

## Making a Commitment to a Healthy Change

In order to take control of your health you have to have the confidence and make the commitment to do it. We have provided some suggestions on how you can gain confidence to control your health. This section focuses on how making a contract with yourself can help you to make the commitment to take control of your health.

### What is a health behavior contract?

We often think of a contract as a legal document that people draft between themselves and their lawyers. A contract can also be a document that you develop to make a commitment to live healthier. A health behavior contract is a contract that you make with yourself that describes how you plan to make a change in your health, for example, taking your medication for high blood pressure, exercising more, or watching your diet. You can make a contract with a family member, friend, co-worker, or your physician.

### STEP 1: Getting started with your contract

The first step in making a health behavior contract is to have a well thought out and realistic plan on what you are going to do to take control of your health. A health behavior contract should include a statement on how you are going to do it, who will help you to achieve your goal, and what you will do if you meet challenges in achieving your goal.

### STEP 2: Making certain the contract works for you

Once you have written the contract, read it carefully and see if it fits your personal style. Ask yourself, "How certain am I that I can meet the goals of this contract?" Rate yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being totally uncertain and 10 being totally certain. ***If you have a score below an 8, you should select a more realistic goal.***

### STEP 3: Getting help from others

Share your plans with your family members and friends. Tell them what they can do to help you stick to your plan. Also share with them what may be unhelpful to you.

### STEP 4: Review your contract on a regular basis

It is important to make sure your plan is realistic and works for you. If you find that you are able to meet your goals, choose healthy ways to reward yourself. If you find it challenging to complete your goals, then reevaluate your contract. Don't blame yourself or feel guilty. You may need to make some adjustments to it. Remember, like other contracts, a health behavior contract may need to be reevaluated and renegotiated.

### Some Examples of Contracts

"I will walk (WHAT) at least 5 blocks (HOW MUCH) in the afternoon (WHEN), three times a week (HOW OFTEN)."

### STEP 5: My Contract

Below is a contract that may help you to make a commitment and keep it. This contract should contain the following:

1. What I am going to do.
2. When I am going to do it.
3. How often I am going to do it.
4. How much I am going to do (if the activity has a specific duration or amount).

For example: "I will walk (WHAT) three extra blocks (HOW MUCH) in the morning (WHEN), five times a week (HOW OFTEN)."

### I WILL:

(Do what) \_\_\_\_\_

(When) \_\_\_\_\_

(How often) \_\_\_\_\_

(How much) \_\_\_\_\_

How confident am I that I will do this? \_\_\_\_\_

(on a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being not at all confident and 10 being completely confident)

Based on *The Arthritis Helpbook: A Tested Self-Management Program for Coping with Your Arthritis*. K Lorig, JF Fries. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, MA, 1990; with the permission of Da Capo Press

## Combined Positive Affect and Self Affirmation Intervention: Staying Positive to Keeping your Contract

Taking control of your health requires being physically active, taking your medicine, and eating right. And don't forget that taking control of your health takes partnering with your doctor to monitor your progress. But, just *knowing* this is not enough. Here is what one patient said:

"I'm not so sure anybody totally responds to knowledge and fear alone. It's not enough. There has to be something else. There's got to be a whole bunch of other positive things to make you want to make that change on a continuing basis."

It takes something *more* to be healthier. It takes *Staying Positive*. That's right. There is *power* in positive thinking. You may think that staying positive is difficult when you are living with a chronic health condition. However, staying positive is important to overcome the challenges that present themselves in your daily life. Staying positive is important to take control. Staying positive can help you to become more physically active even though you have a chronic health condition. Staying positive can also help you change your diet, be physically active as well as taking your medication regularly. This will help you to develop the skill to *stay positive*.

### The Benefits of Staying Positive

Do you know that when people feel positive they are happier and more successful at meeting challenges? They are also more helpful to others and have better memory and judgment than people who do not feel as positive. In addition, when people feel positive they are more creative and better at problem-solving. Doctors believe that when people have positive feelings, it helps them overcome challenges in their lives. This also applies to challenges like walking more or staying on a heart-healthy diet.

Here are some examples from people with heart disease who use positive thoughts to help them be more physically active. Think about how their situations may be similar to yours. Although these examples are for people with heart disease, these situations can be applied to anyone living with a chronic health condition.

### What People Say About Staying Positive

Mr. A is a 60-year-old man who has had angioplasty. To stay positive, he thinks a lot about pleasant things when he walks. "Walking itself makes me feel good, but I think about nice things too. I keep thinking that I will be able to walk even more by summer time. Now I incorporate walking into my daily routine. I even bought a new pair of sneakers so that I am comfortable when I increase my stroll to longer distances."

Mr. B stays positive by trying to do something nice for others. "Well, I feel if people have a negative attitude about something, it will just be detrimental to them because a feeling of feeling good, for the most part, is tonic. If you could have that feeling all the time, even though if you feel down once in a while, it doesn't last long and you feel better more quickly. When you do something good for someone, when you see their smiles, it makes me feel good, have a positive feeling."

Mrs. C is a grandmother who stays positive about life by thinking of her family, keeping active, and being with friends. She also takes pride in her accomplishments. "The most important things to me are the welfare of my children and my grandchildren. I'm so proud of them. I also go to classes and wonderful concerts, which is very healthy. You have to find things you enjoy doing, whether it's knitting or something else. I feel good when I do something that pleases me, that I feel happy about. I enjoy meeting with friends or coming home, knowing my husband will be home, talking to people on the phone, keeping in touch."

## Staying Positive

When people have positive feelings, it helps them overcome challenges in their lives, including big challenges and small challenges, like becoming more physically active. One very simple way to stay positive is to think about the small things in your life that make you feel good. Things that bring a smile to your face. Perhaps seeing a beautiful sunset or finding a five-dollar bill in your pocket will make you feel good.

What are some of the small things in your life that make you have positive feelings? What are some of the things that make you feel good, even for just a few moments? Thinking about these small things that make you feel good may help you to overcome challenges and improve your health. **Make a list of some in the space below.**

## Reflecting on Proud Moments

When people think about some proud moments in their lives or things that they have done that they are proud of, it also helps them overcome challenges. What are some moments in your life or things that you have done that you will always be proud of? Thinking about how these moment or things made you proud may encourage you to be more physically active. **Make a list of some in the space below.**

### Give This a Try

First, when you get up in the morning, think about the small things that you said make you feel good, like \_\_\_\_\_ . Then as you go through your day, notice those and other small things that make you feel good and take a moment to enjoy them.

Second, when you encounter some difficulties or are in a situation that makes it hard for you to \_\_\_\_\_ (examples: be physically active, take your blood pressure medications, etc) think about things you enjoy or proud moments in your life, like \_\_\_\_\_ .

*Do you think you can do these things? Will you think of one of these when you start your day? And as you go through your day, will you take time to enjoy them?*

*Will you also think of one of these when you encounter some difficulties or are in a situation that makes it hard for you to \_\_\_\_\_ (examples: be physically active, take your blood pressure medications, etc)?*

### My Commitment to Staying Positive

I am going to think of small things that make me feel good and take a moment to enjoy them.

**STEP 1:** When I get up in the morning, I am going to think about the small things that make me feel good and go through my day thinking about these and taking time to enjoy them.

**STEP 2:** When I encounter something that makes it hard for me to \_\_\_\_\_ (examples: be physically active, take your blood pressure medications, etc) I am going to think about something I enjoy, or a proud moment in my life, and see if these thoughts help me to keep \_\_\_\_\_ ((examples: be physically active, take your blood pressure medications, etc)

**Congratulations!** You have now taken an important step toward positive thinking and taking control of your chronic health condition!

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