

City Center Fitness -Medical Weight Loss Program  
By Lori Lawrie

## **Adding Exercise to your Life – Are you Emotionally ready ?**

Studies have shown that 7 out of 10 people who start an exercise program drop out within a few months. They're just not mentally prepared for the commitment involved. In order to achieve optimum health goals it is imperative that some form of physical activity becomes part of ones lifestyle but many of us are not ready to make the necessary changes.

Only during the last decade has behavior change been understood as a process of identifiable stages through which we pass. The extensive medical research into smoking and alcohol abuse has opened up new doors to understanding the process of change. This better understanding of change has been applied to Health Promotion and now more specifically to exercise and eating behavior. So how do we apply this logic to our own daily struggles with beginning or sticking to an exercise program?

In Penticton, City Centre Fitness new Lifestyle Change Programs use this medically based *Six Stages of Change Model* to help identify participants' readiness to make changes in their life. Different tools are used at different stages so it is important to assess and continually monitor participants' emotional readiness.

Members of the Medical Weight Loss Program go through a series of physical readiness screening with medical professionals until they get the go ahead to start exercising. Once this happens the participants are asked "Are you really ready to make exercise a part of your life" They may be physically ready but there could be some emotional roadblocks that stand in the way.

There are a number of screening tools to assess which stage someone is in and different techniques to apply at the various stages. If someone is in the first stage of *Pre-Contemplation*, they have not yet recognized that the Health and Wellness benefits of being physically active actually applies to them. In the second stage or *contemplative stage* a person starts to consider a change but it is usually accompanied by an excuse (yeah but- it's too cold, its too expensive, I don't have time). In the third stage *preparation stage* a number of small behavior changes can start to be seen such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator. In this stage a number of "baby-steps" to change are introduced before someone enters the fourth stage which is the *action stage*. In this stage one goes from thinking about it to acting upon it. A number of small successes will create momentum and increase confidence to take on more "action steps".

It is important to not confuse action with change. Only when these actions become accepted as part of a person's lifestyle will real change be achieved. The most successful lifestyle change programs can run for a year or more - that is because real change takes

time. Quick fix weight loss programs and diets may help with rapid weight loss but quite often individuals return to their original weight or gain even more. That is because nothing really changed and the guilt of not succeeding can intensify emotional issues. Permanent behavior change can be difficult and most people cannot accomplish it in just a few weeks or even months.

The fifth stage in the model of change program is *setback / relapse*. Change does not occur in a linear direction. There will always be setbacks and returns to old habits. But a lapse doesn't have to be a full relapse. The trick is to be aware that it is happening and have the tools to help you deal with it. And don't be hard on yourself as setbacks are a part of life.

The Medical Weight Loss Program at City Center runs for 12 months. In order to be truly successful a person must "live the change". Replacing old habits with new ones and maintaining them for the long haul often brings up much fear. That brings us to the six stage *maintenance*. Once a person has lived for a period of time with their desired lifestyle changes and successfully recovered from relapses they will have a new confidence that wasn't there before.

When physical activity becomes a regular part of a person life they will actually miss it when it starts to slip away. "Exercise for life" should be the goal and it may mean trying a variety of different exercise options until you find the right fit for you. During this stage regular tune-ups with a personal trainer can ensure you stay on track and motivated.

In the City Center Medical Weight Loss Program, participants deal with change in the area of physical activity, eating and stress management. A personal journal contains a series of self reflective questionnaires and information which addresses possible emotional roadblocks and helps set realistic goals for exercise, relaxation and eating behavior. A limited number of participants are accepted every month. For more information on Medical Weight Loss and other lifestyle change programs contact City Center Fitness, 399 Main Street Penticton, 250-487-1481