In the December issue of *Diabetes Care*, researchers from the University of Chicago predict that the number of Americans living with diabetes will nearly double in the next 25 years, increasing from 23.7 million in 2009 to 44.1 million in 2034 (Huang et al., 2009). Fortunately, as shown in the previous emails, healthy eating and regular physical activity can help prevent or delay development of diabetes and can help prevent or delay complications in people who have diabetes.

Many of us need to make changes in our lives to eat healthier or exercise regularly, but changing our lives can be difficult and turning those changes into good habits of a lifetime takes effort. The good news is that making just a few, small changes at a time can have a big impact on health and wellness. The information below will help create positive habits for a lifetime.

### Stages of Change

Whether you are trying to incorporate a new, positive behavior into your life or stop a habit that you consider negative, changing involves several stages. Knowing what stage of change you are currently in can help you choose the best approach to attaining your goal. Movement through the stages is not linear. Most people find themselves moving back and forth among them until a new behavior becomes a habit.

- **Precontemplation.** “I am not interested in change right now.” In this stage, you first need to decide that you have habits that need to change. For example, if you are not sure if you are following a healthy diet, keep a food diary for a week or two, then review it to see how you are doing.
- **Contemplation.** “I am thinking about making a change sometime.” In this stage, the costs of change still outweigh the benefits. Consider the benefits of the change. Make a list of the pros and cons of your current behavior and of the new behavior.
- **Preparation.** “I am ready to make a change in the next month.” In this stage, you should create a realistic plan for how you will make the change. Your plan should be as specific as possible. Write down exactly what you will do, when you will do it, how you will do it, what you will need to do it. Next write down what might get in the way of your plan and what you will do to minimize these obstacles. Gather what you need to carry out your plan. When writing your plan, follow the “Tips for Changing Behavior” below.
- **Action.** “I am making a change right now.” Everyday, you will have to consciously practice your new behavior and you will be tempted to go back to previous habits. If you fail, figure out what went wrong, plan for it, add your learning to your written plan, and try again.
- **Maintenance.** “I have been doing it for more than 6 months.” After more than 6 months of a new behavior, you are used to doing it and less effort is required to continue. It is now a habit.

### Tips for Changing Behavior

- Don’t try to make too many changes at once. Rather than trying eat healthier all at once, pick one aspect of your diet to change. If you are successful within six months, try another change at that time.
- Reward yourself for each milestone you meet. If you have faithfully taken the stairs every day for three months, treat yourself to a professional massage or a night at the movie. Give yourself a payment toward a more costly item. Numerous, small rewards, delivered for meeting smaller goals, are more effective than bigger rewards, requiring a long and difficult effort.
- Be patient. You will relapse. Having a relapse is not as important as how you deal with the relapse. If you believe that one relapse means you have failed completely and you give up, changing habits will be harder for you. But, if you allow for an occasional relapse and treat it as nothing more than a slight misstep that teaches you something, then you’re on the right track.
- Choose a time to start when you think your life will be as calm and in control as possible.
- Write down all your obstacles. If you have tried to make this change before, think about why it did not work. Then, write down how you plan to avoid or overcome those obstacles this time.

### How Long Will It Take?

The goal with behavior change is for the new behavior to become a habit—something that you do just in your everyday life without much thought or effort. But a new behavior takes much thought and effort. So, how often does the new behavior have to be performed before it becomes a habit? The answer is that it depends on the type of habit you are trying to form. Simpler behaviors become habits more quickly than behaviors that take much thought and effort. So, how often does the new behavior have to be performed before it becomes a habit? The answer is that it depends on the type of habit you are trying to form. Simpler behaviors become habits more quickly than behaviors that take much thought and effort.

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### Getting the Fullness Message

It takes 15 minutes or more for your brain to get the message that you have been full. Eating slowly can allow satiety (fullness) signals to begin to develop. Wait 15 minutes before second servings and you may not want them at all.

- Ask friends and family to help you in gentle ways that will not be irritating. For example, you may not want family members to remind you when you do not exercise, but it would be nice if they understood the changes you take when you do.
- Reward yourself for each milestone you meet. If you have faithfully taken the stairs every day for three months, treat yourself to a professional massage or a night at the movie. Give yourself a payment toward a more costly item. Numerous, small rewards, delivered for meeting smaller goals, are more effective than bigger rewards, requiring a long and difficult effort.
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### Lava Rocks: A Healthy Holiday Cookie

**Ingredients**

- 2 1/2 c flour
- 1 c granulated sugar
- 1/2 c brown sugar
- 1/3 c cocoa powder
- 1 t salt
- 1 1/2 t baking soda
- 2 t vanilla extract
- 1/2 c chopped walnuts
- 1/2 c chopped pecans
- 1/2 c chopped almonds
- 1/2 c dark chocolate chips
- 1/2 c shredded coconut
- 1/2 t nutmeg
- 1/2 c chopped pecans
- 1/2 c chopped almonds
- 1/2 c dark chocolate chips
- 1/2 c shredded coconut
- 1/2 c chopped walnuts
- 1/2 c chopped pecans
- 1/2 c chopped almonds
- 1/2 c dark chocolate chips
- 1/2 c shredded coconut
- 1/2 c chopped walnuts
- 1/2 c chopped pecans
- 1/2 c chopped almonds
- 1/2 c dark chocolate chips

**Preparation**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or nonstick baking mats.
2. In a large mixing bowl, cream together flour, granulated sugar, brown sugar, cocoa powder, salt, baking soda, and vanilla extract. Add the nuts and mix well. Scrape down the sides of the bowl several times. Fold in the dark chocolate chips, coconut, and walnuts until evenly incorporated.
3. Spoon the dough by heaping tablespoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheets, about 2 inches apart.
4. Bake the cookies, in batches, in the center of the oven, until dry and glossy on the surface but soft in the centers when pressed, 15 to 17 minutes. Let cool on the pan for 5 to 10 minutes. Carefully transfer the cookies, on the paper or mats, to a wire rack to cool completely.

**Nutrition**

Per cookie: 319 calories; 7 g fat (1 g sat, 3 g mono); 3 mg cholesterol; 15 g carbohydrates; 2 g protein; 1 g fiber; 15 mg sodium; 42 mg potassium; 1 Carbonyte Exchange; 1 carbohydrate (other), 1 fat

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**Disclaimer**

This information is provided as an informational resource only and is not intended to be used as a substitute for the advice or care of a medical professional. Consult your medical provider regarding matters related to health including diagnosing and treating medical conditions and obtaining medical advice. For More Information visit the American Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.org.

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**Sources**

American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, MyPlate Foundation for Medical Education and Research, and WebMD.

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**Notes**

1 carbohydrate (other), 1 fat

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Perhaps you are more likely to overeat while watching TV or eating at your desk. Try to vary the association of eating with the cue. In general, visible and accessible food items are often cues for uncontrolled eating.