

Stages of Change

For most people, a change in behavior occurs gradually. One may move from being uninterested, unaware or unwilling to make a change, to considering a change, to deciding and to preparing to make a change. Action to change is then taken. Over time, attempts to maintain the new behavior occur. Relapses sometimes occur. However, these are part of the process of working toward life-long change.

Below each stage of change is described using dietary change as an example. If you are thinking of changing a behavior it may help to identify the stage you are in currently and the stages you may pass through on your way to making successful heart healthy changes.

Pre-Contemplation: You may not even consider changing at this time. Unhealthy eaters who are "in denial" may not see that the nutritional advice applies to them personally. People with high saturated fat diets (and possibly high cholesterol levels) may feel "immune" to the health problems that affect others. Unhealthy eaters may have tried unsuccessfully so many times to follow a healthy diet that they have simply given up.



Contemplation: You may feel ambivalent about changing. Giving up an enjoyed behavior may cause you to feel a sense of loss despite the perceived gain. During this stage, it helps to assess the benefits and barriers of changing (e.g., time, expense, hassle, fear, "I know I need to, but ...").



Preparation: You may be preparing to make a specific change. You may experiment with small changes as your determination to change increases. For example, sampling low-fat foods may be experimentation with or a move toward greater dietary changes. Switching to a different brand of butter or decreasing your intake of cheese signals that you have decided a change is needed.



Action: This stage is the one that your doctor is eager to see you reach. Many failed New Year's resolutions provide evidence that if the prior stages have been glossed over, action itself is often not enough. Any action taken should be praised because it demonstrates the desire for lifestyle change.



Maintenance & Relapse Prevention: Maintenance and relapse prevention involve incorporating the new behavior into your life long-term. Discouragement over occasional setbacks may halt the change process and result in you giving up. However, you may

This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of the instructions you receive from your health care providers. Discuss the risks and benefits of therapies with your doctor and always take medication as prescribed. For answers to other questions talk to your health care provider.

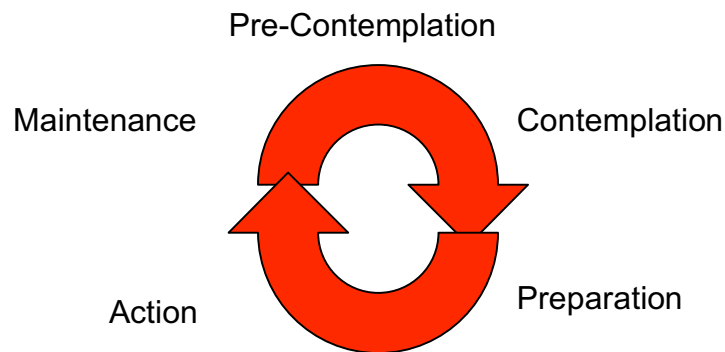
For more information or a referral, please call the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Preventive Cardiology Program at (212) 305-4866 or visit our website at:

<http://www.hearthealthtimes.com>.



find yourself passing through the stages of change several times before you successfully make the change a part of your everyday life. That's okay! Focus on the successful part of your plan ("You did it for six days; what made that work?"), problem solve and try again!

Change is a process, not a single event which happens overnight. Try to visualize yourself attempting to make a heart healthy change by moving through the stages of change in a circular pattern (see below).



This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of the instructions you receive from your health care providers. Discuss the risks and benefits of therapies with your doctor and always take medication as prescribed. For answers to other questions talk to your health care provider.

For more information or a referral, please call the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Preventive Cardiology Program at (212) 305-4866 or visit our website at: <http://www.hearthealthtimes.com>.

