

NEW-LIFESTYLES STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOUSM CHANGING BEHAVIOR FACTS

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When it comes to helping someone to modify a behavior or to make a significant lifestyle change, it is important to remember that changing a behavior is a process—not an event.

Changing a behavior unfolds over months and years, and maintaining the new behavior can be a lifelong effort. Generally, a specific new behavior must be practiced until it becomes a habit. A habit that we continue practicing over time becomes an incorporated part of our lifestyle. As a lifestyle, the changed behavior happens without any conscious thought on our part.

For health and fitness professionals, this means that in order to reverse the sedentary lifestyle many Americans have adopted, we first need to focus on changing specific behaviors that trigger this lifestyle. As changing behavior is a process, we need to encourage individuals to change their behavior little by little until they reach their ultimate goal of achieving a new active, healthy lifestyle. It's not going to happen overnight—so patience and perseverance are essential!

The process of changing a behavior is best described by the Transtheoretical Model, or Stages of Change, developed by Dr. James Prochaska and Dr. Carlo DiClemente. This idea of common change processes and six distinct stages came from interviews with people who had successfully given up smoking. It is called the Transtheoretical Model because it looks at what is

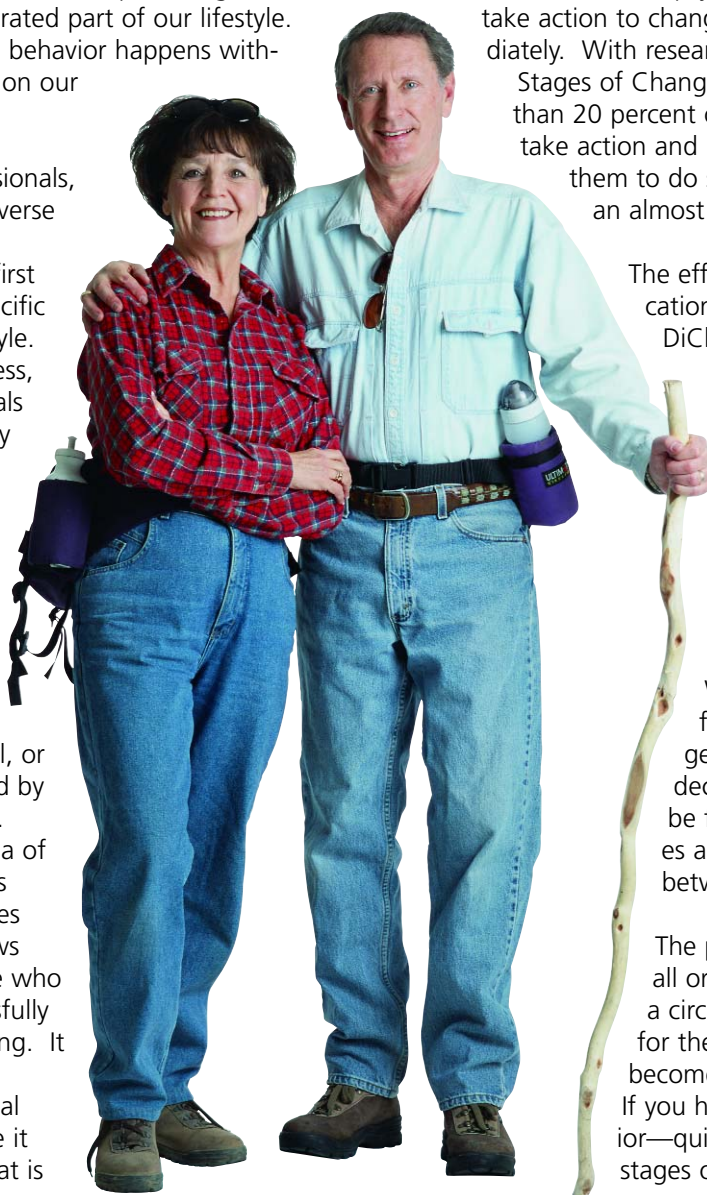
similar and successful across a number of different theories of psychology. This model quickly became popular as the Stages of Change with its potential for practical application and simplified, effective new understanding of the process of behavior change.

Characterized by six distinct stages, Prochaska and DiClemente's Stages of Change correspond to an individual's readiness to change, which will vary over time. Prior to the Transtheoretical Model, psychologists pushed individuals to take action to change specific behaviors almost immediately. With research conducted to support the Stages of Change, it has been found that fewer than 20 percent of individuals are actually ready to take action and make the change. By forcing them to do so, we set up these individuals for an almost guaranteed failure.

The effective method of behavior modification is to use Prochaska and DiClemente's Stages of Change model to choose an intervention for an individual based upon the appropriate stage, or apparent readiness of that individual. In this model, success is defined not just by changing the behavior but by any movement toward change, such as a shift from one stage of readiness to another.

Whether it's a recommendation from a medical professional, a suggestion from a friend or a self-made decision, the process of change can be filled with pitfalls, glowing successes and all of the ups and downs in between.

The process of change is gradual (not all or nothing) and oftentimes moves in a circular (non-linear) direction. It's easy for the person making the change to become stuck at any time in the process. If you have ever tried to change a behavior—quit smoking, lose weight, these stages of change will feel familiar.



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PROCHASKA AND DICLEMENTE'S STAGES OF CHANGE

PRE-CONTEMPLATION

"Ignorance is bliss."

In the pre-contemplation stage, individuals may be in denial that they have a problem or need to make a change. They often expect others to change, as they themselves are resistant, and want others to validate their current behaviors. Usually referred by others, there is a high drop out rate at this stage due to a lack of personal commitment. The old adage that you can't change someone, they have to be ready to change themselves rings true at this stage.

Techniques for supporting clients at this stage:

- Encourage re-evaluation of their current behavior and self-exploration.
- Explain risks associated with the behavior.
- Normalize and validate their lack of readiness for the change.
- Emphasize that the decision is theirs to make the change.

CONTEMPLATION

"Just window shopping."

In the contemplation stage, people start to acknowledge a problem and are eager to talk about it, but they are not quite ready to make a change. They substitute thinking for action. They may fear failure or loss and can get stuck in a rut of chronically contemplating their decision to change.

Techniques for supporting clients at this stage:

- Normalize and validate their lack of readiness for the change.
- Emphasize that the decision is theirs to make the change.
- Encourage evaluation of the pros and cons of change.
- Identify and promote new, positive outcomes of the change.

PREPARATION

"Testing the waters."

In the preparation stage, there is a great deal of planning and skill building. Individuals announce and make public their intentions to change. While they might still be ambivalent, the person may have initiated a few small behavioral changes. This is a very important stage because the individual finally has reached a high level of awareness about the problem.

Techniques for supporting clients at this stage:

- Encourage small initial steps.
- Support client through barriers to change and brainstorm problem solving solutions.
- Identify client's social support network.
- Teach, if necessary, skills for effective behavior change.

ACTION

Often the briefest stage, taking action is also the busiest stage for an individual and requires the greatest commitment of time and energy. During the action stage, the changing individual receives the greatest recognition from others which results in an increase in the individual's self-esteem.

Techniques for supporting clients at this stage:

- Provide client with lots of support.
- Work with client to restructure cues that might trigger a relapse to old behavior.
- Keep communication open to actively listen when your client needs support.
- Encourage client by reminding them of the long-term benefits of change.

MAINTENANCE

This stage is characterized by the person's continuance of the change in which they are struggling to prevent relapse. Although in this model, relapse is not seen as a failure but as an opportunity to learn from unsuccessful attempts. Maintenance is a long, on-going process in which the behavior is more thoroughly adopted.

Techniques for supporting clients at this stage:

- Plan for follow-up support.
- Discuss coping with relapse.
- Evaluate trigger for relapse.
- Reassess motivation and barriers.
- Brainstorm alternative, more effective coping strategies.

TERMINATION

For many people, the maintenance stage lasts forever. The Stages of Change model accepts this situation as normal. But for some people and some behaviors, the behavior change reaches a termination stage in which the problem, temptation or threat no longer exists.

Changing a behavior unfolds over months and years, and maintaining the new behavior can be a lifelong effort. When making important lifestyle changes, patience and perseverance are essential!

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