

Learning How to Change Habits

Toolkit No. 14

A lot of your diabetes care is up to you. You may have already changed some habits to take better care of yourself. Perhaps you exercise more now than you did before you were diagnosed with diabetes. Maybe you'd like to change other habits but you're stuck—you feel like you just can't get started. **Changing habits can be hard to do. But you can learn a step-by-step approach that will help you reach your goals.**

What happens when you change a habit?

Every change involves several stages:

- **Precontemplation.** Maybe you think that a change would help but you're not ready or interested. You feel the change would be too hard to make.
- **Contemplation.** You're thinking about making a change, but not right away. At this stage, the costs of making the change still outweigh the benefits.
- **Preparation.** You're ready to make the change within the month. You've made a realistic plan and you've gathered what you need to carry out your plan.
- **Action.** You've taken action and started your new routine. But sometimes you're tempted to go back to your previous habits.
- **Maintenance.** After more than 6 months of your new routine, you're used to doing it. It's now a habit.

Think about what stage you're in for changes you'd like to make. Are you in the early stages—not yet ready for a change? Or maybe you'd like to make a change but you don't know how. Knowing what stage you're in can help you choose the best approach to changing habits and attaining your goals.



You can make it easier to eat low-fat foods by stocking up on fruits and vegetables.

Changing Habits: Getting Started

Think about your diabetes care. Then fill in your answers.

What's my goal?

What change would help me reach my goal?

What stage am I in for this change?

- ☐ I'm not ready to change right now.
- ☐ I'm thinking about doing it sometime.
- ☐ I might do it in the next month.
- ☐ I'm doing it now.
- ☐ I've been doing it for more than 6 months.

Not quite ready to take action?

Here's what to do next.

To move from the "not-ready" stage to the action stage:

- Consider the benefits of the change. For example, if you took a half-hour walk every morning, how would that help your health? What effect would it have on your weight?
- Answer these questions:
What part of this change would be hard for me? _____
Why haven't I made this change before? _____
How can I work around these problems? _____

Ready to make a change?

Here's what to do next.

To change a habit, you'll need a realistic, achievable plan. Your plan should be as specific as possible. Your health care team can provide information to help you. Write your plan here:

- **Here's what I'll do:**

Example: I'll take a brisk walk 5 days a week for half an hour.

- **Here's when I'll do it:**

Example: I'll walk after breakfast.

- **Here's what I need to get ready:**

Example: I'll need comfortable walking shoes.

- **This might get in the way of my plan:**

Example: If it's raining, I won't be able to walk outside.

- **If that happens, I'll do this instead:**

Example: I'll go to the recreation center and walk around inside.

- **Here's when I'll start:**

Example: I'll start my walks on Monday.

Ready to take action or already taking action?

Here's what to do next.

Once you've started your new habit, you'll want to take steps to keep doing what you're doing. These steps can help:

- Set up things around you so it'll be easier to stick with your new habit. For example, stock up on vegetables and fruit instead of high-fat snacks.
- Make it easy to find time for your new habit by changing your schedule or your routine. If you prefer to walk in the morning before work, get up a little earlier so you'll have time.
- Think about roadblocks that might come up and plan ways to get around them.
- Ask for support from family, friends, and your health care team. For example, ask a family member to watch the kids while you go for a walk.
- If you sometimes slip up and go back to your old habit, don't despair. You can start fresh tomorrow.
- Keep track of your efforts by writing down what you're doing.
- Vary your routine to keep it interesting. For example, if you're tired of walking around your neighborhood, walk inside the shopping mall instead.
- Reward yourself for sticking with your plan.

Remember: it takes time to make new habits, but your patience and persistence will pay off in the long run.

