

Small Steps to Health and Wealth Tracking Changes

One of the most effective tools for behavior change is to track your current behavior. In the Small Steps to Health and Wealth workbook, authors point to the five A's of successful behavior change – awareness (tracking current behaviors), ability (being able to make a change), ambition (a strong desire to change), attitude (a positive state of mind about changing) and action (taking steps to actually change).

If you are trying to make a change, write down the five A's and how you are going to demonstrate your skills in each area.

Awareness is the first step. Many people are fairly oblivious to their current behaviors. Keeping written records can be an effective way to track patterns and work toward change. For health, a person might start food-journaling – keeping track of how much and what foods are eaten daily. Also, an exercise journal or body measurement log may be a good tracking device. For wealth, using a checkbook register or computer software program to track expenses may be revealing. Also, credit card registers, available at your local extension office can help you track your expenses. For me, the credit card registers have helped me reconsider a few purchases. One evening, I was doing some on-line shopping and as I got ready to check out, I took out my credit card register. Written in the register was a \$200 expense that I had already incurred that month, but had 'forgotten' about until seeing it on the register. If I had not been tracking my credit card expenses, I would have absent-mindedly overspent that month. As it was, I emptied my shopping cart and decided to wait until another time when I knew I could pay for my purchases without caring a credit card balance.

Your tracking methods do not need to be elaborate. They can be as simple as a few pieces of recycled paper stapled together to write your notes. The main thing is to keep track – of how much you eat, exercise, spend, save. Once you track your behaviors, you should take a few minutes each day to analyze your notes. There are several on-line health trackers, one of my favorites is www.mypyramidtracker.gov where you can enter your daily food intake and exercise expenditures. You can graph the energy balances, nutritional intake, etc.

A simple ledger can do the trick for expenses or you can use a software program that allows you to compare your spending to your budgetary plans and goals. If you track your expenses, you can usually find a few “spending leaks” that need to be plugged.

While you are tracking your behavior, you may want to keep track of your history, too. Your history can greatly affect how you tackle your current goals. Your personal “baggage” may be keeping you from positive changes. “Baggage” is the false, and often irrational, set of feelings and beliefs which distort people’s thinking and affects their health and wealth behaviors. One piece of baggage many people get weighed down with is that food can bring you comfort. Another example of baggage may be a belief that buying expensive items proves your worth. While you are tracking behavior, track your beliefs, too. It may well be that this baggage is heavy enough to derail you behavior change. Make a list of these attitudes and re-write the messages to be positive sentiments that you can carry with you on your journey toward your goals.