

Is it time for a change?

Best-selling author Brian Tracy said, "Your world can only get better when you get better. No one is going to come along and change things for you. If you want things to change, you are going to have to make the changes yourself." This is certainly true about health, isn't it?

With the exception of a child on the day of a test, no one ever wants to be sick. Yet, many of us fail to

change our habits and daily patterns of behavior until we become sick or experience physical limitations. Rather than wait until that happens or feel guilty about it, we need to determine where we are in the process of change with regard to our health.

The Change Model was developed by psychologists who identified the different stages of decision making behaviors. You can use this model to understand and "improve" where you are in terms of any health-related behavior — whether it's exercising, getting more sleep, quitting smoking, eating better, or managing medications. As we explore the five stages of change, think of a "health habit"

HEALTHY BOTTOM LINE



Mick Bates

you'd like to improve so you can discover where you are and how you can make progress.

Stage 1: Precontemplation

Some people are living at this stage. Individuals in precontemplation rarely intend to start a healthy behavior in the near future or are perhaps even unaware of the need to change. Not knowing the consequences of continuing a behavior, underestimating the benefits of changing, or overestimating the barriers keep people in unhealthy behaviors. So, education and awareness are the key at this level. Once someone knows what's at stake, what resources are available to support them, and that only they have the power to make this change, they can motivate themselves with positive rewards or negative consequences to move them to the next stage.

Stage 2: Contemplation

You're probably familiar with this one. Contemplation is when you're playing with the idea of taking action within the next six months. When you're in this phase, you're aware of the "pros" of making a change, but are being held back by the "cons" or costs, in terms of time, effort, energy and money involved.

At this point, you know you need to do something, but haven't gotten there yet. It's easy to get stuck in this stage. The keys here are imagining having made the change and utilizing positive incentives to propel yourself from thought to action.

Stage 3: Preparation

When you're in the preparation phase, you know the time has come; you've decided that you

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will take action in the immediate future. You have a plan (even if you haven't considered every detail) to do something specific about beginning a healthy habit.

Getting started is often the hardest part.

To enhance your success, make a commitment to yourself or to someone who will support you, and set a start date for a specific, achievable action.

Stage 4: Action

Nike's slogan, "Just do it!" reflects the importance of the action phase. When you're in this stage of change, you are already practicing healthy lifestyle habits.

Experts say it takes six weeks to create a habit but it takes six months to really make it "stick" so you don't "back slide" into older, familiar patterns of behavior.

In the action phase, some people find it hard to stay the course and continue something that is new and not yet familiar.

Focusing on the immediate benefits of a change in health and getting encouragement from others can help you hang in there until the going gets easier.

Stage 5: Maintenance

Maintaining a healthy change for longer than six months presents the biggest challenge for some people.

But for many, this is the easy part because they've made a "healthy habit" part of their life and who they are. If they briefly get off track, they return to the healthy habit over and over again because of the benefits they experience.

Research shows that successful change in one area of health provides the positive reinforcement and motivation to tackle other behaviors that can lead

to additional improvements in health.

So what about that "healthy habit" you'd like to create? Where are you right now in the process of change? If you're in contemplation, how can you move to preparation?

The rewards can be exponential.

We invite you to apply this "model" to any aspect of your health or life, and share it to help friends, co-workers, and loved ones.

Bottom line? Change in life is guaranteed.

When it comes to your health, it's up to you to whether that change will be positive or negative. What steps will you take this month to improve your health?

— Bates owns and operates **BODYWORKS** in Beckley. Columns from previous months can be viewed at Register-Herald.com; search **Healthy Bottom Line** or under the **Articles** tab under the **News Drop** down at Bodyworkshfr.com.

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