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Stay Motivated: What to Do If You Don't Pass the CHP Exam on the First Try

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AAHP Blogs

The Certified Health Physicist (CHP) exam is widely regarded as one of the most [challenging professional certifications](#) in the field of health physics.

For many, it's not a matter of "if" they'll pass on the first attempt, but rather "when" they'll achieve success. Sometimes it takes multiple tries.

And that's completely normal.

Amber Bolen, a CHP and a dose reconstructor at NV5-Dade Moeller knows this well. So does her husband. Both are proof that the [CHP certification](#) isn't about immediate success.

It's about long-term commitment.

"The reality is, even the most seasoned professionals often need multiple attempts to pass," Bolen says.

The process can span years, she adds. For others, even decades. But every step along the way builds knowledge, skill and resilience.

"This is a journey that tests not just your expertise but also your perseverance. But it's worth every effort," she says.

Her story—and her husband's story—is an inspiring reminder to test-takers: Don't get discouraged. Keep trying. You'll reach your CHP destination.

Bolen shares her roadmap and tips on what to do to stay the course no matter what the setbacks.

A Journey Built on Perseverance

Bolen's path to becoming a CHP began in 2008, shortly after finishing her undergraduate degree.

Like many young professionals, she followed the common advice to take the Part 1 exam immediately after graduation.

"I quickly realized I wasn't ready," Bolen recalls. "There's so much practical knowledge you gain from working in the field that you just don't learn in school."

Unsurprisingly, she didn't pass on her first attempt. She decided to wait until she felt more prepared, which turned into years of studying, working and eventually raising a family.

Her husband's journey started years later, and the two eventually found themselves supporting one another through the process. Over the course of more than a decade, they studied together, sat for exams together and celebrated small victories—even while facing setbacks.

In 2023, Bolen passed both parts of the CHP exam, while her husband passed Part 1 but narrowly missed Part 2. In 2024, he aced it.

"It's been a journey of over 12 years for us as a couple," Bolen shares. "Our kids have grown up with us studying, attending prep classes and lugging around roller bags full of Bevelacqua books on every trip."

5 Things to Do If You Don't Pass

Bolen's story highlights an important truth: needing multiple attempts to pass the CHP exam is common. The process is challenging, but with determination and the right mindset, success is within reach.

Here's her advice for staying motivated:

1. Don't Be Hard on Yourself

Life doesn't stop when you're preparing for the CHP exam. Most test-takers are juggling full-time jobs, family responsibilities and other commitments. "Give yourself grace," Bolen says. "If you know you're not ready, it's okay to defer. There's no shame in waiting until you're fully prepared."

2. Hold Yourself Accountable

Having a study partner or mentor can make an enormous difference. "For us, it was huge to have someone in the house to keep us accountable," Bolen explains. "If you don't have that, find someone who can check in on your progress and push you to stay on track."

3. Be Realistic About Study Time

The American Board of Health Physics (ABHP) recommends significant hours of study for the CHP exam, and Bolen emphasizes the importance of over-preparing. "If you think you'll need 300 hours, plan for 400. Life gets in the way, and you'll likely end up closer to your original estimate."

4. Celebrate Small Wins

Every step is progress. Passing Part 1 or even understanding a challenging topic is a victory worth acknowledging. "Passing Part 1 felt like a huge win for us, even before we finished the process," Bolen says.

5. Stay Positive

Bolen's husband had a unique approach when he realized he wasn't ready: he didn't force himself to take the exam. "He was honest with himself about whether he was prepared," she says. "That honesty saved him from unnecessary frustration and burnout."

The Reward of Becoming a CHP

The journey to becoming a CHP isn't just about passing an exam. It's about personal and professional growth.

For Bolen, earning the CHP certification has brought both validation and opportunity. She has already seen some benefits from her certification, including increased credibility and a bonus.

But for her, the certification is about more than immediate career advancement. It's also about being part of an esteemed community.

"Becoming a CHP has always been a dream," she says. "When I was a college intern, I told my mentor that one day I'd wear a Hawaiian shirt on a Monday in honor of the people taking the exam. About 16 years later, I finally did it. It's a symbol of

perseverance and belonging."

Bolen also sees potential for future opportunities. She and her husband plan to use their shared expertise for consulting work when they approach retirement.

"It's not just about the here and now—it's an investment in our future," she adds.

A Message to Aspiring CHPs

The CHP exam is a challenging but rewarding journey. If you don't pass on your first or even fifth attempt, remember that you're not alone. Bolen's story is proof that persistence pays off.

"Even the best struggle," she says. "But if you stay the course, give yourself grace and lean on your support system. You'll get there. The journey is worth it."

So, to all aspiring CHPs: Keep going. Your Hawaiian shirt moment is waiting.

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Corporate Headquarters:

50 Millstone Road, Building 200, Suite 215, East Windsor, NJ 08520, USA
Phone: +1 (888) 282-3446 • Email: director@aahp-abhp.org

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