

# Slips as learning opportunities



There are numerous myths about how people attempt changes, accomplish goals and move toward their vision of well-being. Consider all that you have learned during this campaign. Can you separate the myths from the facts?

## Activity: Test yourself<sup>1</sup>

Mark “True” or “False” for each statement.  
Correct answers are provided at the end of this handout.

1. Making a change is difficult.	T	F
2. It just takes willpower to make a change.	T	F
3. Most people are successful in their first attempt to change.	T	F
4. Trial and error is an inefficient way to make a change.	T	F
5. Change processes that work for one goal will also work for others.	T	F
6. The path to change is a straight line.	T	F
7. Stress is the cause of most slips or setbacks.	T	F
8. Knowing is the same as doing.	T	F

## A journey, not a destination

Some experts suggest that there is a sixth and final stage of change, sometimes called termination. At this stage, you are confident that any problem behavior will never return and there is no fear of slips or setbacks. Termination may be possible for some addictive behaviors and offers hope for those who are struggling. Other experts believe that most aspects of well-being require a lifetime of striving to maintain goals that have been achieved.

## Revisit your vision of well-being<sup>2</sup>

Early in this campaign, you were encouraged to establish your personal vision of well-being for the future. As you continue your journey toward well-being, pause occasionally and revisit your vision. Consider again “where you want to be” relative to your personal vision. Ask yourself:

- To what degree have I achieved my vision of well-being?
- Are there aspects of my vision that need to be refined or adjusted?
- How motivated am I to continue to pursue my vision of well-being?



## Encouragement:

A slip is not a fall. You haven’t failed and you don’t have to go back to where you started. Recognize a slip, treat it as a learning opportunity and attempt to get back on track as quickly as possible. Don’t make the mistake of giving up too soon.

## Answers to the quiz

1. **True.** Most people have to put in significant effort and even experience slips and setbacks before making a change in their lives. But change is possible. Taking the first step is often the most difficult.
2. **False.** Willpower is your belief in your ability to make a change and then making a commitment to act on that belief. Willpower alone is usually not enough to make and sustain a change. It takes willpower, skill power and persistent effort.
3. **False.** Most people make several attempts before they are able to change for good. In fact, the more serious attempts that have been made, the more likely that the next one will be the long-term solution.
4. **True.** Trial and error is inefficient, not to mention time-consuming and frustrating. A better approach is learning from your own experience and also from the experiences of others who are available to support you.
5. **True.** If you have mastered relaxation, exercise, finding positive substitutes, rearranging your surroundings, assertive communication, rewards and getting help from others, you should be able to use these techniques again to pursue other goals that are important to you.
6. **False.** Change typically follows a spiral pattern. You can recycle and repurpose the strategies you have learned in other ways. You aren't going around in circles, rather you are progressing up the spiral staircase of change.
7. **True.** Emotional stress and social pressures trigger most slips or setbacks. That's why it is critical that you include coping skills (relaxation, exercise, finding positive substitutes, assertive communication) as part of your action plan for change. Taking steps immediately to reduce stress at its first sign can prevent a slip.
8. **False.** Knowledge is empowering and is essential to the change process but is not enough by itself. The processes used in the early stages of change are mental processes — increasing awareness and knowledge about yourself and your goal and evaluating your options. Many people say they know what they should do. They just haven't figured out how to put the action into practice on a regular basis.

### Sources:

1. Prochaska, JO and Norcross, JC. *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis – Ninth Edition*. New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.
2. INTERVENT International. Lifestyle management program: Staying healthy, 2020.

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