

Stages of Change

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People who achieve fitness goals understand this: change is a process. Success in health & fitness isn't magical or lucky, rather the result of determined focus and effort. Executing change is a necessity when one desires to improve health. By understanding the process of change, we can better position ourselves to achieve even the most challenging of fitness goals.

The **Transtheoretical** model, better known as the **Stages of Change** model, is a concept in sport & exercise psychology that outlines the phases in the process of change. In fitness, the model is applied to behaviors specifically related towards exercise. There are five stages of change in which individuals cycle throughout life. Fitness professionals and exercisers can benefit from understanding and applying the stages of change to improve health.

Stages of Change model:

Stage 1 – Pre-contemplation: individuals in this stage are not interested and do not intend to

make any change in the near future.

Stage 2 - Contemplation: individuals may be thinking about making a change in lifestyle or habits, yet have not taken action.

Stage 3 - Preparation: individuals may be making changes but plan to make more regular change in the near future.

Stage 4 - Action: these are people who are executing the change they desire; however, the change is relatively new.

Stage 5 - Maintenance: these individuals have made changes and have consistently maintained the behavior for six months or more. (1)

There can be countless reasons why people fail to change. Here are a few common “mis-steps” individuals make when seeking to improve health:

- **Incorrect stage** Identifying the current stage is extremely important. At times, people are not successful because they believe they are in one stage, but their

behaviors indicate otherwise. This lack of awareness may cause problems when unexpected challenges arise.

Tip: Identify your current stage based on health behaviors.

- **Pump your brakes**

There are cases where people feel they are progressing more rapidly than expected. This is dangerous and can lead to skipping phases of change. Fitness professionals see this often when individuals fail to contemplate the time or financial commitments required to make change, and jump right to action (skipping the stage of preparation). This hubris can lead to feelings of anxiety and/or frustration when the desired outcomes do not come to fruition.

Tip: Focus on mastering the challenges of your current stage before progressing.

- **Distrusting process**

The fact we desire to change is an indication we are not satisfied with current results. It may be necessary to change habits, thoughts, and values before success can be

achieved. This process takes time. If you're not confident your strategy will lead to success, find a strategy in which you are confident.

Tip: Trust the process and if necessary, change your approach.

We all want to improve some area of life. Understanding the phases involved in change, avoiding common mis-steps, and trusting our process can help us see the change we desire. Whatever your health & fitness goals, you are able to achieve each of them as long as you are willing and capable of making change.

1. Clark, Michael. 2012. *NASM Essentials of Personal Fitness Training (4th edition)*. Baltimore, MD. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

