

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Readiness for Health-related Behavior Change | August 2021



When you remind yourself why you want to be healthier, it's easier to stay motivated until the desired change becomes a routine part of your life.

Readiness for Health-related Behavior Change

Wanting to change unhealthy behavior is essential when you decide to focus on your physical and mental well-being, but it doesn't guarantee results. Change is inevitable; positive change is intentional.

People typically don't change their behavior like flipping a switch. Instead, they tend to go through a series of stages.

One way to understand the process of intentional behavior change is to study the Transtheoretical Model

on stages of change. (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross, 1992).

The stages are:

1. **Precontemplation:** No change in health-related behavior intended within the next six months. May be in denial or unaware behavior is problematic or health is compromised. May underestimate advantages associated with behavior change and dwell on negative aspects of change.
2. **Contemplation:** Recognition and intention to change health-related behavior within the next six months; may still feel ambivalent about change.
3. **Preparation:** Also referred to as determination, ready to act within the next 30 days with the belief that changing behavior will improve health and quality of life.
4. **Action:** Have started to change behavior within the last six months and intend to continue that course of action.
5. **Maintenance:** Desired behavior has been sustained at least six months with the intention to make it a permanent change and avoid backsliding.

A sixth stage, termination, is often not applied to health-related behaviors because of the likelihood of relapse or resumption of former behavior patterns, making it difficult to achieve.

The stages of change do not have definitive time periods. It's possible for one stage to be prolonged and another short depending on the circumstances. In addition, people can move in both directions. Most will cycle through the stages several times before an intended change takes root (Zimmerman et al., 2000).

Ready for Change?

Readiness for change in health behaviors should be associated with a specific activity, such as taking medications, quitting smoking, drinking less alcohol, improving sleep habits, choosing healthy foods or

getting more exercise – not a complex combination of goals, experts say. There are several ways you can assess your readiness.

One easy way is to use a 0-10 scale. Pick a behavior you want to change and ask yourself, on a scale of 0 to 10, “How ready am I to change this behavior?” The scale represents a continuum from “not prepared to change” to “already changing.” An honest score reveals whether motivation-based interventions will help elicit change.

Ask yourself some questions. Here are a few examples:

- What is the connection between my quality of life and not considering a change?
- What are the barriers to changing and how can I overcome them?
- How will I know when I have reached my goal and am able to maintain this change?

An article on the Transtheoretical Model published by [Pro-change® Behavior Systems](#) refers to 10 processes that influence progress through the stages of change. Awareness of these processes helps inform health improvement and management goals:

Cognitive and Affective Experiential Processes

1. Consciousness-raising (fact-finding)
2. Dramatic relief (acknowledge feelings)
3. Environmental re-evaluation (effect on others)

4. Self-re-evaluation (revise self-image)
5. Social liberation (external support)

Behavioral Processes

1. Self-liberation (commitment)
2. Counter-conditioning (use substitutes)
3. Helping relationships (get support)
4. Reinforcement management (use rewards)
5. Stimulus control (manage environment)

Another way to assess readiness for change is to engage in motivational interviewing with a behavioral health professional. This collaborative method has been shown to help people overcome fears and resolve ambivalence about or resistance to change. It stimulates intrinsic motivation, not by telling people what to do but by providing support and education so they can make informed decisions based on their personal goals and values.

According to studies, people are also more likely to be motivated to change when realistic health improvement goals and specific interventions are matched with each stage of change (Table 1).

There is no easy fix. Once you are ready for change, track your progress. Expect setbacks and celebrate milestones. When you remind yourself why you want to be healthier, it's easier to stay motivated until the desired change becomes a routine part of your life.

Table 1: Stages of Change: Characteristics and Strategies

Stage	Characteristics	Strategies
Precontemplation	May not be considering any change. May be in denial about a health problem or not consider it serious. May have tried changing and given up.	Understand risks versus benefits. Identify positive outcomes related to change.
Contemplation	Ambivalent about changing. May be weighing benefits versus barriers (e.g., time, cost, bother, fear, lack of enjoyment, no support).	Identify barriers and misconceptions. Address concerns. Identify support systems.
Preparation	Prepared to experiment with small changes.	Develop realistic goals and timeline for change. Obtain positive reinforcement.
Action	Taking definitive action to change behavior.	Positive reinforcement.
Maintenance	Striving to maintain the new behavior over the long term.	Encouragement and support.

Source: Adapted from Zimmerman et al., 2000; Tabor and Lopez, 2004; *Facilitating Behavior Change, Adult Meducation.com*