

Learning How to Change Habits

A lot of taking care of your health is up to you. You decide what to eat and how much to eat. You choose whether to exercise and what to do. You make choices all day long.

Maybe you'd like to do something to improve your health. Perhaps your goal is to lose weight. But to reach your goal, you know you'll need to change what you eat, what you do for exercise, or both. You will raise your chances of reaching your goal by making a plan that's specific, realistic, and practical. Start with 2 or 3 small steps. Make sure the changes fit with your likes, dislikes, and schedule. Choose things you're sure you can do. Invite your family members to make the changes too.

Changing Habits: Getting Started

Think about your health and your habits. Then fill in your answers.

• What's my goal?

Example: I want to lose 10 pounds.

• Why did I choose this goal?

Example: I want to stay healthy and be around for my grandchildren.

• What change would help me reach my goal?

Example: I'll eat a fruit or vegetable with every meal.

• How important is it to me to reach my goal?

Example: It's very important.

• How sure am I that I can make this change?

Circle the number on the line below that shows how sure you are. If you're very sure you can make the change, circle "5." Choosing "1" means you don't think you can do it. Or maybe you're somewhere in the middle.

1	2	3	4	5
Not sure at all		Somewhat sure		Very sure



You can make it easier to eat healthful foods by stocking up on fruits and vegetables.

If you're not sure you can make this change, choose another way to reach your goal. Being sure you can do something increases your chances of sticking with a new habit.

• What part of this change would be hard for me?

• Why haven't I made this change before?

• How can I work around these problems?

• How ready am I to make this change?

Circle the number below that shows how ready you are. If you're very ready to make the change, circle "4" or higher. Choosing "1" means you're not ready at all.

1	2	3	4	5
Not sure at all		Somewhat sure		Very sure

If you're not ready to make this change, think about how to get ready. Then write the steps here.

Making my plan

To change a habit, make a plan that's as specific and realistic as possible. For each goal, think about four things:

1. How long will you try this goal? *Keep it short.*
2. Is it easy to do in your regular daily life? *Be realistic.*
3. Is it limited in scope? *Be specific.*
4. How often will you do this? *Make a plan.*

Take a look at these examples.

- **Not specific:** I will eat less.
- **Specific:** I will eat 1 slice of toast for breakfast instead of 2 slices.
- **Not realistic:** I will walk for at least 2 hours every day.
- **Realistic:** I will walk for 20 minutes at least three days a week during lunch for the next month.

If you need help making a plan, talk with your health care team. Write your plan below. Make a copy for your health care provider. Talk with your health care provider in a month about how you're doing with your plan.

Now write your own goals.

Eating:

For the next ____ (how long) ____ days each week (how often) I will _____

(Remember to keep it realistic and specific.)

Physically active:

For the next ____ (how long) ____ days each week (how often) I will _____

(Remember to keep it realistic and specific.)

It takes time to make new habits, but being patient and sticking to your plan will pay off in the long run. If you sometimes slip up and go back to your old ways, don't despair. Start fresh tomorrow. You can do it!

Tips to help you stick with your new habit

Things to Do	Examples
Get rid of unhealthy foods in your kitchen so they won't tempt you when you're trying to make new habits.	Stock up on vegetables and fruit instead of high-fat snacks.
Find time for your new habit by changing your schedule.	If you like to walk in the morning before work, get up a little earlier so you'll have time. Put it on your calendar and buddy up with a friend or family member.
Plan ways to get around any roadblocks that might come up.	Bring snacks from home instead of buying from the vending machine.
Ask for support from family, friends, and your health care team.	Ask a family member to watch the kids while you go for a walk.
Keep track of your efforts by writing down what you're doing.	Use your calendar, a notebook, a pedometer, or an online food and activity tracker.
Vary your routine to keep it interesting.	Instead of walking around your neighborhood, walk inside the shopping mall.
Reward yourself for sticking with your plan.	Take time to do something special for yourself.



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