

## Living Healthier: Ready to change your habits

Are you motivated to lose weight? Eat healthier? Manage your stress? Are your goals realistic? Answer these questions and more to make sure you're ready to start living healthier — and know what steps to take if you aren't quite there.

Your lifestyle change success depends in large part on your readiness to take on the challenge. If you jump in before you're ready, your plans might buckle under the first challenge.

Use these questions to assess your weight-loss readiness.

**1. Are you motivated to make long-term lifestyle changes?** Successful health changes depend on permanent lifestyle changes, such as eating healthy foods and including physical activity in your daily routine. That could represent a significant departure from your current lifestyle. Be honest.

Knowing that you need to make changes in your life and actually doing it are two different things. You might need to overhaul your diet so that you're eating more whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, for example. You may need to find time for physical activity, ideally at least 30 to 45 minutes — or more — nearly every day of the week.

Whether your motivation for undertaking these changes is better health, improved appearance or simply feeling better about yourself, find your motivation and focus on it.

**2. Have you addressed the big distractions in your life?** If you're dealing with major life events, such as marital problems, job stress, illness or financial worries, you might not want to add the challenge of overhauling your lifestyle habits. Instead, consider addressing these major issues before you launch into a lifestyle program.

**3. Do you have a realistic picture of the amount of change you can achieve in a certain time period?** Achieving and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a lifelong

process. Start by making sure your goal is safe and realistic — such as losing 10 percent of your current weight. Then aim to lose one to two pounds a week until you reach your goal. This means burning 500 to 1,000 calories more than you consume each day — through diet, exercise or both.

You might see more results more quickly if you change your habits significantly. Be careful, though. Radical changes that aren't sustainable aren't likely to be effective over the long term.

**4. Have you resolved any emotional issues connected to your current situation?** For example, emotions and food are often intertwined. Anger, stress, grief and boredom can trigger emotional eating. If you have a history of an eating disorder, weight loss can be even trickier.

To prepare for the challenges ahead, identify any emotional issues related to your struggles. Talk to your doctor or a mental health provider, if needed.

**5. Do you have support and accountability?** Any lifestyle changes can be difficult. You might face moments of temptation or become disheartened. Having someone in your corner to offer encouragement can help. If you don't have friends or loved ones you can rely on for positive help, consider joining a support group.

If you want to keep your efforts private, be prepared to be accountable to yourself with regular check-ups and a log of your efforts. You might also want to consider joining an online program or using a certified health coach.

**6. Have you embraced the challenge?**

If you don't have a positive attitude about change, you might not be ready — and if you dread what lies ahead, you might be more likely to find excuses to veer off course.

Instead, try to embrace the vision of your new lifestyle and remain positive. Focus on how good you'll feel when you're more active or when you weigh less. Picture yourself celebrating every success along the way.

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**Your results: Ready or not?**

Think about your responses to the questions above:

- Did you answer yes to all or most of the questions? You're probably ready to make the lifestyle changes that'll support permanent change. Forge ahead — starting today! If you think you need help, consult a professional or enroll in a reputable weight-loss program.
- Did you answer no to more than one of the questions? You might not be ready to embark on a lifestyle change program right now - and that's OK. Explore what's holding you back and face those obstacles. Consider seeking help from your doctor or another professional, such as a certified wellness coach, to help you work through these issues. Then re-evaluate your readiness for change so that you can get started on the path to a healthier you.

If you couldn't answer all of the questions with a simple yes or no but you feel generally positive about most of your answers and you're upbeat about change, consider starting now. You might never have definitive answers in life. Don't let that rob you of a chance to achieve your goals.

## Save *the* date

On **April 25, 2014** we will be hosting our first ever Merritt Adventure Challenge at Terrapin Adventures in Savage, Maryland. The challenge will be held from **1pm to 4pm** and will culminate in a happy hour at Ram's Head Tavern.

Details will follow shortly but will include an Olympic style team challenge including tasks like rope bridges, zip lines, and a geocaching (scavenger hunt) nature hike for those looking for something less physical.

Block the date now and stop by and see Tracy Funk if you want to sign up!



## 30 Day Push Up Challenge

We will be kicking off January with a 30-Day Push Up Challenge. The Quick Fire Challenges are designed to be a simple and quick month-long challenge. This time around it will be a series of push ups as well as continuing with water intake. Participation in the challenge is simple: See Tracy to sign up and pick up your tracking form.

Each day complete the daily number of push ups and drink the required glasses of water (hydration is important!) Check off each box daily, circling which challenge level you completed (beginner or advanced).

Put your name on the form and submit complete form to Tracy to be entered into a drawing for one of two \$100 gift cards. One winner will be drawn from each challenge level (beginner and advanced).

Interested in making some positive life changes? Make an appointment with nutritionist Diana Sugiuchi on **Tuesday, December 17th**. She will be onsite at our Baltimore office from 11 am until 1 pm taking personal appointments every 20 minutes. Don't miss this opportunity! Contact Tracy Funk to sign up.