

## Session 6

# Making changes

The aim of the session is to understand:

- ✓ What you can change to improve your heart health.
- ✓ How to make successful changes and who can help.
- ✓ What can help.
- ✓ Top tips.

The information you need to get across is:

 10 minutes

### What can you change to improve your heart health?

Many research studies have suggested that a person's lifestyle can be a cause of ill health. So it's a good idea to think about changing lifestyle factors which you can control – the modifiable risk factors for coronary heart disease discussed in Session 4. These are:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- physical inactivity
- being overweight
- diabetes.

### How can you make successful changes and who can help?

Experience and research tell us that to increase the chances of successfully making a change<sup>4</sup>:

- **You need to want to make the change.** If the person doesn't want to change their lifestyle, no-one can make them do so.
- **There needs to be a lifestyle change.** For example, a person trying to eat more healthily needs to clear out their fridge and cupboards of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, and re-stock them with healthy foods.
- **The lifestyle change must continue over time.** The change needs to become part of everyday life. For example, a person trying to get more active by walking to work needs to continue doing so every day.
- **The lifestyle being changed cannot be a way of coping.** For example, if someone smokes when they are stressed, they need to replace this habit with another coping mechanism, such as chewing sugar-free gum. Otherwise, when they get stressed, they will reach for their cigarettes.
- **Their life should not be uncertain when making the change.** For example, if someone is having a challenging time – such as changing their job or moving house – it is probably not the best time to make a lifestyle change.
- **The person needs social support.** This can be from friends, family and/or health professionals. The person needs to identify who they will get support from and let those people know about the change they plan to make, so that they know how to provide support.

## Checklist



Session time:  
**45 minutes**

## You will need

- Training card 6
- Visual card 6



- Summary sheet 6 

- Case study 6 

- My goal worksheet 

- Local information and services template 



Making changes to your lifestyle can be challenging at first, but over time you will notice the benefit to your health and wellbeing. You can get help from health professionals, such as:

- dietitians
- physical activity instructors
- smoking cessation advisers
- health advocates
- the BHF Heart Helpline.

## What can help?

Don't be discouraged if you feel you can only manage one small change at a time. Set yourself a goal and make a plan to help you achieve it. For example, if your goal is to increase the amount of physical activity you do, you could plan to go swimming three times a week. But if your time is limited, you could start by going once a week and aim to work up to two, then three days over time. If you keep your goals **specific, realistic** and **manageable**, you'll find them easier to achieve.

## Helpful definitions

**Specific:** Make your goal straightforward and write down what you want to achieve. Don't worry if you have to break a large goal into smaller ones to achieve it.

**Measurable:** An example of a measurable goal is saying "I want to go swimming twice a week for 30 minutes". An example of a goal that isn't measurable is saying "I want to go swimming more".

**Realistic:** This doesn't mean making your goal too easy, it means not setting yourself a goal that's too difficult to fit it into your daily life. If you aim too high you are setting yourself up for failure. If you get the balance right you will have a real sense of achievement when you reach your goal.

## Are there any tips to help you achieve your goal?

1. Commit to your goal, plan, get enough support, and consider what potential difficulties you may face and the rewards you might give yourself. For example, buy yourself a treat with the money you save by not using the car for very short journeys. Write it all down. Review your goal regularly and consider how you are doing.
2. Tell as many people as you can what you are doing so they can support you – and it makes it harder for you not to stick to your plan!
3. When you have achieved your goal, think about setting a new one.
4. If you're not achieving your goal, or if you have tried to make changes but have so far been unsuccessful, **don't give up**. You may need to review your plan or get further advice and support. It may be that your goal was unrealistic. Discuss this with a health professional, for example, your practice nurse or GP, or call the BHF Heart Helpline.
5. Remember to review all of your modifiable risk factors regularly, as you may feel ready to make changes to another modifiable risk factor at a later date.

## Pre-session preparation

1. Investigate local information and support services. Print out the *Local information and services template* and fill it in 
2. Print out *Summary sheet 6*, *Case study 6* and *My goal worksheet* 

## Activities

**Key activity: Shared experience – making lifestyle changes**  
(small groups/pairs)

 15 minutes

Ask each group/pair to share any experience they have of trying to make a lifestyle change. **(10 minutes)**

- What worked and what didn't?
- Were they able to maintain the changes?

Ask participants to list three things they'd like to change, then discuss:

**1. Which one is the most important right now?**

- Reinforce the point about addressing one lifestyle change at a time.
- Remind them that when they're making one lifestyle change, it may benefit other aspects of their lifestyle, eg, by increasing their physical activity they might also lose weight.

**2. Which one is the most realistic?**

- Remind the group that goals which are specific, realistic and manageable are easier to achieve than goals which are too vague or ambitious.

Hand out the *My goal worksheet* to each small group/pair, and invite participants to make their own plan about how they can increase their physical activity, or make a lifestyle change. Remind them to make their goals specific, realistic and manageable. **(5 minutes)**

**Key activity: Case study – making lifestyle changes**  
(small groups/pairs)

 **20 minutes**

**Case study 6**

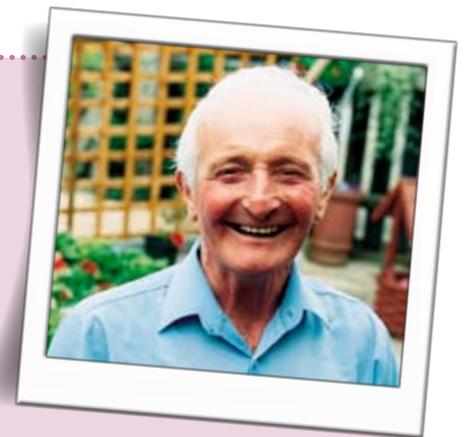
**Name:** Stephen

**Age:** 68

**Gender:** Male

**Ethnicity:** White British

**Waist measurement:** 99 cm (about 39 inches)



Stephen tries to exercise regularly by going for a 10 minute leisurely walk with his dog at least three times a week and whenever else he finds the time. Occasionally, he also walks when he is meeting friends or going to the shops. He knows this is good for him although he finds it easier to drive.

He smokes approximately 15 cigarettes a day (low tar). He doesn't enjoy smoking as much as he used to, has been thinking of giving up and has asked his GP for some advice.

Stephen's waist measurement puts him in the 'health is at risk' category.

Hand out the case study to each small group/pair.

Ask the group to focus on and write down how they could help and support Stephen to increase the amount of physical activity he does, and/or stop smoking.

Ask them to answer the following questions on the case study: **(10 minutes)**

**1. What are Stephen's risk factors for coronary heart disease?**

Stephen's known risk factors are:

- not achieving the recommended level of physical activity (See Session 8 on page 40.)
- being overweight (waist measurement indicates he is in the 'health is at risk' category)
- smoking.

Stephen may have unknown risk factors including:

- family history of heart disease
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- diabetes.

## 2. Which of his known risk factors are modifiable, ie, which can he change?

Stephen's modifiable risk factors are:

- physical inactivity
- being overweight
- smoking.

Ask them to discuss:

## 3. Whether they think Stephen is ready to make a lifestyle change?

- Stephen tries to exercise regularly and has sought help about giving up smoking, so he is likely to be ready to start making a lifestyle change.

## 4. What are the potential barriers to Stephen becoming more physically active, and/or stopping smoking, and how could he overcome them?

Stephen's potential barriers are:

- being overweight
- lack of motivation
- preferring to take the car instead of walking (although the petrol money saved could buy a reward)
- addiction/dependence on cigarettes.

His potential solutions could be:

- setting himself achievable goals and rewarding himself when he reaches them
- taking the dog for more energetic walks, which would increase Stephen's activity level, and may help him stop smoking by boosting his sense of wellbeing
- investigating local walking groups etc
- following a healthy diet
- investigating what local or national stop smoking services are available for information and support
- after quitting, he could buy himself a reward with the money he saves on cigarettes.

## 5. Ask them to make suggestions about where he could go for advice and support.

- See his GP or practice nurse, health advocate or trainer, call a stop smoking helpline or the BHF Heart Helpline.

Ask each group to nominate a spokesperson and take it in turns for each group to feed back. Ask them to write their suggestions on a flipchart. **(10 minutes)**

## At the end of the session

Hand out *Summary sheet 6* and the completed *Local information and services template* [\[USB\]](#)

## Background information

Although you now have all the basic information you need to deliver Session 6, here's some more detail which you might find useful.

### How do people make changes?

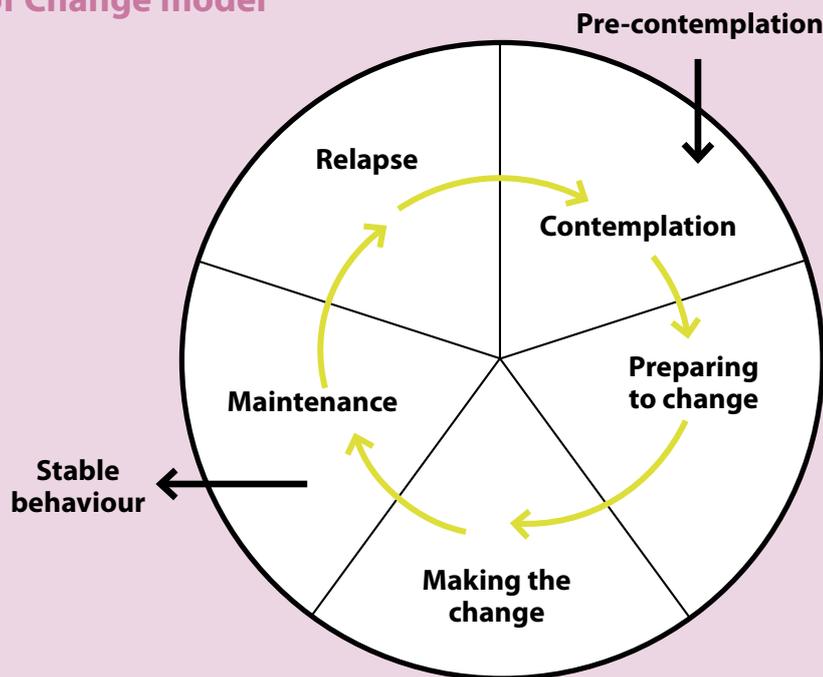
There are a several theories which aim to explain how people make changes to their lifestyle. One of these is called the **Stages of Change model**<sup>5</sup>.

According to the model, no change is final but is part of an ongoing cycle of change which includes the following stages:

- **Pre-contemplation.** This is when people are not thinking about changing their lifestyle and are not aware of the risk to their health.
- **Contemplation.** This is when people are aware of the risk, but are not ready to make the change. They might be seeking more information or help to make that decision.
- **Preparing to change.** This is when the benefits of making the change are greater than the costs of not making the change. People might look for extra support during this time.
- **Making the change.** This is when people are taking positive action to do things differently by setting a goal, making a realistic plan, and getting support and rewards.
- **Maintenance.** This is when the new lifestyle is sustained and the person has a healthier lifestyle.
- **Relapse.** This is when a person goes back to their old, unhealthy lifestyle – but the good news is that they might try to change it again.

People can go backwards or forwards through the series of cycles of change.

### Stages of Change model



Source: adapted from Prochaska and DiClemente

## For more information

**bhf.org.uk**

**BHF Heart Helpline: 0300 330 3311** – for information and support on anything related to heart health.

This service is available in English only.

**Heart Matters** – a FREE BHF service offering information and support on improving your heart health.

Visit **bhf.org.uk/heartmatters**