

Are You Ready for Change?

Tips for Making a Change, and Making It Last

Nobody's perfect, so there's probably something about your life, habits or routine that you'd like to change. Maybe you want to eat healthier or exercise more. To improve your chances of making a long-lasting change, try these tips:

1. List the benefits of making a healthy change.

To increase your chance of success, remember to pick just one or two areas of your life that you want to change. Then write down exactly what you could gain by making a change. You might note that you'd have more energy if you exercised, for example, or lower your blood pressure if you ate healthier meals.

2. Evaluate your readiness for change.

Behavior change happens over time, not overnight. Knowing where you are in the change process can help you develop a plan for moving forward – and ultimately achieving lifelong change. Which stage of change describes you?

- **Considering making a change** – You're thinking about change, and see some of the benefits. You see a lot of roadblocks, too, though. You're just not sure if change is possible or will be worth the effort.
- **Planning or taking some action** – Change now looks like a real possibility, and you believe that the benefits will be worth the work. You have a plan for overcoming roadblocks and you're starting to lay the foundation for change.
- **Making the change** – You are making the change, and working hard to make it part of your routine. You are committed to your goal.

3. Move towards change by creating a S-M-A-R-T goal. A S-M-A-R-T goal is:

- **Specific** – You know exactly what you need to do.
- **Measurable** – You can track your progress easily and objectively.
- **Attainable** – You have a clear vision of the steps you'll take.
- **Realistic** – You are honest with yourself about the challenges, and have a good plan for confronting them.
- **Timely** – You have a clear, reasonable timeline.

Example of a SMART goal: I will lose 10 pounds (measurable and specific) by June 1 (timely) by walking briskly outside four times a week (measurable, attainable and realistic).

4. Stay on track.

It takes time for a healthy change to become a solid habit. In the meantime, you're more likely to stay committed to your goal if you:

- **Expect the unexpected.** Be flexible, and develop a back-up plan to keep you moving forward when changes in your life, mood or motivation threaten to stop you in your tracks. Have an exercise video for rainy days, go-to healthy recipes for busy evenings and a good pep talk for moments of temptation. If you do slip up, learn from the experience and get back on track.
- **Have fun.** Make sure that something about the change is enjoyable for you. For example, find a form of exercise you enjoy, and switch it up if you begin to get bored. Many people are more committed to exercise if they have a work-out buddy. Others appreciate the chance to get lost in their favorite music or a good audiobook. If you're changing your diet, experiment with new recipes and ingredients and share your favorites with friends.
- **Celebrate success.** Make a list of rewards that you can afford, and that won't take you away from your goal. Celebrate large and small victories with something from your list – a good book (and an undisturbed hour to read it), fresh flowers, an evening out. Making new changes can be challenging, so take time to congratulate yourself for staying on track!

Need more help?

Check out the *Readiness for Healthy Change* e-learning program on our member website for extra tips on making a change. MHN's member website provides a variety of resources – from articles to assessments – to help you get fit, eat well, quit smoking and achieve other goals.

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Need help?

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week: **(800) 977-7637**

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