



American Heart Association®

Hard Hats with Heart™



Toolbox Talks

Change is a Mindset

You want to look better, feel better or improve your health. You feel it in your bones that it's time for a change. But overhauling your day-to-day lifestyle in short order can be hard. Sweeping goals like "lose weight," "get fit" or "eat better" are perennially popular New Year's resolutions. But truth is, such resolutions can fail quickly. A simpler (and frankly, easier) approach can be to translate goals into habits, and then build better health one habit at a time.

Humans already are good at forming habits. Research has suggested over 40% of our daily lives is made up of behaviors we do in specific contexts, often without thinking — that is, habits! But building new, healthy habits (and letting go of age-old, unhealthy ones) takes preparation. The best intentions can fall short along the way if you lose focus on why a behavioral change is important. Don't lose sight of what triggered your decision to make this effort.

Focus on the 'Why'

What made you determined to improve your health, fitness or mental well-being? Maybe you had to turn down an opportunity to go hiking, which you used to love. Perhaps stress, or the symptoms of a chronic condition, are getting the better of you. Or wouldn't it be nice to be able to play softball with your kids? Any of these reasons could solidify your commitment to making a change.

Please Yourself

Be honest about why you want to lose weight or improve your fitness level. Sure, your doctor is right that you will lower your risk of heart disease. But you've always known this — and it hasn't inspired you to exercise or eat more healthfully. Past efforts to change may not have worked because you were responding to someone else's rationales.

What would make you happy? Research shows that people are more likely to pursue a goal if they have freely chosen it themselves. Your family urges that you'll live longer if you drop those pounds. But maybe looking great at your daughter's wedding or being able to play tennis again is a more effective motivator for you. And that's OK!

Similarly, new healthy habits should be things you are happy or comfortable doing. If you, say, are going to boost your veggie intake, don't include Brussels sprouts if you can't stand Brussels sprouts. And don't start (or re-start) a jogging program if that makes your knees or feet hurt.

Get In the Groove

Embracing change can be uplifting. Project ahead to that time when you can get through the day without pain or can fall asleep without medication or pick up a grandchild. In clarifying what matters most to you, you've set the stage for planning a strategy to adopt healthier habits.

Discussion Questions:

- What is your why?