

There is a process that everyone goes through when creating healthier habits. It is often referred to as “Stages of Change” or “readiness for change.” In 1979, psychologist James Prochaska first described this process for those quitting smoking. Since then, the Stages of Change model has been used to help individuals with changing eating habits, physical activity, stress management, alcohol or drug use, and many other behaviors. The Stages of Change include five steps, which are described in the table below.

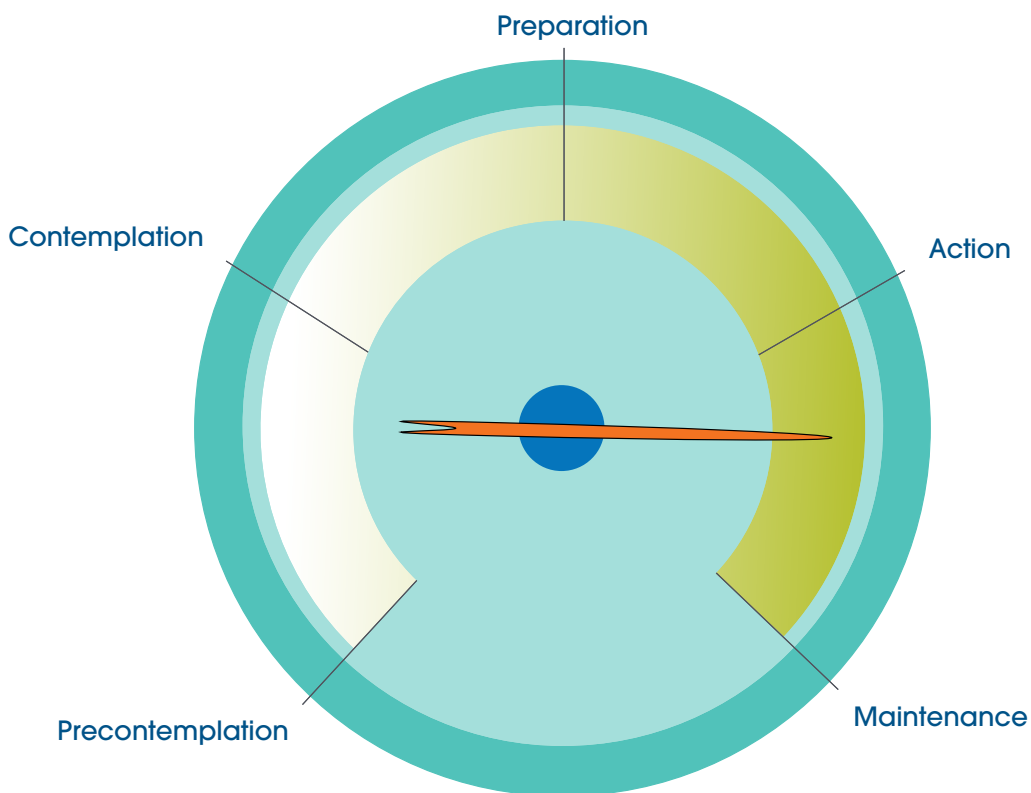
## The Stages of Change

Stage	Description	Strategies for Support
<b>Precontemplation</b>	People in this stage are often unaware that a behavior needs changing. If they are aware that a behavior needs to change, they are not intending to change right now.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Affirm that you are on your own timeline and are not ready to make change right now.</li> <li>■ Gather more information about the behavior you want to create, or how your current behavior may be impacting you.</li> <li>■ Explore core values.</li> </ul>
<b>Contemplation</b>	People in this stage are aware that a behavior needs to change and they are seriously thinking about changing it. Individuals in this stage are not ready to take action at this time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Affirm that you are on your own timeline and are considering making a change.</li> <li>■ Create a pro and con list.</li> <li>■ Imagine who you will be when you make this change and why this is important for you.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparation</b>	People in this stage are getting ready to change a specific behavior. Typically, they are creating a plan and are mentally “gearing themselves up” to take action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Set a small, achievable goal.</li> <li>■ Identify your strengths, which will help you be successful.</li> <li>■ Identify any obstacles which may need support as you get ready to take action.</li> </ul>
<b>Action</b>	People in this stage are actively working to change their behavior. This is the most intensive stage as an individual is changing their behavior and associated beliefs and attitudes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Set up a system of accountability (family, friends, counselor, etc.).</li> <li>■ Practice the new behavior and remember that changing behavior is a process.</li> <li>■ Celebrate your wins.</li> <li>■ Plan for lapses, which are common during times of stress or life change.</li> </ul>
<b>Maintenance</b>	People in this stage are solidifying their new healthy behavior(s) and creating support structures so the behavior will become long lasting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Evaluate what is working for you and what needs adjustment.</li> <li>■ Revisit your goal and adjust, as needed.</li> <li>■ Revisit your core values and why this behavior change is important to you.</li> <li>■ Plan for lapses, which are common during times of stress or life change.</li> </ul>

## APPLYING THE STAGES OF CHANGE

It is invaluable for both patients and practitioners to understand where an individual is within the Stages of Change model. Understanding a patient's story includes understanding their readiness for change. By identifying where a patient is within this model, supportive strategies can be used to increase confidence and support lasting behavior change. There is no right or wrong within the Stages of Change and each person will progress based on their readiness and the magnitude of the behavior they wish to change.

### Readiness Gauge



- 1) The behavior or habit I would like to change is \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) I am in the \_\_\_\_\_ stage right now.
- 3) These are the things I need to move forward or maintain \_\_\_\_\_.

### References

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2. Zimmerman G, Olsen C, Bosworth M. A 'stages of change' approach to helping patients change behavior. *Am Fam Physician.* 2000;61(5):1409–1416.
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