

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE



A Word About the Process of Change

Changing your lifestyle isn't an event that happens overnight. Instead, it's a process that occurs gradually over time. During different phases of the program, you may feel differently about this process of change. Initially, you may be preoccupied with the program, talking and thinking about it and filled with anxious anticipation. Next, you may feel awkward and somewhat panic stricken. Your life may feel 'chaotic' as you let go of old 'anchors' or ways of doing things (e.g. eating high fat lunches at the deli) and begin executing new healthy behaviors (e.g. taking a 10 minute walk at lunch). Finally, once you integrate the new behaviors into your life, you'll likely feel a growing sense of stability and calm.

Resisting Change: Common Strategies

During the change process, you may find there are times when you feel unable to embrace the new challenges—it's too stressful! Don't worry... you are not alone! Some common tactics we all use to resist changing appears below. Most people have used these tactics at one time or another in their lives. Read each tactic and identify those strategies you have used in the past to resist changing, for example, your eating habits.

Delay: You procrastinate or forget the things you "really wanted to do."

Example: "I really do want to take the low fat cooking class. I know it'll help, but I just don't have time. I'll sign up next time."

Denial: You refuse to acknowledge an actual event or personal experience that is apparent to others.

Example: "I don't eat a lot of desserts" (you say as you finish your daily éclair at lunch).

Rationalizing: You conceal your feelings, thoughts, and actions by creating a set of reassuring or self-serving but incorrect explanations.

Example: "I can't change how I eat because I have to cook for me."

Avoidance: You behave in ways that prevent you from situations or people you experience as threatening.

Example: "I'm just too late for my office visit today. I'm not going to go."

Strategies for Overcoming Resistance

Common reasons people resist change are noted below. Strategies for overcoming resistance are also given.

Negative, Pessimistic, Anxious Thoughts

Sometimes, people harbor negative, pessimistic or anxious thoughts about the changes they are about to undertake. Example: "This will be another fruitless attempt to manage my weight... and I'm scared." For most people, talking about fears and concerns to a trusted person can help reduce the intensity of the fear and foster a more realistic perspective about the change process. Social support and aid from helpful others are powerful allies for overcoming negative, pessimistic and anxious thoughts.

Lacking Necessary Skills or Knowledge

Deep down, some people believe that they don't have the needed skills or knowledge to change. For example, "I don't know how to exercise... I'll never be able to do this program." Seeking out needed information and acquiring necessary skills can help you to face this challenge. This medical weight loss program is designed to provide you with both the knowledge and skills necessary for successful weight management.

Payoffs For Unhealthy Behaviors

Sometimes, people maintain unhealthy behaviors because there are powerful rewards for doing so—like getting attention from others, immediate gratification of needs, or avoidance of work or stress. For example, eating large amounts of chocolate may fulfill the need to be treated special and takes away stressful feelings. Taking an honest look at what you gain from your unhealthy behavior can help you identify your needs and create healthier ways of meeting these needs.

Your Assignment

First, identify the resistance strategies you use. Using the information above, identify what 'triggers' your resistance tactic. Next, use one of the strategies listed to overcome your resistance. Set small goals that you can achieve to launch yourself into action.