

# Making Lifestyle Changes Stick

Making healthy changes in our lifestyle is something that most have tried to achieve and have failed. Often we find that despite our desire to affect change in our lives, change is harder to put into action and we fall back into old habits.

As creatures of comfort it is challenging to abandon the familiarities of habitual life, undertake new methods, and pave new roads. Lifestyle changes can range from tiny adjustments, to serious shifts in the way we perceive and do things.

In its nature change requires a level of discomfort whether it is on physical or psychological aspect. Keeping this in mind it's understandable that we feel a slight dose of resentment towards change.

The fear of failing is also another factor that can undermine our confidence and commitment to change. Approaching any change in our lives without a strategy sets us up to fail. If we decide that change is what we want or need and realise a strategy to achieve it, goals can be readily achieved.

Routines, awareness and human behaviours factor in and if we look carefully, we realise that we rarely even make little adjustments to our lives.

Our routines are formed from childhood and some picked up along the way. Once a routine is formed, it's hard escaping from it and forming a new one to replace the old – even harder.

It is clear of course that many of us want almost the same things from life. The picture of success, fulfilled life, healthy and fit body, relationships that give meaning and lifestyle that embodies all of that is probably more or less on the wish list of all of us.

It is easy to envision the success. But actually getting there is a whole different story. A path of lesser resistance or lesser discomfort hampers us in our journey.

How can we slip some new healthy and viable habits in our lives, and make them stay for good? How can we avoid that feeling of dread as we take the first step towards the unfamiliar, and gather the courage we need to leave the comfort zone of the repetitive and familiar?

First of all we must acknowledge that doing that is not so hard. Second, that it cannot be achieved overnight but one step at a time. And last we must not fail to acknowledge that persistence is the key.



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## 7 steps to approaching change

- 1. Develop a plan and a strategy first.** Map out where you are headed, and what the journey is most likely to look like. Try and imagine the final results, and the difficulties that may occur, imagine the outcome way ahead. Embrace the idea of a healthy lifestyle change fully, and without question. Motivate yourself to do so.
- 2. Start small,** and expand the time and the interval of your routine. Even with small changes your mind starts to react with discomfort as expected, often finding change hostile within the system. Small steps in the beginning can allow your mind to acclimatise to change in routine slowly and therefore the resistant action is limited.  
  
Put on running shoes and go for a walk and a stretch instead of going for a run, or change your diet one ingredient or improving one meal at a time. Once you do that try and make it a consistent habit. The second that is done, go and expand the whole thing in the direction you planned. This way the resistance is minimal, and the mind almost fully accepts the change, and supports you in developing it.
- 3. Stick to the schedule.** Don't allow yourself to be swooped by enthusiasm that comes from the initial results and forget about going small. Keep the small steps going until you are sure you are affecting that change consistently.
- 4. Choose something to represent a trigger,** that will instantly prepare your mind that your habit (new routine) is about to take place. An example is, to light a scent candle before preparing to meditate. That way you are always preparing the mind about your conscious actions and what you are about to do next, until your new routine feels like second nature.
- 5. Focus on one change at a time.** As appealing as improving every area of your life at once seems to be, in practice it results with slight disappointment. Changing all we are used to, even with the greatest of motivation and knowledge may be too much. So do one change at a time, and once you form the habit of getting there, and feel the success instead of failing, it will be easy to change more at one time.
- 6. Surround yourself with people that are likely to support the healthy change.** Make an announcement about the change that you are about to make and ask people to support you. That way you will feel a certain obligation not to fail them as well as yourself.
- 7. Reward yourself.** Remember that you define the extent of what reward means. Treat yourself with a nice book, movie, a nap, have a massage. Acknowledge that the new habit is now something that is a part of your life.

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### References:

Dr R Brooks, *Realistic Lifestyle Changes: A Positive Approach to Nurturing Our Health*, 12 January 2015.