

# Finding a Health Coach to Help You Meet Your Health and Well-being Goals

By Deborah Lee, PhD, RN

**I**n the last edition of Health & Wellness Magazine, we explored the topic of integrative health coaching, what it is and what it isn't. As a review, integrative health coaches work with individuals who seek to improve any area of health and well-being in their life such as nutrition and physical activity, work issues, relationships issues and work-life balance. Health is seen as more than physical health and encompasses every aspect of a person's life including professional and personal development, mind-body-spirit connection, environment, etc.

Working with a health coach, individuals develop their health and wellness goals and the health coach assists them in development and execution of a plan to achieve their goals and provides the support, motivation and accountability so the client is more likely to achieve their goals for long-term sustainable behavior change. The process is based in the relationship between the client and the health coach. Unlike traditional models of care where the health care provider tells the patient/client what they need to do, the agenda in a health coaching relationship is set by the client, not by the health coach.

## How to Find a Reputable Health Coach

Do you know there is no standardized training, no legal requirement and no specific level of education to be a health coach (or any other type of coach such as a life coach or executive coach\*)? Health coaches do not need a license to call themselves coaches or to practice their trade. Anyone can hang out a shingle as a health coach (or any other type of coach) and provide services with no formal degree or training. There are questions you can ask when selecting a health coach to help you select a coach who best meets your needs.

## What is the Coach's Background and Training?

- Do they have a professional degree to augment their health coaching?
- Which health coach training program did they attend?
- How many hours of training did they receive?
- How was the training delivered (on-site, distance learning, or a combination)?
- Did they complete the entire training program?
- Are they a certified health coach? Certification means the person has completed extensive training and has at least 100 hours of coaching time as part of the certification process. Certification should take several months and depending on the level of certification, several years. Certification should require completion of an exam, either oral or written, and in some cases both.

For health coaching, you most likely want to select a person with a background in a health profession or allied health profession, such as nursing, nutrition (registered dietician), health education, medical social work, etc. An individual with a degree in a health profession, depending on the profession, was required to pass a licensing exam, which means they meet the minimum standard to practice in their field. Why is this important? Because there is no educational or training requirement for coaches, you should have some level of comfort that the person has an understanding through their professional training of health and wellness and working with people who have health challenges.

A good example of the importance of your health coach's qualifications comes into play for those who have a chronic health condition or are dealing with an issue that impacts their health. Diabetes is a complex condition that requires a multifaceted approach to mitigate complications that can arise. While the health coach does not need to be an expert in diabetes, they do need to

have an understanding of the condition. Your health coach needs to know how to work with the regimen the physician has identified and how to complement the other resources that may be available, such as a diabetes educator and/or a registered dietician. These providers will give you information on how to check your blood sugar, how to recognize the symptoms if your glucose level is too high or too low, and counsel you on what to eat to manage your blood sugar. This information is invaluable. The integrative health coach does not replace these providers. The integrative health coach works with you to figure out how to reduce the challenges of living with diabetes by helping you develop a plan for how to keep yourself healthy and focus on your well-being. What is different is that the integrative health coach's approach is centered on what the person wants, and by being centered on the person and their desires for their life, behavior change is more likely to result.

\*Sports coaching and fitness training are different and not intended to be addressed in this article.

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Program where she is currently working towards certification as an Integrative Health Coach. She brings 30 years of professional and personal experience to her integrative health coaching practice. After working as a hospital and home care nurse, researcher, university professor, public health professional and health care administrator in the U.S. and Canada, she decided to return to the root of why she became a nurse; to help people feel better and stay healthy. Deborah can be reached at [Deborah.Lee@BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com](mailto:Deborah.Lee@BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com) or [www.BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com](http://www.BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com)

