

# Live Your Optimal Life in 2012!

## The process for making lasting change

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In last month's Health & Wellness, we focused on preparing you to transform your life in 2012. This month we focus on the process for making sustainable health and lifestyle changes. As noted in our last article, making behavior and lifestyle change is notoriously difficult, but there are strategies to make success more likely and sustainable. Homeostasis, which is an innate quality making our mind and body resistant to change, means we have to prepare ourselves and plan accordingly in order to override the status quo. There are several steps in the change process and each takes planning to increase the likelihood of success. Although there are steps as one moves from status quo to a new behavior, change is a non-linear process, and moving through this process is more advantageous than random attempts at change, which are often possible, but not sustained.

Pre-contemplation is the stage when we have limited awareness of a problem behavior. We're human. We tend to ignore or rationalize behavior that is disadvantageous. We think, "it's OK that I over-eat because my life is stressful and I deserve it."

When we move to contemplation, we exhibit some ambivalence regarding our behavior. We begin to think about making a change but we're not ready to commit to it. In this stage the thinking is, "I know I shouldn't eat this much but eating before bed calms me down when I'm stressed." At this stage you are willing to consider a behavior or lifestyle change but may not be ready to take action to do so.

Preparation means we have committed to making a change and need to create a plan to make it happen. The commitment to change in itself does not adequately prepare you. Making short- and long- term goals, mapping out action steps, exploring barriers that might get in the way and developing options to achieve your goal(s) are all part of preparing to make a change. If this stage is not thoroughly completed, a plan to change frequently fails.

Once you have adequately prepared, you are ready to take action. In this phase of change, the focus is on altering the behavior you desire to change by implementing the action steps outlined in your plan. Reviewing the plan each week. Seeing what worked and what didn't. Then deciding how the plan might need to be adjusted in order to move in the right direction is necessary. Studies show that sustainable behavior change takes three or more months of implementing the new behavior- moving us from status quo to something new- and sometimes longer depending on the change we are trying to make.

Maintenance means the new behavior has become a way of life. There may be periodic lapses, but you can quickly return to the new way of being without a significant relapse because the behavior is now part of who you are.

There are two powerful and progressive supports available to make the changes you desire achievable- integrative health coaching and mindfulness.

An integrative health coach is your partner in working through the change process so you can successfully make the behavior and lifestyle changes you desire. The integrative health coach

provides the structure, support, motivation and accountability necessary for most of us to make real, life-long changes. The great news is lasting change IS possible and individuals are capable of making behavior changes in their own best interest. Integrative health coaching is based on this premise. Remember, if change was easy, we'd all be doing the things that we know are best for our health and well-being.

The other resource that makes sustainable change more likely is developing a mindfulness practice. Mindfulness helps develop authentic self-awareness and clarity to identify the existence and cause of our habitual thinking, and repetitive, subconscious behavior patterns that may have obstructed sustainable progress in these areas in the past. Participating in a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course is the optimal way to begin and maintain a personal mindfulness practice. Being more aware and present in each moment of your life builds a sense of calm and ease that goes hand-in-hand with making and sustaining behavior change.

With disciplined and continuous effort that includes support from an integrative health coach and a mindfulness practice, you can overcome the old homeostasis and establish new patterns of behavior that the body and mind naturally want to maintain - a new homeostasis for 2012.

### The Change Process

What You Are Today

What You Can Become



Limited awareness of problem: "I can't change" or "I won't change"

Willing to consider change. Weigh pros/cons of change. Explore ambivalence toward making a change.

Create plan to fully prepare for change- set goals, action steps, explore barriers, and options to achieve goal.

Focus is on altering behavior by implementing plan to achieve goal. Assess progress, learn from challenges and make changes to plan as necessary.

Successfully and regularly implement the new behavior. New behavior is becoming a way of life.

#### Tools & Support to help you progress:

- Integrative health coaching
- Mindfulness

You can learn more about Integrative Health Coaching at [www.BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com](http://www.BetterChoicesHealthCoaching.com) and MBSR at [www.IntegrativeMindfulness.net](http://www.IntegrativeMindfulness.net)