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## Making changes

If you have lost and regained weight several times in the past, you know losing weight is the easy part. Keeping it off is when the tough work begins.

"If you do what you've always done you'll get what you always got." — Anonymous

This adage sums up a basic truth about weight management. If you return to your old lifestyle, the weight will return too. The only way to maintain a new healthy weight is to make permanent lifestyle changes that support the new you.

Change is necessary, but making too many changes at once or getting frustrated when change does not come easily can undo your success. Remember that you have spent a lifetime developing your old habits. You need to give yourself time to learn new lifestyle habits, and you need to find activities to replace the enjoyment you used to get from food. You have already made a significant positive change in your life by joining the OPTIFAST Program.

The goals of this module are to prepare you for the process of change, help you recognize the changes you need to make, teach you to stick to these changes by building in a series of small rewards, equip you with self-monitoring strategies, and teach you to deal with behavior lapses.

### tools for success

- Recognize your choices in making lifestyle changes.
- Distinguish between goals you truly want to achieve and goals others think you should achieve. You'll be more likely to succeed if you set your own goals.
- Understand the power of immediate payoffs (rewards) as a motivating factor in making permanent lifestyle changes.
- Learn self-monitoring techniques to assess your progress and stay on track.
- Learn how to cope with lapses and prevent them from becoming relapses.

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## Separating *Wants* from *Shoulds*

Have you enrolled in this program because you **want** to change your habits or are you here because you think you **should** change? Learning to distinguish between “wants” and “shoulds” is a skill you need to master in order to change your lifestyle.

“Shoulds” are a reflection of customs, cultural messages, conscience (what you believe you should do), and what do others tell you that you should do.

You encounter shoulds daily. The media constantly bombards you with messages about weight, activity level, and lifestyle. Regardless of whether these messages are realistic or not, it is only natural you may start to believe you should aspire to achieve these ideals.

In addition, your spouse, friends, family, and even acquaintances are sometimes quick to point out the goals they think you should attain. Perhaps your spouse believes you should exercise more, or your physician thinks you should lose 20 pounds. It’s important for you to be aware of the extent to which others impose their own list of shoulds on you.

Take a moment to generate a list of messages you are receiving from various sources about how you should manage your life.

You should

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You should

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You should

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You should

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Now, consider the goals you truly WANT to achieve. Some of the goals you want may mirror the messages you have listed under shoulds. Review the list of shoulds and put an asterisk (\*) next to the statements that truly reflect goals YOU WANT to achieve. If you are uncertain about which goals you truly value, ask yourself:

- Why is this goal important to me?
- Do I want to reach this goal only to please someone else?
- How often do I visualize or daydream about obtaining this goal?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of changing my habits?

Hopefully, you want to attain certain goals unrelated to what someone else believes you should achieve. It is important to listen to your inner voice.

The goals you want to achieve for personal reasons typically provide you with stronger motivation for changing your habits than the goals you feel you should strive to attain.

Take a moment to list the lifestyle changes you want for yourself that have no apparent relationship to anything you have been told you should achieve.

I want

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I want

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I want

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I want

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To help you convert your wants into a series of small achievable goals, review the **OPTIFAST® Lifestyle Education Series™** module **Setting Compelling Goals**. Ask a member of the OPTIFAST Program staff for a copy of this module if you do not already have one. If you've set goals, review your progress and distinguish any should vs. want goals.

## Choose To Change

The decision to adopt healthy eating and physical activity habits is a conscious choice. Throughout this program, you frequently will be confronted with "decision points" that will challenge you to choose new behaviors and avoid slipping into old habits.

During the first few weeks of the program, make an effort to be aware of the eating and activity behaviors you choose each day. Focusing on the decision-making process reinforces the fact that you are making conscious choices, rather than drifting into careless or automatic responses.

To minimize lapses it is important for you to notice the times, places, and circumstances in which you are tempted to engage in inappropriate eating or sedentary behaviors. The simple acts of noticing these challenging situations and then acknowledging you did not choose your old unhelpful responses, are a start in the process of making new behaviors more conscious.

By consciously making choices about your behaviors, you will be able to develop the

necessary awareness for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Use the **Choose to Change** page to track the conscious decisions you make to follow new lifestyle behaviors.

## Rewards Reinforce Change

You did not reach your current weight overnight, and you may not achieve your goal weight tomorrow, next week, or even next month. It's important to reward the positive changes you are making along the way to sustain your long-term commitment to your weight loss goal.

### Immediate Positive Payoffs

Researchers have found rewards received immediately following a desired behavior provide powerful motivation to permanently adopt the new behavior. For example, wouldn't you be more likely to walk a mile if you knew you would have a sauna and massage immediately following the walk than if the sauna and massage were to occur the following week?

Immediate positive payoffs don't have to be expensive or complicated. Virtually any activity you enjoy (with the exception of eating) would be appropriate. In the space provided below, list as many positive payoffs as possible. Keep in mind, the payoffs should be easy to obtain immediately after you have reached a goal.

**Example**— One hour of private time to read a book or listen to music.

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## Self-Monitoring

Critical elements in getting from one place to another, whether you are driving across the country or trying to manage your weight, include knowing where you want to go, mapping out your plans, and then monitoring your progress along the way.



### Daily Health Diary

According to researchers at the National Weight Control Registry (NWCR) studying successful weight managers, self-monitoring is a fundamental tool for successfully changing your eating habits and for maintaining your new lifestyle long term. A daily health diary is designed to help you keep track of information related to your weekly activity goals, daily adherence to your prescribed food plan, and your general emotional wellbeing. You can use a Daily Diary, purchase health diaries, use online tracking tools or make your own. The most useful ones have three sections:

- **Weekly Lifestyle, Activity, and Exercise Goals Record** — A chart for recording lifestyle activities and exercise goals you complete over a week.
- **Daily Meal Records** — Seven pages for recording your daily food intake for the week.
- **Thoughts** — A place to rate your emotional state during the week.

Taking the time to complete the appropriate sections in your diary each day will enable you to see where you've been, where you are, and where you're headed. Recording and monitoring your progress toward goals will help you catch lapses and correct your course before they become relapses.

### Weekly Weight Chart

You may be tempted to weigh yourself every day to see your progress. Try to resist. We suggest you weigh yourself no more than once a week. Since weight does not change more than one pound a day, frequent weighing may lead to disappointment. Also, the scale doesn't always give an accurate picture of your progress, especially if you check it every day.

### Strategies for Stepping on the Scale

- Weigh yourself only once a week.
- Always weigh at the same time of day.
- Weigh yourself naked or while wearing the same light clothing.
- Zero your scale correctly.
- Set your scale on a level, hard surface (not carpeted).
- Record your weight on a weight graph. Keep it in a handy spot so you can refer to it weekly. It will show your success over time. Bring your graph to each clinic visit.

### Journaling

Journaling gives you a place to work through the thoughts, emotions, and situations you note in your diary. Journaling can be especially helpful when you feel a need to "talk" to someone but there is no one immediately available. It's also fun to look back after a period of time and read about your challenges and opportunities, and realize you have worked through them.

Try these tips to make journaling more fun and informative:

- Get a small, blank notebook you will use only for this purpose.
- Don't feel compelled to make a daily entry. However, don't ignore your journal because you feel you don't have enough time to write something. Writing down your thoughts and feelings doesn't have to take a lot of time.
- Write about more than events themselves. Write about how events affect you.
- Keep in mind that you don't have to let anyone else read your journal!
- Review your journal periodically.

To learn more about journaling request a copy of the OPTIFAST Lifestyle Education Series module *Journaling: The Write Way to Better Health*.

### Thought prompters

If you find yourself experiencing writer's block, ask yourself one or more of the following questions:

- How do I feel about myself?
- Did I encounter anything stressful today? How did the situation make me feel?
- What positive qualities do I see more clearly in myself?
- How would I describe my interactions with others today?
- What were my feelings at the beginning of my weight management program? How have they changed over time?
- What issues from my past are affecting my progress?
- Which experiences this week had the most impact on my weight management efforts? Why?
- How direct is my communication with other members of my group? With my family and friends?
- What changes am I aware of within myself?
- What situations am I handling differently than I might have before joining the program?

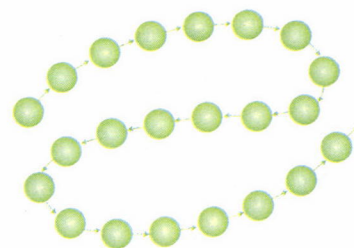
*"Change is inevitable. Resisting it is optional."*

—Anonymous

### Limiting Lapses

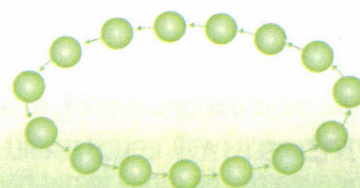
Lapses are an inevitable part of lifestyle change, and you will lapse from time to time. Don't be too hard on yourself and don't give up. It is unrealistic to expect to totally avoid lapses. The goal is to limit the extent of any lapse and the frequency of lapses in general—not to prevent them entirely. Learn from your experiences.

## lapse or relapse



Lapse:

- A temporary departure from new desired behaviors.
- Lapses are a chain reaction. Something triggers you into a familiar chain of responses.



Relapse:

- The return to an old lifestyle behavior.
- Relapses are a cycle. They happen when a chain reaction becomes self-perpetuating.

### Learn From Past Success

Can you think of a habit unrelated to weight management you have changed in the past? Perhaps you've given up smoking, stopped biting your nails, cut back on TV viewing, or stayed within your budget. Describe your steps to success in the space below.

What habit did you change?

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How long did it take to change the habit?

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What slips did you experience?

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How did you get back on track?

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### Getting Back On Track

The most important thing to recognize is you do not have to wait until the start of the next week or even the next day to get back on track.

You can begin damage control immediately.

Sandy was nearing the end of the transition phase of her OPTIFAST® Program. She had lost over 50 pounds and needed some new clothes immediately, as her waistbands kept slipping down to her hips. Delighted that she needed new smaller clothes, she planned a trip to the mall that included a stop at the food court. While at the food court, Sandy succumbed to the urge to have a cheeseburger and fries rather than the Caesar chicken salad she had planned on eating. What could she do to restore some balance to the day's calorie goals?

Sandy could:

- Cut back on the calories she consumes the rest of the day.
- Eat extra light the next day.
- Add some extra activity.

The worst thing she could do would be to wallow in feelings of failure and decide to have a milkshake as well since she "had already blown it."

### Learning for the Future

After a lapse, take some time to figure out what factors pulled you off-track in the first place. If you are not sure what triggered your lapse, begin by recording the lapse event midway through the chain. In each subsequent link of the chain, note each step you took next. Then, think back a bit. What were you feeling before you lapsed, 30 minutes before that, and so on. Write the answers to these questions in the chain links preceding your lapse. Chances are, a picture of the trigger will begin to emerge.

For example, Sandy recorded her lapse event as: *Decide to treat myself* in the sixth link of the chain (see *Interrupting the Chain—Food Court*, insert A). In each subsequent link of the chain, Sandy noted each step she took until she snapped the lapse. Then she thought back a bit, asking herself: "What was I feeling before I left the house today?" "What was I thinking as I headed to the food court?" Sandy wrote the answers to these questions in the chain links preceding her lapse. A picture of the trigger began to emerge.

Sandy began to realize she had placed herself in a high risk situation while still in the transition phase of her diet. As she worked her way through the behavior chain, she realized she felt good about her weight loss progress on one hand, but on the other hand she was frustrated that she still had 22 pounds to lose before she would reach her goal. She also felt deprived of her favorite foods and the pleasure she derived from them. Deprivation won out and she bought the cheeseburger instead of the low-fat chicken Caesar salad she had planned on.

Chains can be broken at any point. It is up to you to decide to snap the lapse. Once you have a picture of the chain of events that led to the lapse, brainstorm ways you could have snapped the lapse by breaking the chain at each link. Note that after Sandy ate the cheeseburger and fries, she decided to leave the food court and walk briskly around the upper floor of the mall two times while concentrating on the positives of managing her weight.



How could Sandy prevent a similar scenario from developing in the future? Perhaps Sandy needed to step back a bit. Maybe she was not ready to resume eating at the mall. Instead, she could have eaten before she went shopping and could have carried a small healthy snack with her. Review the worksheet *Interrupting the Chain—The Food Court* for ideas Sandy could use to head off a similar lapse in the future.

What if a person lets the good times roll on and on? Suppose Sandy figured she had already blown it for the day so she may as well have dessert after the burger. In situations like this, it is important to remember there is always tomorrow! One day of poor choices should not damage your weight control long term. The same is true of lapsing for a week or more. The important thing is to get back in control. The sooner you “snap a lapse,” the less damage you will do to your weight control efforts and the less risk you will be at for a relapse. Use the skills you have learned throughout this program to help you break the lapse behavior chain. If you have lapsed for more than a day, make an appointment to see the dietitian and/or group facilitator associated with the clinic you attend. They can help you explore why you lapsed and found it hard to regain control.

Think of the weight management skills you have acquired as wire clippers you can use to break the lapse behavior chain. Avoid becoming comfortably complacent. *The Chain—Cookie Monster*, insert B, demonstrates that weight management is a long-term process. You can get off track even after many months of success if you let your skills slip.

Leslie had maintained her new healthy weight for nearly 8 months. She even breezed through the holidays without any major lapses, and thus she began to take her success for granted. Shortly after Valentine’s Day she found herself yearning for desserts. She started to buy packages of cookies, telling herself they were for her sons and that they should not have to be deprived because

their mother could not control herself. One weekend when Leslie was feeling especially lonely, she bought a bag of her favorite cookies and left them on the kitchen counter. Before she knew it, she experienced a significant lapse and was on the brink of relapse. See *The Chain —Cookie Monster* insert for details.

What caused Leslie’s lapse? After months of success Leslie felt she was cured and did not need to be vigilant any longer. Also, she was a bit disappointed that while she felt happier and more confident being thinner, her life was not magically transformed like she had secretly hoped it would be. She still had unmet desires and was experiencing periods of loneliness. How could Leslie have nipped her lapse in the bud instead of letting it become a relapse? See *The Chain—Cookie Monster* for ideas.

## Making Changes To Prevent Lapses

Choosing to make positive lifestyle changes and learning to snap lapses becomes easier with practice. The enclosed worksheets are designed to help you identify opportunities to choose to change your behavior, then use your new insights to help you snap a lapse and prevent a relapse.

Remember, all of the skills you have learned during your weight management program can help you master the art of choosing to change. Two of the techniques reviewed in this module, positive payoffs and self-monitoring, are especially useful. Neglecting your reward system can increase chances of a lapse because you may lack a sense of reward for your efforts. Food may once have filled this role for you. You may find yourself returning to it in the absence of other rewards.

Self-monitoring acts like an early warning system. It alerts you to the fact that you are letting some aspects of your healthy lifestyle program slide, which in turn can set you up for a lapse or even a relapse. The self-monitoring strategies presented in this module, together with other tools you have learned, can help prevent lapses. They can also function as tools you can use to snap a lapse.

