

Smart Strategies to Change Habits

Everyone has aspects of their nutrition or lifestyle that they know are unhealthy, too excessive or contribute to their health issues and symptoms. For example, eating too much sugar, not drinking enough water, lack of exercise or simply not eating enough vegetables.

Here are some strategies to think about and use to help you successfully make a change and develop habits that are sustainable.

1. Start small – choose one thing.

Don't try and change too many things at once. Identify the habits you want to change, write them down, make a list and then prioritise one or two that you are going to work on first. If you choose too many, it can be overwhelming and you will not successfully change anything.

You also might gradually stage your habit rather than going cold turkey. If you want to give something up, it is better to begin by reducing it first. For example, if you're having five fizzy drinks per day, start off the first week by reducing them to three, then two and so on. It has to be manageable for you.

2. Plan and prepare

Make a plan so you know what you are going to do and when. Also think about why you are doing it and how are you are going to do it. Write it down on paper or in a note book, don't just say it to yourself or think it.

For example:

What? I want to increase my water intake (I currently drink 1.5 L per day on average)

Why? To help improve my energy levels and digestion.

How? Aiming to drink 3 litres per day by using a bottle that is easy to drink out of, taking it with me in the car and to work. Before I leave the house for work in the morning, I need to have drunk one container (1L), then one at work, then one when I get home. I'm going to add in slices of lemon for some flavour.

Also think about the barriers or obstacles - how might you overcome them before they happen?

3. Have an alternative.

Going cold turkey and completely eliminating something can be difficult and often set people up to fail. Having an alternative can make it so much easier. For example, if you feel you drink too much coffee swap it for an alternative. Have a herbal tea instead or have decaffeinated coffee (use water processed which removes caffeine without using chemicals) in its place.

4. It's doesn't have to be perfect

You need to accept that you will sometimes falter, habits can take several weeks to change. If you go off track then think why? You might have been eating out and there weren't any alternatives. Don't be hard on yourself and don't give up. Learn from it and think why it was difficult or how you might overcome it next time.

5. Have patience

We always want something straight away, accept that changing habits will not happen overnight and some will take longer than others.

6. Team work

Is there someone who you can work with and make a change together? – swapping ideas, providing moral support and encouragement can make it easier to achieve and embed a habit. For example, if you need to increase your activity level, find a friend and go on a walk together.