

MAY

THE STAGES OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE
FIVE STAGES THAT MAKE OR BREAK OUR ABILITY
TO MOVE FORWARD

goals / habits / lifestyle / movement / change





Behavior Change

We all struggle with changing our habits, making lasting behavior changes, and dreaming of a time when we have achieved our goals. Most of us have a list a mile long of all the things we would like to do, change and become, yet we all collectively struggle with knowing how to make lasting change.

When wanting to make these changes we often focus on how we can change our habits. And while changing our habits *is* an important step to lasting behavior change, knowing and understanding the stages of behavior change can help us ensure that these new habits we are attempting to develop will stick around and become a lifelong change, rather than a three-week or four-month change.

So, where to start?

First, think of a change you would like to make in your life. This could be anything from “I want to change how I talk to my partner”, or “I want to move my body more”.

Next, let's examine the five stages of behavior change and determine where you fall in them.

Stage 1: Precontemplation

Precontemplation is the stage where you are not even thinking about changing or aware there's a problem. In fact, in this stage if a loved one

suggests a behavior change you might even become defensive and deny there is even a problem.

In this stage, there is little to be done because you have not yet acknowledged the desire for any kind of change.

Tips to Move Through this Stage:

- Consider asking a close friend or family member for some constructive criticism on some behaviors, that may be worth changing.
- Enter the conversation with an open mind and your defenses down, recognizing you do not have to take the advice they offer but it may give you a place to start.

Stage 2: Contemplation

Contemplation is the see-saw stage. This is when you have acknowledged that maybe a change needs to be made but for right now you are simply thinking about the behavior. You are weighing the pros and cons. The pros of changing and what that might look like in your life. The cons of the current behavior and how it affects you.

During the contemplation phase, you also are unsure if changing is worth the cost. You go back

“Behavior is the end result of a prevailing story in one's mind: change the story and the behavior will change.”

— Dr. Jacinta Mpalyenkana

and forth in the see-saw of your mind trying to determine how you feel about the behavior and if it warrants the cost of change.

Tips to Move Through this Stage:

- Try writing a list of pros and cons. Often we just think about it in our minds but it is really hard to visualize the worth of behavior change without seeing it on paper.
- Write down a list of all the different aspects of your life that would change if you decided to make the behavior change.

Stage 3: Preparation

This is the research phase of change. The see-saw has landed and you have decided the behavior is worth changing but you are not quite ready to act. It is important to remember, preparation is not action. Instead, it is researching and learning the ins and outs of how to effectively make the change.

This is a crucial step in success. Often times people will jump from contemplation to action without the proper preparation. If we act without thoughtful consideration and preparation, chances of long term success are decreased.

However, a word of caution - this is an easy step to get lost in. We tend to think simply because we are researching and preparing for change, we are changing. That is not the case. Talking and research are not actions, it is simply preparation. Don't fool yourself into thinking you are doing the hard stuff just yet.

Tips to Move Through this Stage:

- This is a great step to use a journal for. Record your research and what you are finding. List the steps for change and how to complete them. Writing everything down, will help you remember everything that needs to be done for a successful behavior change.
- Create a SMART goal. This will help you set a date in which to start your goal, moving you into the next stage.



Stage 4: Action

This is when you actively take steps to make change. This is the action part of the process. You are doing what needs to be done to make the changes you want in your life.

This is where the process of changing our habits comes in and if you have not had the chance to do so I highly recommend our [Developing a Habit Wellcast](#) and our two-part Atomic Habits Workshop series.

The action stage will be a lot of trial and error. This is where you figure out how to remove the obstacles and barriers that prevent you from changing in the way you would like. This stage is where you will likely need to give yourself some pep talks to continue forward and where some daily affirmations may help remind you why you are choosing to make this change.

It is also important to recruit friends, family, and maybe even a lifestyle/health coach in this process, for accountability and cheerleading reasons. When we are actively making change we need to have the most support possible.

Remember that this stage can take a variable amount of time. Some of us can act and build habits in 28 days and others may take a year or longer to form lasting behavior change.

Tips to Move Through this Stage

- Remember that action includes setbacks. No one is perfect at behavior change. It takes a lot of time to rewire the brain and create long lasting habits.
- Consider reading Atomic Habits by James Clear or watching our Atomic Habits Workshop for more ideas to help you during the action phase.

Stage 5: Maintenance

This is the last stage in behavior change but the one that is the hardest to achieve. Often, we think that after a few weeks of behavior change, we will

be in maintenance mode and be able to just continue without any hindrances to our new behavior. But maintenance still requires work and effort. You must navigate obstacles and continue to learn how to avoid relapsing into the old behavior, which can be easier said than done.

However, don't get discouraged! The longer you go without repeating the old behavior, the easier it becomes to maintain and naturally fit into your life. The maintenance stage is one where you can reflect on how the change has made a positive difference in your life.

The Process

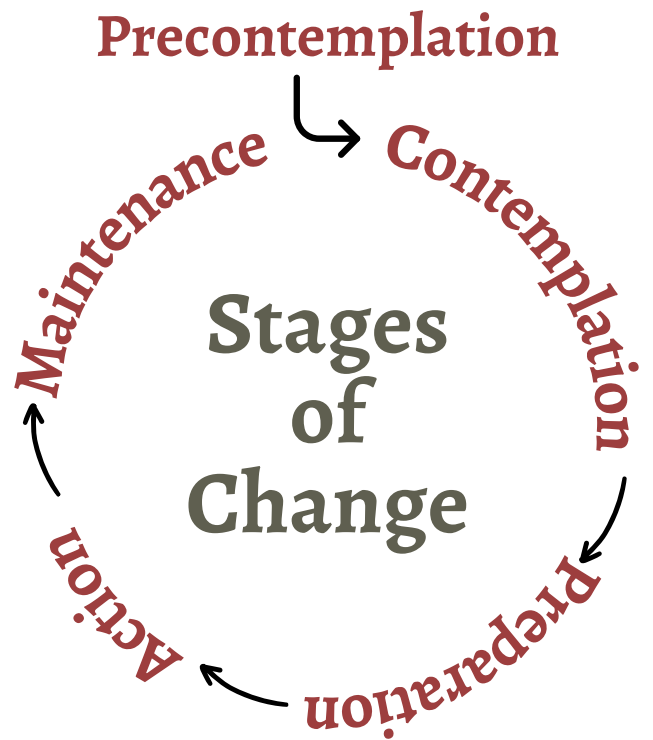
Now that you know a little bit about the stages of behavior change, I want you to think back to the original behavior you first thought of. Did you find that you fit in multiple stages of change? Maybe you bounced between them? That is normal! It is important to note that these stages are often fluid. Meaning, when it comes to lasting behavior change, we often bounce back and forth between the stages. We might be in pre-contemplation one day and the next, contemplation.

These stages don't just happen linearly because life, stress, and distractions happen. When it comes to behavior change it is important we give ourselves grace and time, to figure out how to make big changes in our lives and don't expect perfection right away.

Health Coaching

Because of this fluidity, it can help to have someone to bounce ideas off of and help you talk through your barriers. This is where meeting with a health/lifestyle coach can be very beneficial in helping you on your behavior change journey.

A gentle reminder: a coach is not there to tell you what and when to do it. They aren't there to give you the exact recipe to change, because successful behavior change is different for everyone. And ultimately, you know yourself and your barriers best. Instead, a coach is there to help provide you with tools and motivation to allow you to find the best methods that will work for you and your lifestyle to help you achieve your goals.



If having a coach sounds appealing to you, you are in luck! Healthy Lifestyles offers SIX sessions per calendar year to each of our participants. This is a great way to either get started or move to the next stage of behavior change, no matter where you are at in your journey.

We have several different coaches available to you, with a wide variety of certifications and specializations from yoga and mindfulness to diabetes prevention coach and intuitive eating counselors. Each with different life experiences and perspectives, there is sure to be a coach that works for you! Sign up today on Wellsteps!

