



Overcoming barriers to a healthier lifestyle

Congratulations for reading this document. You are on the road to creating a healthier you. If positive health habits are not part of your daily lifestyle, this document will explain the reasons why that may be and will give you a roadmap for success.

Improved education- knowing what you should do- does not change behavior. Every American understands that cigarettes are harmful to their health, yet over 20% of Americans still smoke. ***Behavior change happens when the perceived value of changing is greater than the perceived difficulty of changing. In other words, it happens when you are ready.***

Dr. James Prochaska has identified these six stages of change.

Precontemplation. At this stage, a person is not even thinking of making a change. They think, "I can't, I never will be able to, I don't want to..."

Contemplation. Here, someone is seriously thinking about doing something, but has not taken action yet.

Preparation. A person has decided to take action. A date has been set to stop smoking. You've toured a prospective athletic club. You are making concrete plans to do something.

Action. You are doing something. You have stopped smoking; cut down on portion sizes; started some movement activity; you have gone in for the cancer screenings.

Maintenance. You maintain what you are doing. It is not always easy, but you stick with it.

Termination. Congratulations- you have arrived! Whatever you are working on is now a regular part of your life. You have created a positive habit and a change to your lifestyle.

Change does not come easy. Not because it is complex to understand, but because any change is difficult. Built in habits and addictions are hard to break. You may be doing something you know is good for you, but you do not necessarily enjoy it. Stay with it. Small investments pay huge dividends to your health.

Why is it so hard to live a healthy lifestyle?

- Do you see the value? Startling as it may seem, for some people who have never been reasonably fit, they may not know what good health feels like. They may not know what quality of life they are missing.
- Lack of time. Many people exist at a frantic pace. Finding time, or finding time for themselves, may be difficult.
- Inability to get a good night's rest. One may not feel like engaging in physical activity if they always feel tired.
- Lack of support. The positive feedback, encouragement, and understanding may not be there. Someone to assist you so you can have time to reward yourself may be difficult to find.



Why is it so hard to live a healthy lifestyle? (continued)

- Unrealistic goals. A person may set unrealistic goals for themselves and get discouraged when they do not meet them.
- Lack of knowledge. Not having a routine that gives results would discourage people from continuing with a fitness or weight management program.
- The ease of fast food and convenience food makes eating healthy difficult.
- Constant bombardment by advertisers tempting someone to eat unhealthy.
- Bad stress in life, difficult times, and inability to handle tough situations will sap the strength from a person.
- Lack of purpose. Someone may not have a goal or a motivating factor to improve their health. They may slip into acceptance of their health status.
- Lack of self confidence. Past failures lead to a belief that they can never change.
- Lack of results. After all the trying- nothing seems to change.

What must be present to make a positive lifestyle change?

- Be clear about your purpose for starting down the path to a new you. Why are you doing this? What is your reason to make a change? Write your reason on a sheet of paper and keep it near you. If you see no reason for yourself, what about becoming healthier for those important people in your life?
- Have realistic goals for both weight management and exercise. Writing goals down will dramatically increase your chance for success. Goals should be measurable and realistic.
- Develop a clear plan. Know what you are trying to accomplish each day. You should be clear about frequency (how many times per week), duration (how many minutes), and intensity (at what level of exertion) will you be doing your activity. Losing more than two pounds per week on a consistent basis is unrealistic.
- There must be an element of fun. You must find a way to enjoy either the program or the outcome. This is critical. Identify something you can enjoy. It may take time to build that enjoyment. Part of the enjoyment may be in the result you receive from doing the activity (being able to walk on vacation) more so than the activity.
- Ability to manage time. Time management is really priority management. Find a way to do the essentials, place your health next. You may have to begin to say no to requests. For most people, not taking care of their health is due to not making it a priority. Not lack of time. Learn to say no if need be. Learn to substitute.
- You must develop a support team. People who will hold you accountable. Find people who will provide you with positive feedback and will be encouraging and understanding.
- Good coping skills. Understand there will be setbacks. Be resilient. Develop an ability to refocus your energy. Learn to understand the triggers that set you back and not allow them get to a point where you quit.



What must be present to make a positive lifestyle change? (continued)

- Control your self talk. Listen to yourself. Do you plague yourself with negative self talk? If so, when a self defeating thought comes into your mind, immediately say, "STOP." Next, say a positive thought that will become "your personal success phrase." For example, if you say, "I do not want to exercise today", replace it with "I will exercise and succeed today." The more you say "STOP", the less the destructive thought will pop into your head. The more often you repeat a positive thought, the easier it becomes to behave that way.

Let's take these ideas and put them into a workable plan. Remember, if you are starting a new exercise program; always check with your personal physician for clearance.

1. Have a clear understanding of your reason to change. What is your purpose? What is motivating you?
2. Set measurable and realistic goals.
3. Develop your support system to encourage you and hold you accountable. Share your written goals with a least on support person.
4. Learn to say "STOP" to negative self talk and create your "Personal Success Phrase" to assist you to stay on track.
5. Plan in something fun, enjoyable.
6. Develop your plan.
7. Live your plan. Expect some relapses. Address them and continue.
8. Develop a reward system for yourself and celebrate many small successes. Do not wait for one final, large accomplishment.