

# Understanding the Stages of Personal Change

Starting an exercise program, quitting smoking, losing weight, managing stress better, eating healthier... if you've ever tried and failed at any of these behavior changes, take heart - it doesn't mean you're

The first step toward achieving a breakthrough is to understand what stage of readiness you're in. Take a moment now to think about a personal habit you could start or stop that would improve your health. Then, read through the following descriptions to determine your readiness stage.

- **Precontemplation.** Until this moment, you probably weren't considering a change. Or you may want to change, but you can't picture yourself making progress for the foreseeable future. If you're not thinking of changing this particular health behavior, you're probably in the precontemplation stage.

- **Contemplation.** You're seriously considering a change, but not committed yet. You're weighing the pros and cons of the problem as well as possible solutions, but struggling with the amount of time and energy required for success. If you intend to make a change within the next 6 months, you're most likely in the contemplation stage.

- **Preparation.** Now you're getting serious. You've made a commitment to try to change the habit in the next 30 days. You may also have attempted to change the habit at least once in the past year with some success, but you're still not where you'd like to be. If you're ready to change, you're in the preparation stage.

- **Action.** You've begun making a change. You're seeing some success and are committed to the healthy behavior. If you've been practicing the new habit consistently for less than 6 months, you're probably in the action stage.

- **Maintenance.** You've been practicing the desired behavior change for 6 months or more. You have every intention of continuing, and don't expect anything will keep you from doing so for the foreseeable future. If you're on track, you're most likely in the maintenance stage.

Although it may seem like you'd move from 1 stage to the next in a straight line, that's not necessarily so. Most people go back and forth between stages, sometimes reaching maintenance, while other times slipping back to preparation or contemplation.

The key to successful behavior change - ultimately reaching the maintenance level - is to accept you're going to go through these stages. Use success at each level as a building block or stepping stone to move to the next stage.

*For more details and materials to help you in the process, contact*

