

Changing behaviours and developing habits.

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I've talked before ([click here](#)) about having to change your behaviours and actions to improve your health and fitness. This is the first and most important step, and unfortunately is where a lot of people fall down.

Luckily the boffins and head doctors have come up with a “map” detailing the 5 steps we go through to change our behaviours.

And here they are...

Step 1 - Pre-contemplation.

eg – the stereotypical couch potato.

At this step, people:

- Have no real knowledge or idea about the new behaviour
- Don't think they *have* to change behaviour
- Don't think it has anything to do with them
- Think they are fine as they are
- Automatically “switch off” whenever the subject arises
- Might say “I don't know”, “I don't want to know” or “it doesn't apply to me”



Things to help people at this step:

- Don't go on about the subject. This usually pushes them into a bloody minded state of mind where they dig their heels in and refuse even more.
- Casually mention the benefits of the change in behaviour, and leave it at that.
- Casually mention that their “hero” does this behaviour, or agrees with it, and leave it at that.
- Don't pressure them into making an immediate change. The goal should only be to move them to the next step.

Step 2 - Contemplation.

eg – the stereotypical person who, just after Christmas, is thinking “I need to go to the gym”.

At this step, people:

- Are openly thinking and talking about making the change in their behaviour, *sometime in the future*.
- Are starting to look into how it may be done. eg they may be finding out where the nearest gyms are, or reading the diet/exercise tips in the papers, and thinking of doing some of these things *sometime in the future*.



- Still don't have real ideas about the hows/wheres/whens yet, but they know they do need/want to change behaviours, *sometime in the future*.
- Are more talk than action.
- Can spend a *very long* time at this step.

Things to help people at this step:

- Help gather information about the hows/wheres/whens.
- Offer examples of other people who have changed behaviours, and how they did it.
- Encourage and help the person to move to the next step as quickly as possible to avoid stagnating at the current step.

Step 3 - Preparation.

eg – person actually going to the gym to have a look at it, talk to the staff and find out best prices/offers for them.

At this step, people:

- Are actually making solid plans about *how* they are going to make the change.
- Are thinking how to fit the new behaviour into their current lives.
- Are working out a fairly solid starting date, a specific end goal and are trying to work out exactly how to get from one point to the other.
- Are dipping their toe in and testing the waters before making the leap of actually changing the behaviour.
- Can often *sound* more confident than they actually are.
- Can easily fall back to the previous step if they are not careful.



Things to help people at this step:

- Be supportive. They may be feeling nervous about making the change.
- Prevent the person getting lost in the fine detail and ensure they remember what their actual overall end goal is.
- Keep them realistic. If they are feeling nervous underneath, they often compensate with overambitious goals and targets.
- Without being too pushy, encourage them to the next step when they are ready, to avoid falling back to the previous step.

Step 4 - Action.

eg – person in January who has signed up for, and is taking part in, their first months worth of exercise.

At this step, people:



- Are actually performing their new behaviour.
- Feel the excitement and novelty value of new behaviour.
- Often feel relief that the planning has actually come to something.
- Often seek reinforcement of the new behaviour from people around them.

Things to help people at this step:

- Be supportive and encourage the person. Even with the best laid plans, some things *will* go wrong. It is important to help the person through these bumps so they don't have a crisis and give up at the first hurdle.
- Make the new behaviour as enjoyable and positive as possible.
- Ensure they know when they are doing things correctly. With anything new, it can be difficult to know what is wrong and right.

Step 5 - Maintenance.

eg – a person who regularly exercises consistently and regularly without having to “talk” themselves into it.

At this step, people:

- Made the change in behaviour at least 6 months ago and it has become an habitual part of their everyday lives.
- They are a “convert” and no longer need reminding why they are doing it.
- Need little outside support to keep the behaviour going as it has virtually become a habit.



Things to help people at this step:

- Because they are “self sufficient” there is little help needed.
- Periodically have a “check up” to ensure complacency has not set in and they are not resting on their laurels.

Final thoughts...

So that is it. If you are trying to change a behaviour for the better, see which of the above steps you are on, then go through the rest until you reach number 5.

As always, if you are trying to lose fat, get healthier, fitter or stronger, [contact me](#) and see how I can help.