

How Change Happens

Changing unhealthy behavior is a process, a journey through five stages. You can't skip a stage, but it's rarely a straight path to a healthy behavior. Most people move in and out of each stage more than once before achieving a lasting change. Chances are, each time you pass through a stage, you'll have a deeper understanding of the pitfalls that lie ahead and the many benefits of the change you're working on. You'll learn from your setbacks. Then, with renewed effort, you can move ahead. By taking one stage at a time, you'll succeed in making a lasting change—one you can live with!

What Stage Are You At?

-  **Not ready.** You don't even want to think about changing right now. You might be willing to consider change someday, but not in the next few months.
-  **Thinking about it.** You see your current situation as a problem or a risk to your health. You're ready to consider the possibility of change, and you're open to learning about the benefits change would bring.
-  **Getting prepared.** You're getting ready to take action soon. You've committed to changing, you're making a plan, and you're asking others for support.
-  **Taking action.** You're setting your plan in motion. You're taking steps, tracking your progress, and using your support system.
-  **Staying on track.** You started changing your behavior some months ago. Now you're focused on sticking with your new, healthier habits.

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Thinking About

EATING SMART



Not Ready to Eat Smart?

Right now, you may not be interested in changing the way you eat. Like many people, you may underestimate the benefits of healthy foods. Truth is, improving your eating habits is one of the best changes you can make for your health. So why not spend a few minutes thinking about what you eat? This booklet can help you get started. To make the most of what you find out, share this booklet with the important people in your life.



What Is Eating Smart?

Eating smart doesn't mean giving up foods you like and forcing down foods you don't. It's really about keeping meals interesting with a variety of foods. It means eating *more* basic foods, like fruits and vegetables, and eating *fewer* processed foods. In short, it's about making small, healthy changes that work for you.

How Healthy Is Your Diet?

How well do your eating habits stack up? Ask yourself the questions below. Each "yes" answer is an area where you may want to improve your eating habits. Do you:

- Eat fast food every week?
- Choose white bread more often than whole-grain bread?
- Forget to eat fruit daily?
- Choose potatoes instead of brightly colored vegetables?
- Pick whole milk and regular cheese more often than low-fat choices?
- Eat high-fat meats, such as hamburgers, more often than low-fat ones, such as fish?
- Add lots of salad dressing, butter, or margarine to your food?
- Choose soft drinks or juice drinks more often than water?

This booklet is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.
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Are You Ready to Decide?

Can you see a better future for yourself? Change is a choice. It's also a process, and knowing where you are is important. Now that you are more aware of yourself, are you ready to act? Do you believe that eating smarter will benefit your life? If you're excited about change and the possibilities it brings, you're ready to move on.



At the Center of Change

Choosing change is much more than a leap of faith. It's what you've been working toward. Remind yourself of all the ways you benefit from eating smart. Review your list of benefits often. By now, the benefits of smart eating probably outweigh the reasons not to!

Ready for the Next Step?

Read the statements below. If you often feel this way, you're ready to move on to the next stage of change—**getting prepared**.

- I feel uneasy when I think about the harmful effects of making unhealthy food choices.
- Eating healthier foods would have many benefits for me.
- I'm unhappy with myself when old habits get the best of me.

If You Aren't Ready

You may see reasons to change, yet still not be ready to do it. Don't give up. Keep adding to your list of benefits. Talk with your supporters, and seek out more information. Fact-finding is an important part of the change process. You can learn more from the resources to the right.

No Matter What...

Congratulations! You're on the right track. By working through this booklet, you've taken the first step in improving the way you eat. You've become aware of a problem and have started thinking about how it affects your life.



Other Resources

- Harvard School of Public Health
www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource
- American Dietetic Association
www.eatright.org
- American Heart Association
heart.org
- USDA MyPlate
www.choosemyplate.gov



Shifting the Balance

You've listed some benefits of eating smart. You've also identified some of your barriers to change. Soon, you may have more reasons to change than to stay as you are. A little fear—of the future, of failure, of finding out more about yourself—is normal. Just don't let it hold you back! Now's a good time to stir yourself up and dig a little deeper.



What If...

You know the drill. You've probably asked this question more than once in your life. Now, use it as a way to psych yourself up. Try not to get defensive. Instead, make an effort to be honest.

...You Continue as You Are?

See yourself 5 years in the future. What will life be like if you don't eat smarter? Have you gained weight? Are you tired after lunch every day? Picture yourself in 10 years. Can you walk a flight of stairs without being short of breath? Are you on medication for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or type 2 diabetes? Eating a poor diet can increase your risk of these health problems. Eating smarter can actually help reduce the risk.

...You Change?

You *can* affect your future life. If you begin to eat smarter, you may be at a stable, healthy weight 5 years from now. What will life be like? You may have the energy to travel, to see and do new things. How do you want to see yourself in 20 years?

Reasons to Eat Smart

Poor eating habits can affect your health, your weight—even your sense of well-being. Here are a just a few of the benefits you gain by improving the way you eat:

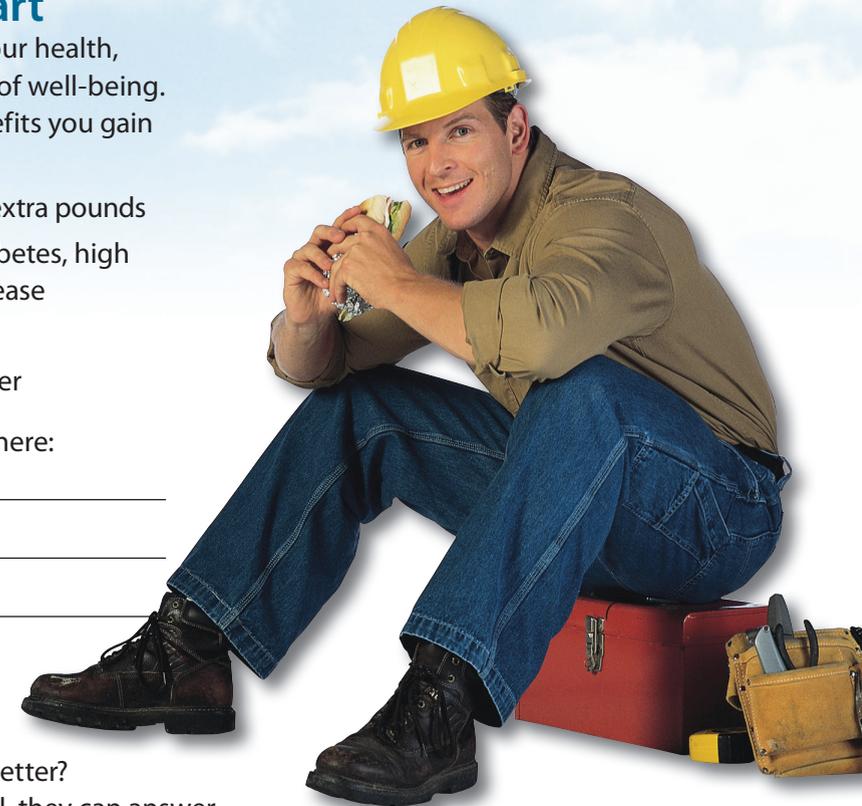
- Maintain your weight, or lose extra pounds
- Reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease
- Have more energy
- Help you deal with stress better

Add a few reasons of your own here:

Post Your List

Have you been able to think of at least two reasons for eating better?

Since these reasons are personal, they can answer the question at the root of all change: What's in it for me? Post your benefits where you'll see them each day—maybe on the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror. As you learn more about the benefits of healthy eating, **add to your list**. Any change that improves your life is worth writing down.



Have You Thought About Eating Better?

Without realizing it, you may already have thought about improving your food habits. Do any of the statements below ring a bell? Have you:

- Read articles or watched TV segments about healthy eating?
- Eaten a meal of freshly prepared foods and asked yourself, "Why don't I do this more often?"
- Looked at the calorie, fat, or salt content on food nutrition labels?
- Felt you should eat better, but were unsure where to start?

Becoming Aware & Finding Help

You might not think your eating habits are a big deal. Or, you may not believe eating unhealthy foods can take a toll on your body. By becoming more aware of your thoughts and actions, you can gain insight into habits that have kept you from eating smarter. You might even open up to people who want to support your efforts to eat healthier.



What Do You Think?

Realizing you could eat smarter is the first step in changing your behavior. Do you know when you're choosing unhealthy foods? Maybe you don't think of food as your body's fuel. Or, you might not believe better food choices could improve your life. The more you're aware of these thoughts, the easier it will be to change them.

See Old Habits

Does habit influence what you eat? Do you buy chips instead of fruit because that's what you've always done? Do you eat fast food because it's easy? Before taking another bite, think about the reasons you choose certain foods. Do you really *need* to eat them? Now may be the time to exchange new habits for old.

Ask Yourself: Who Might Help?

Other people can help you see yourself more clearly. In fact, the people you're close to are likely to be more aware of your habits and defenses than you are. Can you welcome their insight? People who care about you want to help. Their support can help give you the desire and confidence to consider change. Think about the people who would support you, as well as specific ways they might help.



Identify Your Barriers

As you become more aware of old habits, your interest in changing is likely to increase. You may find yourself thinking more seriously about the foods you eat. But you may also have excuses for not changing. Too often, small challenges become big barriers that keep you from reaching your goals. So now's a good time to identify barriers that have kept you from eating smart in the past.



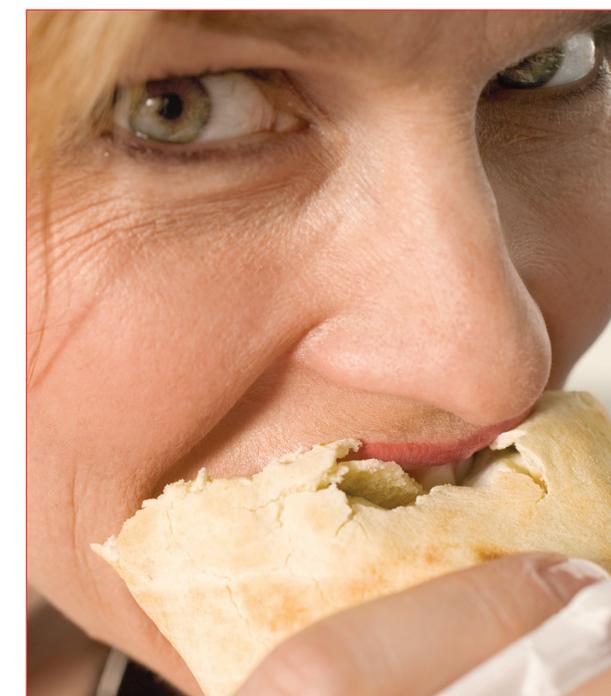
Favorite Excuses

You can always find a way to block your own progress. Everyone does it. And often there's some truth behind excuses for grabbing fast food or eating too much at a party. But now's the time to recognize excuses for what they are. Don't let them hold you back. Here are some common roadblocks that could slow your progress. Try adding a few of your own excuses for not eating smarter.

Common Barriers

- I want to eat foods I like.
- I don't know which foods are healthy.
- Making healthy meals takes too much time.
- Nutrition information keeps changing.

Your Excuses



Add to Your Benefits List

You're discovering your defenses and breaking through barriers. This means you're spending less effort in blocking change. You're also gathering information that will help you take the next step. The more you learn about eating smart, the more benefits you'll find for making the change. Reread your list of reasons to eat healthier from page 3. Now add to your list of benefits—and be sure to post that list where you'll see it often!