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## *Staying Out of the Risk Zone: Health Habits Even Busy People Can Develop*

We know the health risks but we do it anyway: we push ourselves, overload our schedules, eat what we know we shouldn't, skip workouts, and get less sleep than our bodies need. Then, we promise ourselves we'll make changes soon—just not today.

For some, the wake-up call is a health emergency. For others, it's a checkup that makes us realize we're teetering on the border of the high-risk zone. Sure, we want to change our behavior and lower the health risks within our control, but we want to do it in a way that fits our busy schedules. We cast about for a good way to get started on a personalized path toward wellness.

### **Six Steps Toward Change**

The process of turning a thought into action typically happens in a series of steps.

Master health practitioner and life coach Phyllis LeFevre explains the six-step cycle of change this way:

**Precontemplation** is the point at which someone thinks "I might have a problem." They're not quite ac-



knowledging the problem and are not yet ready to address it at this phase.

**Contemplation** is the beginning of acknowledgement, in which a person recognizes that they do have a problem.

In the **Research** phase, a person will start looking at ways to deal with a problem, though they are not yet ready to go into action.

With the **Action** step, a person begins doing something actively to overcome their problem, whether that is self help or seeking outside help. They may consult a doctor or health expert, join a gym, or take other strides they believe will help them make a change.

Then there's the **Maintenance** phase, in which some further action must be taken in order to sustain the changes that have been accomplished.

LeFevre is certified in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and uses this

expertise to help clients identifying specific issues and problems, determine their health and personal goals, and work through the process they will use to achieve those goals. The approach takes into account the client's motivation and looks at the obstacles that may thwart success.

### **What Holds You Back?**

The NLP approach can be successful in changing behaviors because it is tailored to each individual, rather than expecting them to follow a rigid plan they have had no stake in developing.

"For example, if a client is dealing with issues related to overeating and weight, and want to have a healthier lifestyle, we customize a program for them to achieve their results," says LeFevre. "First, we look at *why* they want to change, even rating their problem on a scale of 1 to 10. Then we talk about what behaviors they seek to change, the consequences of the behaviors and who else is affected by the problem."

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We are quite aware of the dangers of hypertension, extra pounds, high cholesterol, lack of exercise and disrupted sleep. Yet when we seek to change our own behaviors to minimize our own health risks, we want to do it on our own terms, in a way that fits our busy schedules.

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## Staying Out of the Risk Zone, Your Way

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LeFevre says clients can be surprised when they realize that their own limiting beliefs and patterns of behavior have contributed to creating their current situation. “NLP has systemized processes to understanding the thought processes and beliefs that sabotage reaching a goal,” she says. She guides clients through these processes to achieve successful outcomes.

### Having a Plan Makes all the Difference

When someone is ready to change their life, they’re often motivated by what they *don’t* want, says LeFevre. “We know that people are motivated away from pain and toward pleasure.”

“For super-busy people, the biggest barrier to better wellness is not having a plan,” LeFevre explains. In her goal planning workshops, she asks participants to state their desired goal and outcome. Then she guides them to devise the steps that will lead to that goal.

“The plan is part of the ‘toward’ motivation. It can consist of something basic, like determining what you will eat for the week and spend a Sunday preparing meals to consume during the week. When we don’t plan, we eat whatever is quick and easy to satisfy our immediate hunger, and often that is not a healthy choice.”

The plan should also include specific times set aside for action steps. Wellness goals can get sidetracked when you don’t make a place for them in your day. “You can avoid this by doing something as simple as writing ‘gym’ in your schedule,” says LeFevre. “Then don’t book anything else on top of it.”

### What About Willpower?

A recent report by the American Psychological Association (APA) examined the science behind willpower and self-control, and how willpower relates lifestyle and behavior change goals.

The [Stress in America follow up survey](#) observes that almost everyone living

in the U.S. made a resolution to change some aspect of their behavior in 2012. Yet people consistently report that a lack of willpower is the top reason they fall short of their goals to lose weight, save more money, exercise or make other lifestyle changes.

“Self-control can be learned and strengthened,” said Steven J. Breckler, PhD, social psychologist and executive director of APA’s Science Directorate in a statement announcing the survey’s release. “For example, avoiding the sources of temptation and planning ahead are effective techniques for maintaining self-control. Research shows that exercising your willpower in one situation may drain your self-control for other situations that immediately follow. Just like with physical exercise, it is smart to avoid taking on too much at once. First, focus on one goal, strengthen your willpower, and then take on more goals over time.”

LeFevre agrees with the need for focus on goals and small steps toward them, but believes there’s more to it than willpower. “NLP addresses what we think, what we say and what we do,” she says. “Since the term *willpower* often implies a negative mind set or deprivation, we focus on *self determination*, and its more positive mind set.”

“For super-busy people, the biggest barrier to better wellness is not having a plan.”

Phyllis LeFevre, Neuro Linguistic Programming Master and certified NLP Life Coach



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#### Online tools for tracking and managing health goals

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[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)  
[www.tracker.diabetes.org](http://www.tracker.diabetes.org)

#### Other Resources

Making Lifestyle Changes that Last <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/lifestyle-changes.aspx>  
What You Need to Know about Willpower: The Psychological Science of Self-Control <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/willpower.aspx>  
Phyllis LeFevre, Inspire Momentum NLP [www.inspiremomentum.com](http://www.inspiremomentum.com)