Stages of Change: Key Features

“It’s not that some people have willpower and some don’t. It’s that some people are ready to change and others are not.”

~James Gordon, M.D.

Change is not a concrete process, but rather, a fluid process. Individuals tend to move through different “stages of change” in the management of medical problems. These stages include: 1) precontemplation, 2) contemplation, 3) preparation, 4) action, and 5) maintenance.

Precontemplation

- People in this stage have no intention to take action to change a behavior in the foreseeable future.
- Often individuals in this stage are not aware of the importance of a change or may deny the negative impact of their current behavior.
- Few benefits to change can be seen by the person.

Contemplation

- People in this stage intend to take action to change in the foreseeable future, but not right away.
- Typically, they desire to change sometime in the next 6 months.
- Individuals in this stage see the benefits of change, but they do not outweigh the difficulties of change.
- Some individuals will get “stuck” in this stage – always knowing they should change, seeing the benefits, but not moving towards action.

Preparation

- People in this stage are intending to take action within the next 30 days.
- They are ready to change, see the benefits of change, and are actively making a plan to change.
For example, such individuals trying to change their exercise behavior might be researching different gyms to join, buying walking shoes, or getting an exercise partner.

### Action

- Individuals in this stage have successfully made a change in their behavior within the past 6 months.
- To truly be in this stage, a person must have achieved the behavior at a level sufficient to reduce the targeted health risk.

### Maintenance

- Individuals in this stage have successfully continued a desired behavior for at least 6 months.
- People in this stage are usually confident they can maintain their new behavior and likely experience few temptations to return to previous behaviors.