TV with Jeanne Blake
Weight Loss Management
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JEANNE BLAKE: Welcome to *About Health* TV. I'm Jeanne Blake, and we'd like to welcome our new viewers in Denver, Colorado. So you'd like to lose weight? Well, join the crowd. Obesity in America continues to increase at a rapid rate. It is now said that 1 in 5 Americans is considered obese, compared to one in eight just 10 years ago. David McElfresh has lost weight, and by all accounts he's done it just the right way. On this edition of *About Health* TV, we'll hear from David McElfresh and how he's done this, what some would consider a remarkable feat, and we'll also hear from nutritionist Ellen Glovsky, who is from Boston Medical Center's Nutritional and Weight Management Center. She will give us her thoughts on David's weight loss process and how you at home can take off unwanted pounds and keep them off.

JEANNE BLAKE: Welcome to both of you. So, David, congratulations! How much weight have you lost?

DAVID: Well, I've lost about 40 pounds. It varies back and forth because I find my weight can vary one or two pounds a day without any problem at all. Unfortunately, over the Christmas season I gained back about four, but I will continue with my program and try to lose that.

JEANNE BLAKE: Now, how long a period of time had you been losing weight?

DAVID: For about nine months, and I'd checked everything with my doctor to make sure that I was doing the right thing, and he agreed with me that a goal of losing approximately one pound a week is kind of a target.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's so reasonable. I mean, in a day of diet crazes, we don't hear of a lot of people doing it that way.

DAVID: Well, I tried one of the diet crazes a long time ago, and I lost quite a bit of weight, but it wasn't very long before I had it all back on.

JEANNE BLAKE: What did you do then?

DAVID: I just got bigger and bigger.

JEANNE BLAKE: No, I mean what diet craze?

DAVID: I think, let's see, it was the Pritkin Diet or one of those ... the Scarsdale Diet, maybe, I don't remember, and it just didn't work.

JEANNE BLAKE: Aha, now I'll mention that David is attending the weight management clinic at Boston Management Center. You really just decided to do this on your own?

DAVID: Well, I had some incentive from friends who said, "Hey look, you know, you're looking really bad. You need to do something about it." I have friends who can.

JEANNE BLAKE: We all have at least one of those in our life.

DAVID: And also I traveled quite a bit and I just wasn't fitting in airplane seats very well, and I didn't like that, and I couldn't bring the tray down comfortably so I could eat. You know, you always have to eat, there's nothing else to do on an airplane. And so I decided to go ahead and try to lose some weight. I started watching my diet and started eating less, because it's just so simple -- you just have to burn more calories than you eat. I mean, there's nothing magic about it. That wasn't working in and of itself, so I had to start an exercise program that I made up myself. And so I do regular exercise every day.

JEANNE BLAKE: What's considered regular exercise?

DAVID: Well, I spent a lot of time in Prague, in the Czech Republic.

JEANNE BLAKE: For business?

DAVID: On business, yes, I have a business over there. And across the street from my apartment -- Prague is a very hilly city, it's a beautiful city, but it's very hilly, and across the street from my apartment is a set of stairs maintained by the government, stone steps that go up the side of this hill. I'd go out every single morning and climb those steps to the top of the hill and then I would walk back down, back to the apartment. The whole process takes about 20 minutes.

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JEANNE BLAKE: I've got this image that you're like Prague's version of Rocky.

DAVID: I don't think so, but to the top of the stairs is the equivalent of an eleven-story building.

JEANNE BLAKE: Wow.

DAVID: And I can now climb that in about four and a half minutes. I do that every single morning.

JEANNE BLAKE: Once up and once down, so it's nine minutes?

DAVID: No, no, no, no. I go up the stairs, and there's a street up there, and I walk back down the street, and it takes 15 minutes to walk back to my apartment.

JEANNE BLAKE: So you're getting about 30 minutes of exercise every day.

DAVID: Every morning. And at the office I walk up the stairs, and we're on the sixth floor.

JEANNE BLAKE: Oh. Before we talk about the approach to the food that he's eating and how that's changed, Ellen, what are you hearing so far from this weight-loss patient?

ELLEN: Well, I'm hearing extremely positive experiences, an extremely positive attitude. What David's done is alter his lifestyle to adjust it to a healthy way of living, which results in weight loss. And actually that is the best way to go about this task of losing weight. He has made decisions about how he'd like to adjust his time and his energy in order to accomplish the goals he's set. His description of his exercise is excellent. Every step that you take, David, increases your health, improves your health, makes you a more vibrant person, probably increases the length of your life. There's some evidence that regular exercise helps people live longer, and certainly live healthier as they do it. He described two different approaches to his exercise -- a programmed exercise, which is your stair walking, stairs up and walking down, which you've got down to a certain time frame. It's something you like, it sounds like you love the city in which you're doing it, and regular daily sort of activities like walking the stairs in your office, because those are the two categories we always ask people to think about. Walk an extra block, walk a flight of steps, and set aside half an hour for regular programmed exercise every day. You've done both.

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JEANNE BLAKE: How many people do we hear say, "I need to exercise, I don't have time." Well, you create the time.

ELLEN: Not only that, but David talks about how much he likes it.

JEANNE BLAKE: Did you like it in the beginning, though?

ELLEN: That's a good point.

DAVID: Well, I thought I was ready to die by the time I got to the top of the stairs, because the first time I climbed the stairs I didn't know where they went, and I had no idea, and I kept climbing, and I thought, "Oh my God, they're never going to end."

ELLEN: It helps to know how long you're going to be doing this, so when you said it takes you 20 minutes ... I find that people can pace themselves when they know it's 20 minutes: I can do this. I've set aside from 7:00 to 7:30, I'm going to do this, I'm going to come home, I'm going to cool down, I'm going to take a shower. And it becomes a regular, routine part of your life that makes you feel good.

DAVID: And of course I'm meeting all the neighborhood dogs, so I know them all now. There's some lady that lives on top of the hill who has eight Pomeranians that came running at me one day. The first day I saw them it was like this cloud of dogs, and now they're my friends.

JEANNE BLAKE: But how do you feel physically different now that you're 40 pounds lighter?

DAVID: Well, I have more energy and I just feel generally better. It comes gradually, so it's not a big dramatic change, I find.

ELLEN: The weight loss of one pound a week is perfect. It bodes well for your future of keeping it off, and you've clearly integrated this into what you want for your life. When people do a diet, and then they're on the diet and then they're off the diet, they gain it back. Whenever I hear people say, "I'm on a diet," I know, it sounds to me like they're going to gain it back. When you begin to say, "I changed my lifestyle because I want to be healthier," this is about your health and your well being that bode better for the future.

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JEANNE BLAKE: And there's so many people that want to lose weight, whether they're the one in eight or one in five now that is considered obese, or whether that large group of people that just want to lose five or ten pounds. They hear a pound a week and feel like, "Oh, that's going to take forever, and I want this to happen now, I want this to change." But David, how long ago -- you said eight or nine months ago?

DAVID: Eight or nine months ago is when I really started the exercise program.

JEANNE BLAKE: And if you hadn't done it eight or nine months ago, you'd still be overweight and not be feeling good.

DAVID: I'd still be some huge number that we don't want to talk about.

ELLEN: The other thing to come out about exercise that's really important is that all the research shows that people who exercise consistently keep their weight off, and it's a very small percentage of people who lose weight and keep it off by diet alone. The regular exercise seems to be the key, because our bodies were meant to move.

JEANNE BLAKE: Now, have you been to the doctor to have your cholesterol and blood pressure and all of that checked?

DAVID: Yes, and I have comparisons between my physical in July of 1999 and my physical in July of 2000. It was quite dramatic. My cholesterol -- he had always thought it was a bit on the high side, and it went from 215, or some number like that, down to 189.

JEANNE BLAKE: Wow, perfect. And without any medicine?

DAVID: No medicine, no.

ELLEN: It's the exercise and the diet. Excellent.

DAVID: And another thing, I was on Prilosec, which is for heartburn, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and I had to take one every single day. They're \$4 apiece, and the insurance company pays for it, but of course it adds up, and since I lost the weight I don't have to take it at all.

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ELLEN: That's wonderful.

DAVID: So the insurance company is saving about \$120.

ELLEN: And you're not taking a prescription drug. All drugs have some side effects, and we'd prefer people don't take them.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let's move on to the part that folks might be wondering. What do you eat?

DAVID: What do I eat? I eat lots of fish and I eat chicken a lot because it's easy to get in Prague. Fish is not so easy, but I can still manage. I just eat less. I eat a lot of vegetables, a lot of fruit.

JEANNE BLAKE: Are you hungry?

DAVID: Almost all the time, it seems.

JEANNE BLAKE: That sounds like bad news for people who are listening.

DAVID: That's not true. At first I was hungry, and then that changed. It took about a month for that to start changing, and then I don't even think about it. If I want a little snack between meals, I have raisins or something like that.

ELLEN: Very good, very good. It does take time to adapt, and it's a very important point, because people think, "If I'm hungry for a day, I can't possibly do this."

DAVID: But if you stick with it, it will. The hunger will go away.

ELLEN: And at the start, we recommend people add extra fruits and vegetables to their diets at the beginning, when you're feeling hungry, you know. All food has calories, but the volume and the almost fat-free nature of fruits and vegetables makes them easier to fill you up. They're high in fiber and high in water and vitamins and minerals, and they help people feel good.

JEANNE BLAKE: And are you drinking a lot of water, David?

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DAVID: Yes, we have water delivered in two-liter bottles to the office, or one-and-a-half-liter bottles. I forget what size they are. And I drink at least two of those every day, perhaps more.

JEANNE BLAKE: What's the water deal, Ellen? It's more than feeling full.

ELLEN: It helps people feel full, it helps you be hydrated, it helps your skin and your hair, and it just helps you feel better.

JEANNE BLAKE: But people say it helps them lose weight more. Is it just filling them up?

ELLEN: It's partly that it helps you be full. It's partly that it helps you feel healthy and have a positive attitude in a subjective sort of way.

JEANNE BLAKE: Now, there's a psychological component, clearly.

DAVID: For one, you walk more, too, because you have to go back and forth to the bathroom.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's true too, David.

ELLEN: It helps with kidney function and all-around gastrointestinal function and it's just a healthy way to do things. It's a piece of this healthy lifestyle.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let's talk about the psychological component, because the first month, David had to deal with it and adjust to it. What did you used to eat?

DAVID: Oh, I used to eat whatever I could lay my hands on, a lot of pork and that type. The thing is, in the Czech Republic, if it doesn't oink they don't eat it.

ELLEN: A lot of fatty pork products, I know, a lot of sausage type things.

DAVID: Sausages on the street ...

ELLEN: And many different varieties.

DAVID: ... on the square are just wonderful.

JEANNE BLAKE: I don't think the Czech Republic has a corner on fat. We've seen the way Americans tend to eat.

ELLEN: But I think the eating patterns in those countries, European countries, had the higher-fat meat, at a time when people were moving their bodies more for a living.

JEANNE BLAKE: But the psychological component of getting through those tough times, David, I'm sure in the last eight or nine months you have hit a place where you said, "I don't think I can do this one more day."

DAVID: Oh, I have, but you just carry on. I've allowed myself a nice Czech'd-up dinner for Thanksgiving. I was in Prague on Thanksgiving, so, you know, this duck and dumpling and two kinds of cabbage and on it goes. So I said, "Well, one day it won't be bad."

ELLEN: No, and actually when you get to that spot where you feel like you can't do it any more, the trick is to figure out what you really, really are missing, what you really, really want, and go about getting exactly that food and eating it just so you're full, and making a decision that this is a time-limited thing that I'm doing and that I will go back to my healthy lifestyle. To say that I will never have these favorites again is a big trap. It leads people to say, "I can't live with this. I quit." To say, "I really want a steak and a baked potato with sour cream." You know, that's the sort of standard American version of that, you go to the best possible place to get that steak, and you enjoy it, and that's that.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think this is the appropriate time to talk about our portions.

ELLEN: Yes, because actually I had in mind the steak restaurants that will serve you a pound. You don't have to eat the whole pound, but there it is on your plate.

JEANNE BLAKE: I just think that so many restaurants -- so many people eat so much more food than they really need, and I think the whole notion of getting stuffed is unhealthy. I mean, I love to eat, I absolutely love to eat.

DAVID: But the way I've been eating, you get full sooner and you really couldn't eat a pound of steak. It just would not be possible.

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JEANNE BLAKE: Well, it would also be rather disgusting at that point.

ELLEN: When your body gets out of the rhythm of doing that, you expect less and you start to be more comfortable with that.

JEANNE BLAKE: Okay, so, we'll now introduce my plate of food, which I've prepared ... no comment from either of you, please. I'll put it down here and maybe we can get a shot of it with the camera, but under Ellen's able guidance I've prepared -- and it doesn't look very appetizing, but I will say that I ate this last night. The chicken got done in the microwave this morning, which is exactly why it looks so absolutely hideous. No one would ever want to eat it. I could have at least put some paprika on it. Normally when I prepare chicken at home, I'll either broil it or grill it, or I'll put a teeny bit of olive oil and some garlic in a frying pan. I mean, it will stick to the pan anyway. And some mustard or something on top, and a little bit of tarragon -- I like tarragon -- or basil.

ELLEN: Mustard and tarragon's marvelous.

JEANNE BLAKE: Yes, it's a good combination. I don't like butter on my vegetables. But when you told me a third of a cup of potatoes or rice, Ellen, I was surprised by that. I mean, I would normally eat more than that. And so this is what it looks like. I'm wondering if you can give us some more guidance on the portions.

ELLEN: Actually, when I referred to a third of a cup as a portion, that's within the sort of diet teaching of exchange lists we talk about, 15 grams of carbohydrates being one ounce of bread or one average slice, half to a third cup of starchy foods, depending on the food and its volume, half a cup of cooked vegetables, three ounces of chicken. That doesn't mean that's all you can eat. If you want to have two servings of starch foods, you can do that and have it be a larger amount. But it gives people some kind of guidance about what a serving is. When you take a large cooking spoon and take mashed potatoes from the pot, you can do three of them and get three or four cups of potatoes.

JEANNE BLAKE: Maybe you can give us some visual images. I brought some baseballs, as you recommended, and this happens to be my Red Sox autographed baseball so this will be staying very close to me, thank you very much.

ELLEN: There are some guidelines of common objects in people's lives that we suggest to think about your portion sizes. The palm of a woman's hand or a deck of cards, the size and shape and the dimensions of a deck of cards: about three ounces of chicken or fish, protein food.

JEANNE BLAKE: Let me demonstrate. This is the deck of cards, and this is the chicken breast, and it actually fits right in my hand.

ELLEN: Now, not all foods are of that nice neat shape and size, but that's one way of thinking about it.

JEANNE BLAKE: What do you think, David, is that enough food for you?

DAVID: That's enough. I would probably have left off the potatoes and increased the green beans and gotten rid of the carrots.

JEANNE BLAKE: Really? You wouldn't have eaten ... why no carrots? Is it that you don't like them?

DAVID: Oh, I like carrots. I just don't eat them that often. There's a lot of sugar.

ELLEN: They do have more starch than some other vegetables, like green beans for example, but it's a very healthy choice. The deep green and yellow vegetables are very high in vitamin A.

JEANNE BLAKE: It also looks better, which for me is a visual thing, too, I have to say.

ELLEN: People tend to be worried about carbohydrates, because we hear so much that carbohydrates aren't good for you. If you're only eating carbohydrates, that's not healthy for you. But you have a beautifully balanced plate here in terms of nutrition and food groups.

JEANNE BLAKE: Now what did you say was supposed to be about the size of a baseball?

ELLEN: About a cup of mashed potatoes.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's pretty good. That's a lot of mashed potatoes. But I will say that I made these mashed potatoes with garlic and chicken broth, low-sodium, low-fat chicken broth, and no milk, which ... I like the way that tastes.

ELLEN: And it doesn't need any fat.

JEANNE BLAKE: Actually, probably less than 100 calories if you have a baseball size of mashed potatoes.

ELLEN: Well, 100 to 150, depending on the size, yes.

DAVID: Adding garlic to them is good.

ELLEN: And there's no extra fat or calories. So larger servings of vegetables, as you said, and I would put a nice salad with this meal.

JEANNE BLAKE: And what would you put on the salad?

ELLEN: You can use some balsamic vinegar, you can use a few drops of olive oil, and take a very, very rich-tasting extra-virgin olive oil that has lots and lots of flavor. People get confused about light olive oil, they think it has less fat. It has less flavor.

DAVID: If you look at the label, you can tell: 100% fat.

ELLEN: All oils are 100% fat. There's a white balsamic vinegar on the market that's lovely, and it's a little less sharp. You can use lemon juice, garlic salt.

DAVID: I eat a lot of tomatoes. I like raw tomatoes and I just eat lots and lots of raw tomatoes.

ELLEN: Excellent choice.

DAVID: And grapes. I get these ... there are these outdoor markets in Prague, and these wonderful big Italian grapes are great.

ELLEN: You know, any fruits and vegetables ... people worry about grapes, they worry about bananas, they worry about raisins.

JEANNE BLAKE: They can't sit and eat five bananas in a day either. I mean, it's really surprising.

DAVID: Sure you can.

JEANNE BLAKE: Ellen, I'm constantly surprised by how little people know about what's in food. And then, you know, eating fried food is bad for you in a variety of ways. I'm just surprised by it. We've talked about it before on this program.

ELLEN: When you take an ounce of chicken, this white meat chicken that you have here, cooked the way you cooked it, it's about 35 calories.

JEANNE BLAKE: Thirty-five calories?

ELLEN: Per ounce. Now, the average woman of 25 to 50 should consume 1,800 to 2,000 calories, assuming average physical activity, so that gives you some frame of reference for where that fits into the total. When you sauté it lightly in olive oil, you double its calories. When you bread it, you triple its calories. When you bread it and deep-fat fry it, you can increase its caloric value by as much as four times because the breading absorbs the oil. If it's cooked in oil that isn't heated enough, if the oil is too low temperature, it absorbs extra oil. You know that greasy fried-food taste? You can get up to 150 calories per ounce of something like white meat chicken or more. Per ounce. An ounce is one or two bites. Now you can eat 1,000 calories of that.

DAVID: And love every minute of it.

JEANNE BLAKE: I think David's salivating. He's going to go home and fall off the diet.

DAVID: No I'm not.

ELLEN: You know, when you talk about four bananas, a banana is about 150 calories, an average banana. Four of them gets you 450-plus calories. If your diet is 1,800 for the day, that wouldn't be a great choice because you'd be taking one of the four -- remember the basic four from grade school? You'd be overdoing on one of them.

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JEANNE BLAKE: What about, and I don't mean in the most simple way, but not eating all day and eating the bulk of your calories at night? I mean, I know that you won't have energy during the day, but I mean in terms of your body using the stuff.

ELLEN: Our bodies are designed to be fueled. Food is fuel. Our bodies are designed to be fueled at least three times a day, sometimes for some people more. When you don't eat all day and you save all your calories, people tend to have a mental sort of twist that says, "Well, I didn't eat all day, I can eat more." And they eat more than they think they're eating. They add extra fat when they prepare, they put extra salad dressing. There's that idea that "I didn't eat all day." And you go to sleep. Your gear quiets down as the evening goes on. Bodies were meant to be fueled, beginning, middle, and end. People do better when they spread it out and add some protein foods to those earlier meals. If you eat a bagel and you eat a rice cake and you don't eat anything else, which is a typical woman's pattern in our country in losing weight -- I'll have a salad and a rice cake -- there's no protein food in there. So you won't feel as healthy, you'll get very hungry by 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon or on your way home from work. You'll be likely to stop in the newsstand and pick up peanuts and potato chips and ... well, it's protein, it's peanuts. You get home, you eat the first thing that's in the front of the refrigerator, which might be pepperoni and cheese, and then you eat dinner. And then you come to someone like me and say, "I don't know why I'm not losing weight, I only ate a bagel and a rice cake all day."

JEANNE BLAKE: David, you're not at your goal yet.

DAVID: No, I'm not at my goal. We were talking earlier before we started the program, and I'm thinking that I probably want to try to lose another 30 pounds, at least 20 though. And I think at that stage, then I'll go into maintenance mode and leave it that way.

ELLEN: Very good.

JEANNE BLAKE: What do you think the next 20 pounds will be like? I don't know, maybe it will keep coming off at the rate it is. I mean, what can David expect?

ELLEN: Well, at some point most people begin to plateau and stop losing.

JEANNE BLAKE: Have you, David?
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DAVID: Oh yes, I've reach plateaus at least twice, and it takes a while. It can be very discouraging, but if you just stick with it, you will ... eventually the plateau will stop and you will come down.

ELLEN: Did you have to readjust your food and eat less?

DAVID: I did, because you see, I'm not losing any weight. I want to try to ...

ELLEN: Eat a little less.

DAVID: ... eat a little less, or take longer walks.

ELLEN: There you go. As your body is lighter, you need fewer calories to maintain your weight.

JEANNE BLAKE: That's what I was going to ask. What's going on inside the body when you hit that plateau?

ELLEN: If you weight 200 pounds and you move your body, you need a certain number of calories to move it, that bulk, that weight. As you weigh less, you need less to move it.

JEANNE BLAKE: Okay, then why, for example, a friend of mine who is watching me and is going, "A third of a cup, impossible." Of course, she could eat anything she wanted to and not gain any weight.

ELLEN: We speculate that some people just have different genetic ... different metabolic makeup, and of course it's not fair, but it is.

JEANNE BLAKE: But I virtually don't want to say, "Because I'm overweight, well, it's because I have a different genetic makeup than I'm ... it's my mother's fault." Whatever it is, it's our mother's fault anyway.

DAVID: I can attest to that, because I have a very good friend in Prague. She's my favorite interpreter. She can eat anything and never gain any weight. I'm constantly disgusted with her. In fact, we had taken a trip from Prague over -- this was a few years ago -- from Prague to Houston, and
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we had some Czechs with us and they needed an interpreter. We went to a steak restaurant and she ate a 24-ounce T-bone with a salad and potato and topped it off with this huge dessert and never gains any weight.

ELLEN: There's two things probably going on. One is genetics and metabolism and how her body burns what she eats. The other thing is, people who don't have a weight problem tend to adjust for that sort of a meal, naturally, without having to think about it. It's likely that someone like that is eating less days after that because her body needs less.

JEANNE BLAKE: The friend who I was referring to who was saying "the third of the cup, forget it, I'd starve," she doesn't eat that much, actually, in all honesty. She does tend to have really good eating habits and she doesn't eat a lot and she doesn't eat sweets.

ELLEN: And people who don't have a weight problem tend to forget to eat. I don't know if you've ever heard anyone say that.

JEANNE BLAKE: Well, I can't even imagine it.

DAVID: I can't imagine it either.

ELLEN: I can't either. I think it's extraordinary. But people who say, "I haven't eaten all day. I forgot," because there's a different way of relating to food. You know we all have a relationship with food, and everyone's is different. You sort of get what you get in this life. It's not fair, it's true.

JEANNE BLAKE: You just keep your eye on the ball and on the ultimate goal, and David, good luck in reaching yours. I know you'll do it.

DAVID: I'll continue to try. We'll check back.

JEANNE BLAKE: Come back in another 20 pounds. That would be great.

ELLEN: A maintenance program. A follow-up program.

JEANNE BLAKE: Travel safely. Good luck and continued good health. Ellen, it's always great to have you on the program. Thanks very much, so much, for offering your expertise once again. I bet

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some people learned, and go into the new year and lose those pounds that you want to lose and feel good. Thanks again to both of you, and thank you for joining us on this edition of *About Health* TV. I'm Jeanne Blake, and we'll see you next time.

About Health TV is sponsored in part by
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