

# How To Stay Fit as You Age

By Cathy Warner

Staying physically fit is a good idea at any age, but as you get older, it becomes increasingly important to incorporate exercise into your lifestyle to help keep you healthy, mobile and feeling good.

First, it is important to understand what behaviors need to be changed and why. Quitting smoking or drinking, losing weight or getting off the couch and onto the treadmill are not changes that are made overnight and sometimes don't stick on the first try.

Change takes patience and persistence. In fact, researchers have discovered that, like life, change is a process that happens in stages. Knowing and understanding these stages can help you kick bad habits for good.

Using physical activity as an example of changing your behavior for a healthier lifestyle, here are the stages of change that will transform you from couch potato to someone who is healthier, looks good, feels good, and has lots more energy:

**Stage One – Pre-contemplation:** In this stage, physical activity isn't even on your radar screen. Your couch is your favorite place to be. You're not active and you don't think about it.

**Stage Two - Contemplation:** You start to think being active would be better than staying inert. Perhaps the health club commercial finally struck a chord. You want to feel better, have more energy, and stop gaining weight. You also think that doing something to make that happen — say within the next six months — is within the realm of possibility. Maybe you remember the dance class you took years ago and how good it made you feel.

**Stage Three - Preparation:** You make plans to get active next month. You move closer to taking action. Maybe you make a list of goals or pencil in time on your calendar for physical activity.

**Stage Four - Action:** This is where the rubber hits the road. You actually begin to make changes. You bike, jog, walk, swim, or are otherwise physically active, but you have been at it for fewer than six months.

**Stage Five - Maintenance:** At this stage, you've stayed physically active for at least six months. You're riding high. You've learned to reward yourself for sticking with the program — buying yourself new clothes, treating yourself to a massage. You remind yourself how good you look and feel, and how you want to stay that way.

Maintaining your healthy behavior for the rest of your life is your goal — and your challenge. It's not always easy. Here are some ways to keep the change when you're tempted not to:

- **Cut yourself some slack.** The old couch was calling you back and you gave in. But don't give up. Setbacks happen. Falling off track doesn't mean throwing in the towel. Remind yourself that change takes time. Then lace up your sneakers, and get back on track.
- **Have a plan.** Identify your roadblocks and find ways around them. For instance, your fitness routine easily could run afoul of holidays, business travel, and vacations. Look for hotels with a health club, or pack a jump rope in your suitcase. Include a walking or biking tour of scenic or historic places in your vacation plans.
- **Review your goals.** If you start to feel it's just not worth it, think about why you decided to change in the first place. Maybe you wanted to lose weight and being active helped you do it. Perhaps you've lowered your blood pressure or are beginning to control your diabetes. Reminding yourself of the goals you've realized and the ones you're still striving for will help you push ahead.
- **Mobilize your support system.** Call on friends, family members, or coworkers who have been your cheerleaders. They can encourage you to stick with it. Maybe you've formed or joined a support group. Don't hesitate to connect with others who are working on the same change.

- **Have confidence.** Believe in yourself and don't question your ability to change. If you fail once, try again. Try something else. And learn from your mistakes. With patience and determination, you can change your life.

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