

Changing Your Lifestyle



Marshfield Clinic



MINISTRY HEALTH CARE



Two Leaders, One Leading Heart Care Team



Ready to Change Your Lifestyle?

Before achieving lasting success, change in human behavior follows a cycle of distinct steps and stages with a natural tendency for relapse. What this means is one should try and try again if you want to make a genuine change. Overcoming some of the bad habits we've grown accustomed to will require fortitude and strength, but it can be done!



"Youth is wasted on the young," a quote from George Bernard Shaw, begins to take on meaning as we move through adulthood. We reflect back on the consequences of choices made in our younger years, and how they affect our present and future lives. Behaviors such as smoking, overeating and drinking have serious health implications over time. At some point, we come to the realization that improving our health will require change.

Changing a well-established habit comes with much frustration and difficulty. In their book *Changing for the Good*, psychologists James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente describe six stages an individual must successfully go through to achieve a lasting lifestyle change:



PRECONTEMPLATION - There is no thought of changing. Individuals who are *in denial* may not see that particular advice regarding health issues applies to them. An example of denial would be someone with high cholesterol *feeling immune* to health problems that strike others.

CONTEMPLATION - You begin to think about change but are not ready to act on it. You reflect on reasons you persist with a bad habit and what the benefit might be if you stop. Both the rational mind and emotions come into play to move towards a commitment to change.

PREPARATION - You prepare to make a specific change. You might try sampling low-fat foods, decreasing your alcohol intake or going for walks. You recognize that continuing the current behavior will have a negative affect on your health in the future. Strategies are developed to help yourself through temptations. An example would be chewing gum when the urge to smoke hits.

ACTION - You move from thinking about the change towards doing it. Besides going through the previous stages, to succeed, you must be committed, have alternatives you can be satisfied with and reward yourself for new behaviors.

MAINTENANCE OR RELAPSE - This involves incorporating the new behavior "over the long haul." Discouragement and relapses can stop the change process and even result in giving up. Most individuals find themselves "recycling" through stages several times before it becomes well established.

TERMINATION - The new behavior is fully established into a new way of living. Sometimes we may need reminders, but generally the lifestyle change is considered permanent.

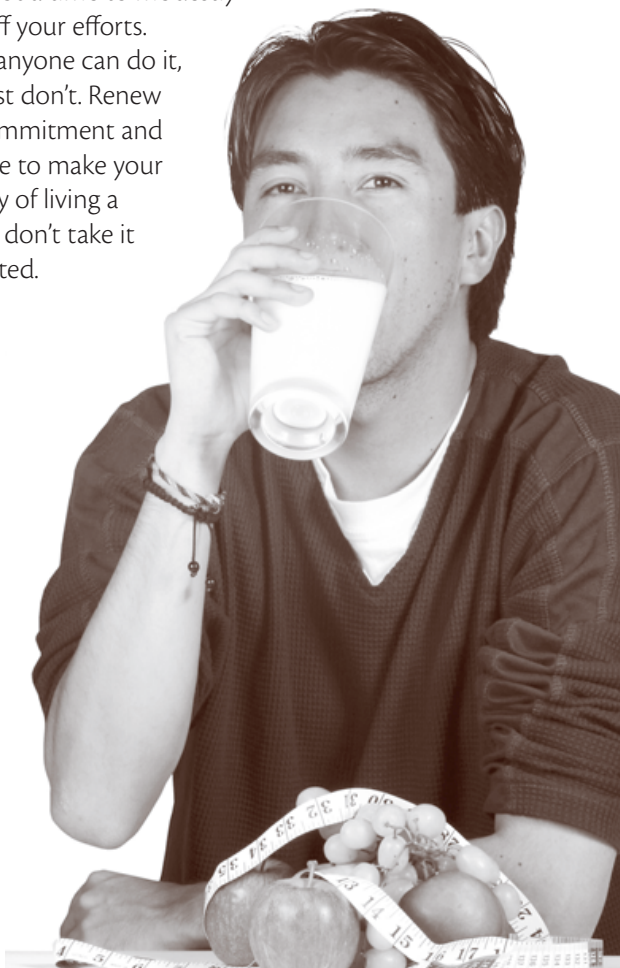
It's important to be aware and reflect on each of the stages as you move through them. Depending on your nature and desire, you may not be able to completely change a bad habit. Instead you might stay in the maintenance and relapse stage, succeeding for a while, and then returning to old habits. Don't let this conquer your will to strive toward the goal of healthy behavior. Only about one in five people get to the termination stage on the first try. This does not mean failure. It just means one relapse. Chalk it up to experience and plan to prevent future recurrences.

TIPS FOR

Change Maintenance

- Keep a reference list of the down side of those behaviors you want to change.
- Continue to remind yourself of the reasons you started this undertaking in the first place.
- Note the difficulties you've faced and overcome.
- Give yourself credit for your success so far.

This is not a time to modestly shrug off your efforts. Maybe anyone can do it, but most don't. Renew your commitment and continue to make your new way of living a priority; don't take it for granted.



For more information on the Marshfield Clinic and Ministry Health Care heart care team, ask your health care provider or visit www.oneheartcareteam.org.